



Barbara at the 2019 HLAA Wisconsin State Association Conference, sporting a scarf to celebrate her favorite team for the "get acquainted tailgate party."

The HLAA mission is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, support and advocacy.

## The HLAA Mission Is Fully Alive!

BY BARBARA KELLEY

“Welcome to the frozen tundra!” were the words I heard when I landed in Appleton, Wisconsin, last November. I was greeted by Julie Olson, longtime member, former chair of the HLAA Board, and current co-chair—along with Christine Klessig—of the HLAA Fox Valley Chapter. Wisconsin might be known for its cheese, the Green Bay Packers and bitterly cold climates, but it’s also the land of warm hospitality from HLAA members working in their state and communities to shine the light on hearing loss.

I had the honor of speaking at the 2019 HLAA Wisconsin State Association Conference on Nov. 16 with the theme “Shining New Light on Hearing Loss!” This conference gave Wisconsin people the opportunity to attend an event with a rich educational program, including updates on Wisconsin state legislation affecting people with hearing loss; learn from exhibits by companies and service providers; have some fun; and be in a communication accessible place where it’s OK not to hear well. Events like this are especially important because not everyone has the means or time to attend HLAA National Conventions. Thank you, Wisconsin members, for work well done.

The “Wisconsin effect” is coast to coast in all of our HLAA Chapters and State Organizations. My trip to Wisconsin, and any time I meet our chapters on their turf, brings home to me how the HLAA mission is fully alive anywhere HLAA is part of the local fiber. HLAA Chapter members welcome people in their local communities who want to learn, give support, and advocate for the basic human right of access to life’s offerings.

HLAA Chapters come in many flavors and sizes. But all are volunteer-led, and all carry out the HLAA mission. Thank you to the volunteers who lead, pitch in, take on major endeavors, help with the Walk4Hearing, and hold true as the unconflicted voice for people with hearing loss. Don’t ever underestimate your contribution to *your* organization. We have a lot of people to reach to let them know they’re not alone in their hearing loss. And we can’t do it without the help of chapters.

Don’t ever underestimate your contribution to your organization. We have a lot of people to reach to let them know they’re not alone in their hearing loss. And we can’t do it without the help of chapters.

## A Look at 2020

Here are some issues we'll be keeping our eyes on in the new year:

- **Medicare:** Medicare coverage for hearing aids is still on the table on Capitol Hill. HLAA has visited several Congressional offices and met with colleagues who also are working on this issue. If there comes a time when we need you to write letters, we'll call on you. Our constituents who speak up are powerful. Medicare coverage is important for all the good reasons we know, but it also sets precedent for other insurance plans to follow.
- **Over-the-counter hearing aids:** The Food and Drug Administration must meet its deadline early this year for putting out proposed rules for over-the-counter hearing aids. HLAA will comment on those rules to ensure safety, efficacy, proper labeling and connectivity.
- **Captioning:** You answered our survey on realtime captioning on local news, and that has carried a lot of weight with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). We've filed a petition on live captioning with the FCC and will be working to ensure quality captioning in local news markets. Captioned telephone service also is on the radar of the FCC, HLAA, and Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS) providers. We'll work to ensure quality standards of this service and access to those who need it.
- **Hearing loops:** The HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop Program volunteers will continue advocating for hearing loops in public places and other establishments such as places of worship. There's legislation in several states addressing hearing loops and telecoils. We'll support those chapters and state organizations however we can.
- **Cellphones:** HLAA is representing people with hearing loss on the hearing aid compatible (HAC) cellphone task force that was directed by FCC in 2016. Together with the wireless industry, hearing aid companies and others, we're working toward the goal of achieving 100% HAC wireless phones. The goal is to deliver recommendations to the FCC by Dec. 31, 2022.

- **Technology partnerships:** We continue our long-time relationship with the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center at Gallaudet University, with HLAA as a subcontractor for a new grant-funded, five-year technology project.

This year's HLAA events—such as the Walk4Hearing in 20 cities in the spring and fall, and the HLAA2020 Convention in New Orleans in June—will bring thousands of people together, all behind the mission of information, education, support and advocacy. And I should add, these also are fun, motivating events.

We'll keep you updated in the pages of *Hearing Life*, on [hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org), and in the free, online *Hearing Life e-News*. You can sign up for the free e-news online and find an HLAA Chapter on [hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org).

Spread the word and stay close to us as we welcome 2020. **HL**

*Barbara Kelley is executive director of HLAA. Reach her at [bkelly@hearingloss.org](mailto:bkelly@hearingloss.org). Follow her on Twitter @Bkelley\_HLAA.*

Save the Date for NOLA



HLAA 2020 CONVENTION  
Hearing Loss Association of America | New Orleans  
June 18-21, 2020



For more information on HLAA2020, email  
Amanda Watson, meeting planner, at  
[awatson@hearingloss.org](mailto:awatson@hearingloss.org).