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Message from the Executive Director

The long-awaited report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Health and Medicine Division (formerly called the Institute of Medicine) was made public last month, on June 2. The Committee on Accessible and Affordable Hearing Health Care for Adults was asked to examine ways in which hearing health care (excluding surgical devices) could be made more affordable and accessible.

The Results are In

Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability

The Hearing Loss Association of America is pleased to be one of the sponsors of *Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability*. The report's focus places the individual with hearing loss as its first priority. The recommendations, if realized, would allow consumers to be empowered with accurate information about hearing health care in general as well as their own hearing loss. It also presents a range of key messages and recommended actions, all backed up with evidence. What struck me most was that many of the key points are those that our organization has been talking about, codifying, and advocating for since our beginning in 1979.

Flashback to 1981

We must develop our impact as a large membership organization by producing accurate information on issues that affect us more. We have developed study groups which we believe will give us the factual basis on which to make our weight of numbers felt. They are Science and Technology; Architecture and Design (emphasis on communication access), Medical (early detection, frank and honest diagnosis and referrals to quality care); Attitudinal Research (with emphasis on combating denial among us and fostering understanding among hearing people); Legislation and Regulation; Public Information; and Education.

—Rocky Stone, Founder, HLAA

Today, several of the HLAA Policy Papers foreshadow some of the concepts included in this current report. These policies can be downloaded at hearingloss.org>About Us/Policy Statements. It can't be understated that history was made on June 2, 2016, with this unprecedented broad-brush report on hearing health care in the United States.

June 2, 2016: From the Committee on Accessible and Affordable Hearing Health Care for Adults

The committee grappled with the questions of how and why hearing loss has been relegated to the sidelines of health care. The barriers to access that have been reported include high costs, lack of insurance coverage, the stigma associated with hearing difficulties and wearing hearing aids, and limited access of available options. The goals of this report and its recommendations are to increase transparency, expand treatment options, provide the evidence necessary for consumers to make informed decisions about their hearing health care and examine various health care delivery and payment models. Hearing loss is a significant public health problem that requires actions throughout the health care and broader community.

—Dan G. Blazer, M.D., Ph.D., MPH, chair, Committee on Accessible and Affordable Hearing Health Care for Adults

HAAA Board of Trustees and staff are thrilled the report emphasizes that hearing loss is a public health issue and should be recognized as such. An overarching recommendation is that everyone has to be part of the solution for better hearing health care and accommodations—health care providers, hearing health care professionals, employers, government agencies, professional associations, researchers, and consumer support and advocacy groups. We know that good hearing is crucial to quality of life and HAAA will play a huge role moving these recommendations forward. We have a long history of advocating for people to receive quality care along with appropriate devices to help them hear well. For this to happen individuals have to be given credible information so they can make informed choices.

The study also notes research priorities for improving support for people with hearing loss, whether in the workplace, at home, or in their communities. We hope HAAA members can contribute to these studies which will help put these recommendations into practice.

I can't capture the full impact of the 361-page report on these few pages but I think you'll dig into it with the same fervor we did. You can read the *Report in Brief*, an *Action Guide for Individuals and Families*, an *Action Guide for Hearing Health Care Professionals*, and the entire report at nas.edu/hearing. We were also honored to have Dr. Blazer speak at the HAAA Convention last month.

I also hope you'll be encouraged with the overall report. As the only consumer-group sponsor, HAAA will take the lead to see that the recommended actions are implemented. We want to work with all the stakeholders as we move forward to improve hearing health care. We welcome your input as we continue to keep you informed on the specific recommendations.

The people who served on the Committee on Accessible and Affordable Hearing Health Care for Adults realized that hearing loss is about more than just the hearing loss itself. They were not mere bureaucrats sitting in a tall office building talking theory, they were people with proven credentials and deep insight who knew how to bring people together, compile evidence, put their personal biases aside and realize hearing health care is about taking care of people who have a health condition that should be prevented, screened for, talked about, and remedied, all the while giving the person with hearing loss control of his or her destiny.

Thank you to everyone involved. I think Rocky Stone and the early members of our organization would be pleased that hearing well may soon become a priority for individuals taking care of their health. **HLM**

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See page 10 for the HAAA Board Chairperson's remarks about *Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability*

Study Sponsors

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Department of Defense
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- Food and Drug Administration
- Hearing Loss Association of America
- National Institute on Aging
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, National Institutes of Health



HAAA—Today and in the Future

In the 37 years since it was founded, HAAA has established itself as the go-to organization for people with hearing loss. During that time we have never wavered from, or lost sight of, our mission—to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy. We put the emphasis on *people*. We never forget that our ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of *people* with hearing loss.

However, all that we do, all that we have accomplished, and all that remains to be done comes at a cost. HAAA is a self-supporting nonprofit organization. It is funded by those who share our goals, values and mission—individuals, foundations, corporations and company-sponsored events such as the HAAA Convention and the HAAA Walk4Hearing. In other words, we depend on *you* for support.

But have you ever wondered how your donations are used? In a new report, *HAAA—Today and in the Future*, we let you know how your donations are put to work. The report gives you a glimpse of some of our accomplishments, but more importantly, it provides an overview of the tremendous amount of work that still needs to be done. Your continued support is critical to helping us achieve those goals. We encourage you to read *HAAA—Today and in the Future*. You can find it at bit.ly/hlaareport.

HAAA extends our deep appreciation to our incredible donors for supporting our mission!