An Exciting Advancement: Navigating the Transition to Auracast™

BY ANDREA KANEB

Moving from long-trusted technologies to something new can feel like stepping off a sturdy dock onto a gently rocking boat. It requires careful first steps until you adapt.

Most people with hearing loss find it exceptionally challenging to hear in noisy environments and over distance. Assistive listening systems (ALS) such as hearing loops, FM, infrared (IR) and some Wi-Fi-based systems deliver sound straight to the person's ears and make word clarity noticeably better. However, many people don't realize these systems exist or how much they can help provide reliable, effective audio access in public venues like theaters, concert halls and houses of worship.

But a new way of listening in public spaces is emerging that could be beneficial for everyone: Auracast broadcast audio. A feature of Bluetooth Low Energy (LE) Audio, Auracast opens the door to broader, more inclusive access to sound for people with and without hearing loss.

What is Auracast?

Auracast is part of Bluetooth LE Audio. It lets a venue broadcast sound to anyone nearby with compatible devices. While traditional Bluetooth connects just one device to another, Auracast supports broadcasting from one to multiple devices at the same time. This allows many people to tune in to the same broadcast, somewhat like a radio station.

How it Works

When an Auracast transmitter sends out an audio broadcast, people in range can select to listen to a particular broadcast directly through their compatible hearing aids, cochlear implant processors, earbuds, headphones or other receiver.

As this technology evolves over time into wider adoption by both venues and device manufacturers, it is important that manufacturers make connecting to Auracast broadcasts as easy as pressing a button on your hearing aid or cochlear implant in simple listening settings. Otherwise, consumers who are less familiar or comfortable with technology, and those with other accessibility needs, could be left out. In the interim period, connection may require some additional steps or a handheld receiver. (Clarity in advertising is essential, too, since hearing aids can only connect to a "standard-quality" Auracast broadcast. That may not be clear to venues or hearing aid users when determining compatibility.)

Selection of a preferred broadcast channel can be made using a wireless phone in various ways: as you would select a Wi-Fi network, by scanning a QR code or tapping signage. While your phone or smartwatch helps you discover and join an

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audio broadcast, the audio itself does not travel through the phone; the phone works like a remote control.

What Makes Auracast Special?

Auracast was designed to address some of the frustrations people have experienced with other assistive listening systems. It supports multiple channels at once, such as foreign language translation or audio description, and uses a new audio format that delivers clearer sound with less delay than traditional Bluetooth.

Auracast also has flexibility; venues can broadcast in stereo for concerts and movies, or mono for lectures. Because the system runs on the familiar 2.4 GHz wireless frequency radio band—used by many common household devices like microwaves and cordless phones—it avoids the magnetic interference from wiring or lighting that can sometimes affect hearing loops. At the same time, this scenario raises a new question: how will Auracast perform in places with heavy Wi-Fi or Bluetooth traffic, which might cause interference? Early tests suggest this can be managed effectively, but only real-world use will confirm its reliability.

Perhaps most importantly, Auracast is not just for people with hearing loss. Anyone with Auracast-enabled earbuds or wireless headphones can use it. When everyone shares the same system, whether in a stadium, theater, church, gym, airport, restaurant, performance hall or museum, it is more likely to be installed, maintained and understood. When assistive listening is mainstream, stigma has a chance to fade.

What if My Hearing Devices Don't Support Auracast?

You can still join in. Venues like those listed above can provide small Auracast receivers that work with headphones or a neckloop for telecoils. You can also plug a proprietary streamer into an Auracast receiver, which is likely to add latency (delay), but lets you use your hearing devices in place without the need to remove them and use earbuds or headphones instead.

A selection of Auri Auracast receivers and other assistive technology at the HLAA 2025 Convention. Equipment provided by Ampetronic | ListenTechnologies.

A hearing assistance sign indicating the availability of Auracast broadcast audio.

These options bridge the gap for people whose hearing devices don't yet support Auracast. That matters because many people only upgrade hearing devices every five to seven years. That's a long time to wait for access to an Auracast-compatible device. During this transition period, telecoils, neckloops and proprietary streamers will remain vital for equitable access. There should be a path to access for everyone.

Telecoils are Still Important

As Auracast adoption begins, telecoils will continue to play a critical role for millions of people for one simple reason: telecoils are already built into many hearing aids and cochlear implants. They also connect easily to hearing loops in public places, interface with established systems (like FM/IR) and do not require a smartphone or app. Consumer groups in Europe, such as the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) and The International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH), have urged manufacturers to keep telecoils in hearing aids for the foreseeable future.

To keep everyone included during this transition, hearing instrument manufacturers must continue offering telecoils, and venues must keep their hearing loops and other assistive listening systems in working order. Think of it this way: telecoils are the taxi waiting at the curb, immediate and simple. Auracast is the rideshare app, modern and flexible, but often requiring a phone and a bit more technological familiarity. For now, both are needed. (See sidebar, "Coexisting Assistive Listening

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Clear and Compelling: Experiencing Auracast at an HLAA Convention

BY ROXANA ROTUNDO

Once a year, hundreds of people in the hearing loss community, along with hearing health care professionals and companies, come together at the HLAA Convention. For those with hearing loss, it's a chance to connect, support one another and explore the latest in technology. HLAA Board of Directors member Roxana Rotundo shares her experience with Auracast, a technology she had never tried before.

The HLAA 2025 Convention in Indianapolis delivered on its commitment to solid educational programs and creating a supportive environment for connecting with people who have hearing loss. Among the many highlights from my time at the convention: experiencing Auracast broadcast audio for the first time. I had read about Auracast before. Its promise of clearer, more inclusive listening in public spaces by allowing multiple hearing devices to connect to a single broadcast was exciting. But reading about it and actually experiencing it are two very different things.

Auracast was available in the workshop rooms and the main speaker sessions on the HLAA Convention, but I didn't know how to connect to it. (Most cochlear implants and hearing aids are not yet Auracast-enabled, including mine.) The reality—and charm!—of a brand new technology is that you have to figure out how it works first.

I Have Always Loved, and Depended on, Technology

When I received each of my cochlear implants (CIs), learning about the latest technology was the best decision I made to get the most out of my devices. I often think about how recipients who aren't tech-savvy might struggle to truly benefit from what's available. It was from that perspective that I approached my first experience connecting to Auracast.

At first, I wasn't sure how to set up the Auracast receiver. I tried connecting it to the wireless microphone accessory for my CIs, just as I do when I use other hearing devices in public venues or at work—and it worked! I was so happy to experience it. Even though my CIs weren't yet enabled for Auracast, I had found a way to use the technology.

This technology will spread quickly because it is designed for the general public, not only people with hearing loss. It provides an easy way for operators of large venues, museums and other spaces to enhance the experiences of *all* visitors, with and without hearing loss.

My actual experience of using Auracast made me a believer. The incoming audio was clear, presenters were understandable and there was no discernible lag time. I am confident that this technology will spread quickly because it is designed for the general public, not only people with hearing loss. It provides an easy way for operators of large venues, museums and other spaces to enhance the experiences of all visitors, with and without hearing loss.

Does assistive hearing technology still have a long way to go? Yes, but I'm the kind of person who enjoys celebrating small victories. At the HLAA Convention, I was happy to show some friends and fellow attendees how to use Auracast and enjoy it together. The future may not be here yet, but imagine that someday, airports, train stations, theaters, houses of worship and sports arenas will all have the ability to broadcast directly to anyone with compatible hearing aids, implants or earbuds. No more missing announcements, no more guessing at what was said. Just easy access, everywhere.

I left the convention knowing we were witnessing a real leap forward for accessibility. As someone who has benefited from years of science and research, I can't overstate how much progress like this matters. It's not just about technology; it's about inclusion, independence and dignity. I can't wait to see more! HL

Roxana Rotundo lives in Miami and is a member of the HLAA Board of Directors. She is CEO and founder of VIP 2000 TV, an independent distribution company of films and content for the Hispanic market. She was a co-executive producer of the award-winning documentary on hearing loss, We Hear You. *She can be reached at* **roxana@vip2000.tv**.

See page 30 to learn about the HLAA 2026 Convention.

Coexisting Assistive Listening Systems: Working Toward Inclusive Hearing Access

BY CHERI PERAZZOLI

After years advocating for hearing loops and universal hearing access, the author has learned one thing for certain: no single system works for everyone. People's needs, devices and comfort levels vary—and as technology evolves, so must our options.

To foster truly inclusive, hearing-friendly public spaces, venues need to provide more than one type of assistive listening system (ALS). Many places already have trusted technologies in place, such as a hearing loop, FM or infrared system. Rather than replacing these familiar systems, venues can simply add new technologies like Auracast to expand access. This coexistence model ensures that people using all types of hearing instruments—whether older or newer—have access to clear sound.

A hearing loop is a form of hearing assistive technology that transmits sound directly into a wearer's hearing aids or cochlear implant processors that are equipped with a telecoil. A telecoil, or t-coil, is a small coil of copper wire inside a hearing device that allows it to become a wireless receiver.

Currently, a few public venues are installing hybrid systems. For example, the WYO Performing Arts & Education Center in Sheridan, Wyoming and the Sydney Opera House in Australia, currently offer both hearing loop and Auracast transmitters, side-by-side. More hybrid installations are expected in the future.

Coexistence is not duplication, it's how we bridge proven solutions with tomorrow's innovations and provide universal access. The good news: Auracast can be added to almost any venue already using an ALS. By running side-by-side with current systems, Auracast complements what millions of people already rely on, giving more of us the chance to hear clearly and comfortably—today and into the future.

Universal Access Demands Strong Support for Coexistence

Leading hearing access organizations worldwide agree that the availability of Auracast and hearing loop systems, along with telecoils in hearing devices, need to be available simultaneously to ensure broad access—especially during the transition to broad Auracast adoption. Among them:

Auracast can be beneficial in educational settings, as demonstrated by this student wearing a neckloop receiver in the classroom.

- **The International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH)** states in its Budapest Declaration, "…all assistive listening systems, hearing aids and cochlear implants need to be Auracast broadcast audio AND telecoil compatible."
- **The Center for Hearing Access**, a U.S. based advocacy organization, calls for "ADA-access-ready hearing instruments" that support telecoils and Auracast for at least the next decade and beyond, to ensure access for all.
- **Bluetooth Special Interest Group (Bluetooth SIG)** also acknowledges that broad adoption of Auracast will take time—and that integration with proven systems is essential to provide accessible audio experiences during the Auracast roll-out.

Barbara Kelley, executive director of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), says, "Hearing and understanding speech in various environments can be a daily struggle for people with any degree of hearing loss. Having choices in technology to meet the varying needs of people with hearing loss is critical. The advent

of technologies like Auracast broadcast audio has the potential to give people who wear hearing aids and cochlear implants an important new option for hearing access in their everyday lives."

Left to right: Cheri Perazzoli, Roxana Rotundo and Andrea Kaneb hold Auri Auracast receivers at the HLAA 2025 Convention in Indianapolis.

What You Can Do

Creating welcoming, accessible spaces isn't something venues do alone—we as users and advocates play a vital role, too. Here are some simple ways to educate places you visit and guide them toward universal hearing access:

- **Ask for telecoil and Auracast capability:** Audiologist, HLAA Adviser and hearing access advocate, Juliëtte Sterkens, Au.D., recommends letting your hearing health care provider know you want devices that connect to ALS via telecoil and Auracast. "That way, you'll be ready for access wherever you go, now and in the future."

- **Request hearing-friendly venues:** At theaters, conference centers, houses of worship, museums or event venues, ask about available ALS. Encourage venues to implement both hearing loops and Auracast to ensure inclusive access. Showing demand encourages adoption.

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—Barbara Kelley, executive director, HLAA

- **Spread the word:** Talk with friends, colleagues and relatives who could benefit from hearing loops or Auracast. When more of us know what to ask for, change happens faster.

- **Get connected:** Streamers, remote microphones, neckloops and telecoils can help you connect to hearing loops and Auracast.

The Way Forward

By offering both well-established and emerging ALS, venues send a clear message that everyone is welcome here. This forward-thinking approach bridges familiar solutions with innovation and reflects the best of universal design—ensuring accessibility for every guest, regardless of hearing ability, hearing instrument or comfort with new technology. By offering a trusted, existing system alongside new technologies like Auracast, venues can accommodate diverse needs and preferences and create truly inclusive and accessible public spaces. HL

Cheri Perazzoli has led successful hearing loss advocacy, education, health care and access initiatives across Washington State and nationally through the HLAA Get in the Hearing Loop campaign and as founder of Let's Loop Seattle. She is president of the Hearing Loss Association of America-Washington State Association (HLAA-WA) and has served on the national HLAA Board of Directors since 2018. Cheri can be reached at **cperazzoli@hearingloss-wa.org**.

Learn more about Auracast and find links to additional resources on the HLAA website at **hearingloss.org/auracast**.

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Systems: Working Toward Inclusive Hearing Access" on page 14.)

How Far Along is the Auracast Transition?

Auracast products are beginning to roll out. Major technology brands are releasing Auracast-enabled devices, showing strong industry confidence. Be aware that some devices are labeled "Auracast-ready," but *this means they will not function until a future software update unlocks the feature.* Meanwhile, "Auracast-enabled" devices work with the technology today.

Transmitters from a handful of manufacturers are now available, and places around the world are slowly starting to install them, such as the Sydney Opera House in Australia, Stadium Taranaki in New Zealand, CCI at the University of the Arts London in the U.K. and the WYO Theater Performing Arts and Education Center in Sheridan, Wyoming.

Widespread adoption will take time. While performing arts centers may be early adopters, other places like houses of worship and municipal buildings upgrade slowly. Many existing systems will remain in place for years. Standards to guide Auracast are taking shape, too. Bluetooth LE Audio standards already exist and certification programs to ensure connection and interoperability between brands are underway. A new international standard for Auracast is expected by late 2027. It will provide a way to check coverage, latency and audio quality of Auracast installations in venues, helping ensure consistent experiences across locations and the compatibility of public ALS with hearing devices.

If you are due to update your hearing aid or cochlear implant soon, there is no need to wait. Just be sure your update includes both Auracast capability and a telecoil, so you are covered for all scenarios.

What to Expect Next

Public access depends on real-world installations. That means advocacy, installer engagement and budgeting all play a role. Many venues are not yet aware of Auracast requirements, so education will be key. Costs depend on room and infrastructure. In many venues, Auracast can be simpler to deploy than a hearing loop. Early estimates are often higher than FM/IR today, but pricing is still evolving.

For consumers, the Auracast logo will indicate certified products that can connect to and broadcast audio. Google Maps already includes Auracast venues in its accessibility search function, and searchable databases of Auracast-enabled products and locations are in development by the Bluetooth Special Interest Group and others.

Auracast is transformative, inclusive and full of potential. It could reshape how people with and without hearing loss access sound in public places.

In the meantime, use telecoils directly with loops. For other existing ALS, request a hearing-aid compatible receiver with a neckloop or streamer. If none are available, use your own and let the venue know ADA rules require that some receivers be hearing-aid compatible. (Venues can meet this requirement by stocking neckloops.)

Success in venues will depend on widespread deployment, quality installations, informed users and continued protection of existing systems.

Stepping Into the Future

Transitions on this scale rarely come without growing pains. The pieces, including compatible hearing devices, venue transmitters and installation guidelines, are only now coming together.

Yet the promise of a simpler setup, improved sound quality and the possibility of universal access that benefits everyone is compelling. However, legacy technologies like hearing loops should remain in place so no one is left out.

Auracast is transformative, inclusive and full of potential. It could reshape how people with and without hearing loss access sound in public places. Early deployments are promising, but large, independent multi-site studies across diverse users are needed. Telecoils and existing ALS remain essential during this transition.

As we step aboard this exciting new boat, let us move forward with confidence while keeping the dock safe for those who rely on it today—and for those not yet ready or able to take that step. HL

Andrea Kaneb is a frequent presenter, adviser and hearing technology advocate through her website, **gatheringsound.com**. *She is a board member of the Museum of Science and a trustee for Massachusetts Eye and Ear, both in Boston, and also serves on the HLAA Board of Directors. Andrea was honored with the Keystone Award at the HLAA 2025 Convention. She can be reached at* **andrea@gatheringsound.com**.