



Speaking for the board, we are engaged and energized. Relationships between the board and the organization are strong and aligned. Personally, I am committed and enthusiastic to expand our impact.

Fulfilling HLAA's Mission

BY KEVIN H. FRANCK

This column is my inaugural message to Hearing Loss Association of America in my new role as its board chair. It is my honor to serve the board and the organization during my 2021–2023 tenure. In this introduction, I will briefly introduce myself and then lay out the board's top-line plans.

I am educated as a biomedical engineer and have a Ph.D. in speech and hearing sciences. I received an executive MBA later in my career. Most of my professional career has involved helping people hear better. In the hearing space, I have held academic clinician roles and worked on leadership teams in the extremes of corporate contexts; from large, established implanted hearing device and consumer electronic companies, to tiny startups and now a clinical-state biotech. Outside of hearing, I have consulted to a variety of pharmaceutical and diagnostic device companies, and even worked for a bionic robot leg company. I live in Concord, Massachusetts, where I enjoy getting engine grease under my fingernails.

HLAA's mission is "to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy." Below is my take on how the HLAA board of directors will ensure that HLAA fulfills its mission in the face of several current forces.

The global pandemic taught us how to use technology to stay social while being physically distant from each other. We learned how to gather in droves over Zoom, and even how to improve access to captions when doing so. These practices were equally effective in personal and professional venues. The board will work with the staff to ensure that as physical distancing relaxes, our new social technical skills will be fully leveraged to improve how we achieve our mission, and how we will advocate for previously unimaginable communication and advocacy opportunities for people with hearing loss.

The pandemic also showed us the fragility of our health care system and the need for good communication hygiene within it. Board members are lending their expertise to the HLAA Communication Access in Health Care program. This program envisions better communication within hospitals, and appropriate use of telemedicine with open captioned accommodations. Combined with HLAA's support for new models of hearing health care in over-the-counter hearing aids for those who can benefit from them, we are promoting more for all.

As a board, organization, and constituency, we must recognize that hearing loss affects people of all races. We, too, need to actively engage a more diverse representation on the board and contribute to a more beautiful canvas woven by stronger strings colored by diversity, equity and inclusion.

HLAA's membership represents a tiny proportion of those affected by hearing loss. You who are reading this column are the most informed about hearing loss because you have successfully traversed the complicated hearing health care landscape, navigated yourself to this organization, became members and received this magazine in some form. Congratulations! But you represent just a tiny proportion of all people with hearing loss. For HLAA to truly achieve

its mission, it must open the world for more than the relatively few with hearing loss who are paid members. HLAA also represents tens of millions of other Americans with undiagnosed or mild hearing loss, or those who are unengaged in our constituency. The organization, with the support and encouragement of the board, is working to revise this model, and on specific efforts to empower populations rarely addressed by our organization, such as younger people who are looking for employment in companies who do not understand all they have to offer.

In times of need we are there for each other. Since the onset of the pandemic, the need has been enormous, and individuals have stepped up in a big way to support each other in every dimension of society. So, too, with HLAA. While many organizations experienced a downturn in giving, we were successfully able to mobilize our community. Our supporters dug deeper and helped to sustain our organization. The 2020

HLAA Giving Challenge showed us just what we can accomplish when we work together. The overwhelming response—\$780,000 in gifts being put to work—is a testament to how people feel about our organization. The funds we generated will be used to make HLAA something better, not just sustain who we are.

As a board, we volunteer our service within the context of who we are right now. Speaking for the Board, we are engaged and energized. Relationships between the board and the organization are strong and aligned. Personally, I am committed and enthusiastic to expand our impact. I plan to communicate with you in a variety of ways, including meeting many of you in person at our convention in 2022 in Tampa, Florida. **HL**

Kevin H. Franck, Ph.D., is chair of the HLAA board of directors and lives in Concord, Massachusetts. He can be reached at chair@hearingloss.org.



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in Tampa, Florida! Learn more at hearingloss.org.**