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A lot has happened since 1979 that has made hearing loss and hearing health an issue of national concern—regulations, legislation and awareness about this issue. But we can't let up on pushing forward. HLAA will keep working for you.

Is Hearing Loss an Issue of National Concern?

BY BARBARA KELLEY

Advocacy is the act of speaking on behalf of or in support of another person, place or thing. When Rocky Stone founded our organization in 1979, he said that for anything to get accomplished hearing loss had to become an issue of national concern. In fact, “Make hearing loss an issue of national concern,” became a tag line we used frequently. Rocky said there needed to be five elements to our approach with advocacy.

1. Confidence in our philosophy; i.e., we provide credible information so people can be empowered to make their own choices about their hearing loss, then turn around and help others.
2. Knowledge of what is important to our federal lawmakers and regulators; i.e., our government.
3. A sense of history yet know where we need to be.
4. A sense of timing, knowing when to fight.
5. Creativity. Ability to devise program and advocacy approaches suitable to the social/political climate of our time.

Hearing Health Front and Center

Since the beginning of 2021, hearing health and HLAA were in the news. We appeared in local and national TV news, major newspapers, podcasts, radio and niche publications with a wide reach like the *AARP Bulletin*. Why did this happen? More than ever hearing health was front and center. The World Health Organization issued the *World Report on Hearing* which globally broadcasted the importance of hearing health across a life course.

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There were also two issues that received attention in the U.S. The first was the proposed expansion of Medicare to cover hearing aids and services. HLAA has advocated for many years for hearing aids to be added to Medicare, but we finally saw coverage concretely written into proposed legislation. In addition to meeting with Congress, we were asked to speak in the media on our position and why Medicare expansion is critical to ensuring that hearing health is managed across a life span. HLAA had direct impact on proposed language in the bill to ensure that the benefit would be meaningful to people over age 65. Unfortunately, the provision which was included in the Build Back Better Act didn't move forward because the proposed bill didn't move. We are playing the long advocacy game on this issue and will have a strategy on Medicare expansion. A sense of timing and knowing when to fight as well as knowing what is important to our lawmakers is critical here.

Another issue was the FDA's overdue proposed rules for over-the-counter hearing aids. President Biden publicly urged the FDA to publish their rules. When a president speaks on any issue, especially one that could affect or benefit consumers, it makes the news. HLAA was one of the first to be called by media to comment on this new category of hearing aids for adults with self-perceived mild to moderate hearing loss. We also advocated for the passage of the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. We knew when to fight. We will continue to provide unbiased and solid information to people with all levels of hearing loss, including those who might benefit from an over-the-counter product.

Together, We Did It

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Barbara Kelley is executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America. She can be reached at bkelly@hearingloss.org. Follow her on Twitter @Bkelly_HLAA.



GET IN THE HEARING LOOP

It's Time to Get in the Hearing Loop

Many people aren't yet aware of hearing loops or other technologies that can improve communication access and public engagement, or how they can enrich the lives of people with hearing loss, their families, friends, colleagues and even communities. The Get in the Hearing Loop program is changing that — one loop, one advocate, one ADA request at a time.

Get in the Hearing Loop, a communication access program of HLAA, is dedicated to providing and promoting community education, advocacy on behalf of people with hearing loss and consultation services to help venues of all kinds successfully implement hearing loop technology.

We dream of a world where people with hearing loss can thrive each day with communication access, full inclusion and equal participation in all aspects of life, everywhere they go.

For more information about hearing loops and the Get in the Hearing Loop program, visit hearingloss.org/GITHL or email GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org.

Hearing Life e-News is delivered to your inbox twice per month. and keeps readers up to date on the latest news and information on hearing loss. Each issue features high-interest content such as recent legislation and advocacy efforts, technology, new products for hearing loss, human interest stories, webinars, updates on the Walk4Hearing, convention and information on HLAA Chapter happenings.

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