HLAA represents all people with hearing loss in the United States. Much of the influence we have involves working behind the scenes to break down barriers and bring hearing health into the mainstream. Some of our work is likened to running a marathon rather than an explosive short sprint with a well-marked finish line. Making transformational change is indeed a marathon requiring sustained energy, patience and passion.

My new appointment to NIH’s influential Council of Councils signals something important for people with hearing loss. It means at the world’s foremost medical research center, hearing loss and hearing health has a seat at the table. Since this is an eight-year appointment, there’s plenty of time to contribute and gauge how hearing loss is considered.

In addition, one of the 27 NIH institutes is the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), established in 1989 with the work of advocates, including HLAA, who pushed for this new institute. I just completed a three-year term on the NIDCD Advisory Council, where I established meaningful relationships and learned about ongoing research in the field of hearing loss. There’s so much hope on the horizon.

Both appointments came through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, carrying the weight and prestige that implies. This is good news for HLAA and for people who care about hearing health.

Table Set with Alphabet Soup
HLAA is also represented at various agencies and regulatory boards at the federal level. Our busy advocacy department is headed by Lise Hamlin, director of public policy, assisted by Brian Meyer, public policy associate. Collectively, we are sitting at important tables representing all people with hearing loss who need communication access and advancements in hearing health. Add to that many of our members who represent HLAA in state and local governments.

Another significant table is one catering to a wide range of cultures in the U.S., which propels us to our goal of prioritizing diversity. In October, an African American HLAA leader and I both participated in a webinar addressing hearing health disparities in underserved communities, sponsored by the National Caucus and Center on Black Aging, Inc. The cover feature of this Hearing Life magazine issue is another example of our commitment to greater inclusion.

Here’s a sampling of the work going on behind the scenes, but very much in the forefront of strategy at HLAA:

Federal Agency Advisory Committees
- Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Disability Advisory Committee
- Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) Disability and Multicultural Coalition
- TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) Passengers with Disabilities Working Group
• U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)/Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA Advisory Committee Working Group for Air Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights public awareness campaign

Collaborations
• Friends of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus (FCHHC)
• Hearing Health Collaborative
• World Health Organization’s World Hearing Forum (WHO/WHF)
• Cochlear Implant International Community of Action (CIICA)
• Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN)
• Teach Access
• International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH)
• Telephone Caption Quality Measures and Metrics Working Group
• The University of Pittsburgh’s CLEARdashboard Advisory Panel
• Disability Organizations Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) Working Group

Industry
• LG’s Accessibility Advisory Board
• AT&T’s Advisory Panel on Access and Aging
• Microsoft’s Hard of Hearing Advisory Board
• Verizon’s Disability Advisory Board
• Consumer Technology Association (CTA) hearing health advocates to CES

The work HLAA does is meaningful. The results at times are long awaited. But as long as there are people like you counting on us, we’ll sustain our energy, patience and most of all, passion. HL

Barbara Kelley receives a commendation from NIDCD Director Debara L. Tucci, M.D., on September 14, 2023, for serving a three-year term on the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders Advisory Council, National Institutes of Health.

Barbara Kelley is executive director of HLAA. She can be reached at bkelley@hearingloss.org. Follow her on Twitter @Bkelley_HLAA.

To view links, see original article at bit.ly/3SH2g18 or scan the QR Code at right:

A version of this article appeared in our Hear This! blog in October. Make sure you’re signed up for alerts like this at bit.ly/3VPtbpe.

Are you a veteran living with hearing loss, tinnitus or other auditory issue?

HLAA stands ready to help our nation’s veterans live successfully with hearing loss and related issues. In addition to a complimentary first-timer convention attendee registration, you can participate in the HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter.

The mission of the HLAA Veterans Across America Virtual Chapter is to provide education, be an advocate for veterans with hearing loss and to provide a support system to help them return to civilian life.

For more information, go to hearingloss.org/Veterans or email chapters@hearingloss.org.