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Information, Education, Advocacy and Support

BY LISE HAMLIN

“...knowledge is power ... knowledge is safety, and ... knowledge is happiness.”

—Thomas Jefferson, 1817

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In the coming weeks and months, we will have lots of information to share with you. Our newest program, ICAAT (Industry-Consumer Alliance for Accessible Technology) will provide a forum for consumers to share their experiences with developers of technology our experiences, our needs, our pain points, so these developers know early on that their products will hit the mark. The phrase, “Nothing about us without us” will be made concrete by ICAAT.

Later this year, we expect to see the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) issue the final rules for Over-the-Counter (OTC) hearing aids. HLAA will be on top of that, providing information to help guide consumers. We are also here to support chapters providing guidance to people in the community who seek their advice about OTC devices. Watch our website and our *Hearing Life eNews* for more in the coming months.

At the end of the year, HLAA’s work on the HAC (Hearing Aid Compatibility) Task Force will come to a conclusion with a final report we will deliver to the FCC (Federal Communications Commission). HLAA serves as co-chair on the Task Force and is actively involved.

Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS) convenes the HAC Task Force on behalf of stakeholders, including the Competitive Carriers Association (CCA), CTIA – The Wireless Industry Association, the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDI) and the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA). The Task Force is collecting data relating to current technical and market conditions involving wireless handsets and recent innovations in hearing improvement technology. The goal of this work is to deliver recommendations to the FCC by the end of 2022 that could serve as the basis for future FCC rules in this area.

Both consumer and industry members of the HAC Task Force take this work seriously. We recently learned some manufacturers and a number of wireless carriers such as AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon have gone beyond FCC requirements: some are offering almost 100% hearing aid compatible handsets. Industry deserves credit for working to ensure so many of their wireless phones are compatible with your hearing aid or cochlear implant easier. That’s great news for consumers.

HAAA also sits on the FCC's Disability Advisory Committee (DAC). This year alone, we have grappled with and provided recommendations to the FCC regarding:

- Real-Time Text (RTT) Deployment in Wireline Networks
- Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Use on Videoconferencing Platforms
- Concerns and Lessons Learned Regarding Communication Access for People with Disabilities During the Pandemic
- Identification of Emerging Technologies and Their Associated Accessibility Opportunities and Considerations

These are just some of the ways HAAA seeks to advocate for people with hearing loss. The goal of all this? We do not engage in advocacy for advocacy's sake. The goal is to give you the tools you need to take control of your hearing loss to live your life fully, equally: the life you want to live.

It's important not only to have the information about changes in technology or public policy. It's also important to understand your rights under the law. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 provided the watershed civil rights law that turned the concept of disability dependence on its head. The ADA supports changing the environment we live in, not the person: we seek wheelchair ramps and Braille signage and assistive

listening systems and captioning. The ADA does not stand alone: many state and local laws also seek to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities.

But as Justin Dart, Jr. wrote in 1991, "... Civil rights are not a guarantee of the good life, but an equal opportunity and responsibility to participate in producing the good life for oneself and for all."

People with hearing loss are often acutely aware of all the things they cannot do, particularly if they once had the ability to hear and find it diminished. What we need to recognize is that we hold the power to change our own lives in our own hands.

Empowerment means we don't sit alone and wait for someone else to show up with the answer. Sometimes it means doing our own search, asking the right questions to find an OTC hearing aid that works. Sometimes it means filing a complaint with the FCC when the TV captions go astray. In the end, that search or the complaints we file can lead us not only to the best outcome in the moment, but those successes also empower us to realize we can make change happen.

Our dearest hope at HAAA is that you take the wealth of information we provide through our website, our *Hearing Life eNews*, our Chapters, our conventions, our Walk4Hearing and our webinars, and use it to empower yourself to live your best life. We know you can. **HL**

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HAAA Expands Online Community and Calendar



Did you know that HAAA has new, branded HAAA Groups Online Communities? In addition to joining our Facebook Official Community & Support group, we have added six special interest subgroups. They are HAAA Advocacy, HAAA GITHL – Get in the Hearing Loop, HAAA Leaders, HAAA Newsletter Editors, HAAA Tech and HAAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter. Through each subgroup, you will connect to a nationwide community for support and sharing of ideas. To join a group, scroll through the subgroup list and click on the group you wish to join, then click on +Join This Group.

We have a new calendar feature on the HAAA website. You can find HAAA Chapter and State meetings by clicking on the Find HAAA Chapter and State Meetings Here button. For more information about these Groups, email Carla Beyer-Smolín at cbeyer-smolin@hearingloss.org. Learn more at: <https://hlaagroups.hearingloss.org/g/HAAA>.