A New Way to Advocate for and Have a Say in Better Technology Access

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When the designer, and the maker, and the user are all in the same place talking to each other you get designs that work. *—Alistair Parvin, systems designer and co-founder of the U.K.-based Open Systems Lab*

Industry-Consumer **Alliance for Access**ible Technology

For many people who are deaf or have hearing loss, the reason for frustrations around, and even avoidance of, certain technologies is simple: Whether it's poor caption quality for live television or inadequate communication at telemedicine appointments, their needs go unmet. But what if there was a place where consumers could connect with tech developers to advocate for and inform more usable, accessible products? Soon there will be, with this summer's launch of the Industry-Consumer Alliance for Accessible Technology — ICAAT (pronounced "eye-cat").

Working from the idea that an ongoing program could help build relationships between consumers and industry, we started working on building out ICAAT in October 2019, thanks to a five-year grant from the National Institutes on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research – NIDILRR (grant #90REGE0013) under the Department of Health and Human Services. As what we believe is the first of its kind for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, ICAAT provides an online space for organizing around purposeful action. **Our vision** for ICAAT is for consumers and industry to work together for mutual benefit to ensure that new and current technologies improve the quality of life for people who are deaf or have hearing loss. **Our mission** is to inspire more accessible, innovative and responsive products *from the ground up* that meet the needs of these consumers.

We've created an online space that can be accessed through HLAA's website, hearingloss.org/programs-events/icaat/. An interactive user experience and accessible design are central to ICAAT's features and functionality. So, who can join ICAAT? Anyone interested in our core mission should consider joining ICAAT. Whether you are a person who is deaf or has a hearing loss, a consumer advocate or ally, or an industry professional designing and developing hearing assistive technology or mainstream consumer electronics, you are welcome.

ICAAT offers a variety of opportunities for consumers and industry to share and engage with one another. These include:

- **Tech Forum** — an online community for consumers and industry to share resources and information, post events and have discussions with other members in groups organized by topic.

- **User Stories** — a series of short narratives that document real people's everyday experiences and can be used by industry to inform, inspire and jump-start creative solutions to the problems that consumers face.

- **CoDesign Connect** — a marketplace where consumers can find product research opportunities and industry can recruit consumers to participate in product testing, product review, market research and design research; consultations with hearing loss experts may also be requested by industry.

- **CoDesign Essentials** — a collection of practical information for consumers and industry wanting to learn about best practices for collaborating with one another.
  - For consumers, these topics include understanding product design, development and testing, what makes a good product review and considerations when participating in these activities, such as consent, privacy and data usage.
  - For industry, topics include understanding identity, communication preferences, and personal hearing technology use and options and best practices for providing communication access.

We've intentionally designed ICAAT to meet people where they are, so whether you are a consumer interested in diving deep and contributing resources to share with others or are wanting to test products in development, or a product designer or tech developer seeking to increase the utilization and accessibility of your products, **there is a place for you here at ICAAT**! HL

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Ways to Get Involved When You Join ICAAT

- Take part in CoDesign Connect by posting or participating in technology design, development or testing activities

- Share information and resources with other members of the Tech Forum's various discussion groups

- Read and react to User Stories and contribute your own story

- Explore CoDesign Essentials practical information designed to support consumer and industry collaborations