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“In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future.”

—Eric Hoffer,
Reflections on the Human Condition

What Did We Learn?

BY BARBARA KELLEY

Most of us are still carrying the weight of what happened in 2020 with the global pandemic into this new year. We learned together that human connections were more important than ever. We found out that HLAA needed you as much as you needed HLAA.

The global pandemic has also spurred creativity. Technology became more important than ever to keep us connected. The support and education that HLAA provides in person became virtual, digital experiences—HLAA Chapters, Convention and Walk4Hearing. We learned along with you, that we can adapt. We found connection and community among those we trust through digital platforms. Telehealth rose to the top for our health care visits. With these experiences came communication breakdowns and triumphs. We learned to navigate through communication barriers such as masks, not always finding solutions, but never giving up.

Hearing Loss and the Pandemic

HLAA, in partnership with Cochlear, conducted a survey last fall illustrating COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the community of people with hearing loss in the United States. The online survey of 1,399 participants sought to find out the pandemic's impact on those in the hearing loss community, including individuals with hearing loss, their loved ones and their hearing health care professionals.

Key findings include:

70% of those with hearing loss say they are more aware of their hearing loss due to the pandemic, and **47%** say they are more eager to explore hearing loss solutions due to the pandemic.

46% notice their hearing loss influencing other aspects of their mental health since the pandemic began, with:

- 67%** having feelings of anxiety
- 63%** having feelings of isolation
- 47%** having feelings of loneliness
- 22%** having feelings of confusion
- 21%** having feelings of forgetfulness

52% say they feel less connected to friends and family as a result of their hearing loss during the pandemic.

Hearing Loss and Accessibility

95% of the hearing loss community say face masks/coverings have created communication barriers since the pandemic began.

89% report experiencing accessibility issues since the pandemic began (including but not limited to the ability to lipread due to face masks, physical distancing

making conversations harder and not having access to captioning across all technology platforms).

35% say they have experienced a lack of empathy from others for their hearing loss during the pandemic.

Hearing Loss and Technology

68% of those with hearing loss have increased their use of technology during the pandemic to communicate with others.

68% say pandemic-related increased use of technology has caused them to become more aware of their hearing loss.

55% say their hearing loss creates challenges while using technology to communicate, while 45% use assistive hearing devices that make it easier to communicate.

Accenture's July 2020 report *Digital Health Technology Vision 2020* states:

"As people strive to find normalcy and stability as the world reopens, they are turning to health more than ever for answers." They go on to say, "85% of health executives acknowledge that technology has become an inextricable part of the human experience and 70% of consumers globally expect that their relationship with technology will be more prominent or significantly more prominent in their lives over the next three years." Hearing health care will have to keep up with the overall health care trends. A positive outlook might say that it might be easier for hearing health to be part of overall health in this future digital picture.

We learned a lot from the year 2020. We just have to keep saying 'yes' to the future. **HL**

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

Learn more about HLAA at hearingloss.org.

Mother and son at the New Jersey Walk4Hearing. Find out about the Walks at walk4hearing.org.

