

By Donna Sorkin

American Cochlear Implant Alliance: Removing Barriers to Cochlear Implant Care

American Cochlear Implant (ACI) Alliance was established as a nonprofit in late 2011 and began operations in 2012 with a clearly defined mission:

To advance access to the gift of hearing provided by cochlear implantation through research, advocacy and awareness.

ACI Alliance is unique in that it brings together clinicians from across the cochlear implant (CI) continuum of care such as ear, nose, and throat (ENT) physicians, audiologists and speech language pathologists as well as others in the CI community, including researchers, educators, social workers and consumer/parent advocates.

The organization's focus is on carrying out initiatives that are designed to remove barriers to cochlear implant care that currently exist in the United States for children and adults who could benefit. These barriers include low public awareness; a lack of referrals from patient advising networks such as primary care physicians (and even hearing health professionals) who are unaware of candidacy and outcomes; uneven coverage and reimbursement by insurers; and a need for accepted "best clinical practices." Cost effectiveness and quality-of-life benefits for CIs have been demonstrated but the data is outdated.

HCAA members have experienced all of these barriers. We have often heard their stories lamenting how long it took them to pursue a cochlear implant because "they just didn't know how much it would help beyond hearing aids."

By bringing together the collective talents and resources of an interdisciplinary group of individuals and organizations working within and beyond cochlear implantation, it is hoped that the ACI Alliance can positively address the low utilization of this life-changing device among people who could benefit.



ACI Alliance Accomplishments and Ongoing Activities of Interest to HCAA Members

- Multi-center study to evaluate expansion of Medicare candidacy criteria for adults as a first step to change Medicare criteria to more closely match the FDA (acialliance.org/page/MedicareExpansion)
- Collaboration with HCAA on coordinated campaign to publicize CI candidacy and outcomes and inspire more individuals who might benefit to seek an evaluation
- Publish articles and conduct presentations on CI candidacy and outcomes for general health care audiences outside of CI such as primary care physicians and hearing health care professionals
- Developed and disseminated *Position Paper: Pediatric Habilitation Following Cochlear Implantation* to address therapy caps in insurance plans (acialliance.org/page/ACITherapyStatement)
- Organization of State Champion network to monitor and address CI barriers to access at the state and national levels (acialliance.org/page/StateChampions)
- Conduct *ACI Alliance on the Hill* events to advance reauthorization of national legislation on newborn hearing screening and intervention and improve visibility about hearing health care
- Sponsoring research on quality of life and cost effectiveness of CIs
- Developing a *Clinical Referral Guide* for primary care physicians, nurses, physician assistants and others who care for adults in general medicine settings

For more information visit acialliance.org. **HLM**

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