

Being a Clear Voice for Consumers

When you read our advocacy statement on our website, it reads:

The Hearing Loss Association of America advocates for equal access and political empowerment for approximately 48 million Americans with hearing loss. We work with industry and government to expand access to mainstream and assistive technologies, enforce existing disability laws, regulations and standards to impact the lives of people with hearing loss. HLAA promotes self-advocacy for its constituents to ensure equal opportunity in the areas of telecommunications, employment, health care, education and community life.

This is a great definition of what our advocacy mission is and is certainly valued by our members. According to our most recent membership survey, more than 74 percent of respondents believe this is one of the most important things we do.

We know that policy makers and industry leaders respect the work we have been doing for the past 35 years and actively engage with us on critical policy issues. We are changing the way individuals and the industry think about hearing loss and we are changing people's lives. We are not afraid to address significant policy issues that impact consumers because we must be the clearest voice for consumers.

Yet, we are more than advocates for people with hearing loss and their families. HLAA and the leaders in the organization are social entrepreneurs. I am struck by the quote (at left) by Bill Drayton and how it parallels the work we do.

Drayton says, "Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."

Isn't that really what HLAA has been about for the past 35 years? We are revolutionizing the hearing health care industry and leveraging our purchase power to demand changes in technology. Would we feel comfortable saying the following?

"HLAA is not content to just educate people about hearing loss or help people better communicate with technology assistance. We will not rest until we have revolutionized how people think and respond to hearing loss."

I would.

If you think more about our work, we are making demands on the hearing aid industry, hearing health care professionals, and technology manufacturers. We are demanding change in insurance coverage, and better hearing health care. We are the consumer voice to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Federal Drug Administration (FDA), Social Security Administration (SSA), and other government and policy makers. We are addressing communication technology from hearing loops to cell phones to captioning on TV and on the Internet.

In every issue of *Hearing Loss Magazine* we talk about our most recent advocacy effort and how it is making a difference in your life. In this issue, Lise Hamlin writes about the Friend of the Court Brief we have just filed that ensures that the FCC clearly understands our position on equal access to captioned phones (see page 19).

In the last few months we have met with the FCC to discuss upcoming rule-makings on hearing aid-compatible cell phones and television captioning standards. The FDA is updating their guidance document on hearing aids and Personal Sound Amplification Products (PSAPs).

We are supporting legislation to amend the Social Security Act to include Medicare coverage for hearing rehabilitation, including a comprehensive audiology assessment to determine if a hearing aid is appropriate, a threshold test to determine audio acuity, and various services associated with fitting, adjusting, and using hearing

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"Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."

—Bill Drayton, *Leading Social Entrepreneurs Changing the World*

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aids. We also support extending Medicare coverage to include purchasing hearing aids, defining them as any wearable instrument or device for compensating for hearing loss.

These are important policy issues for HLAA and our leadership on this issue is being watched by industry and consumers alike.

Our advocacy work revolves around changing how society and industry thinks and responds to the person with hearing loss. We are leading the efforts advocating for understanding that hearing is a part of healthy living that impacts all aspects of life. We are insisting that hearing health care professionals treat people who have a hearing loss as a whole person—not just a recipient of a hearing aid. Our work is making an impact in people's lives every day—and that is a revolution!

What role do you want to play in the revolution? Let's talk about this on my blog at <http://hlaaexecutivedirector.blogspot.com/>. **HLM**

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Thank You!

HLAA would like to extend our deep appreciation to our incredible donors for supporting our mission—to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

HLAA is a self-supporting nonprofit organization. Our support comes from individuals, foundations and corporations who share our goals, values and mission.

Your support makes a difference in the lives of consumers with hearing loss—and our combined efforts can make our voices heard from town hall to the corridors of Washington. Your support makes our voices heard—all 48 million of them—thank you.