

Listen up: Hearing aids go over-the-counter Monday

By [Hiawatha Bray](#) Globe Staff, Updated October 17, 2022, 8:20 a.m.



Several audio companies are ready to sell compatible hearing aids, including Sony, Jabra, and Lexie Hearing, a South African company that's using technology developed by Framingham-based Bose Corp. SONY ELECTRONICS, INC.

You can now buy a hearing aid as easily as an iPhone.

A federal law enacted in 2017 goes into effect Monday, allowing US residents to purchase high-quality hearing aids at retail stores, with no need for a prescription or costly visits to a doctor or audiologist.

It's likely that the new policy will lead to lower prices for hearing aids, which have

routinely sold for as much as \$5,000. Over-the-counter hearing aids are expected to sell for less than \$1,000, meaning that millions more people will be able to afford them. And they'll be available at major retailers like Walgreens, Walmart, and Best Buy.

"This opens up a new path," said Barbara Kelley, executive director of the [Hearing Loss Association of America](#). "We hope that making it easier, having hearing aids in the mainstream, gets people to pay attention to their hearing health."

Implementing the new law took five years, while the US Food and Drug Administration created standards that must be met by all over-the-counter hearing aids. Several audio companies are ready to sell compatible hearing aids, including Sony, Jabra, and [Lexie Hearing](#), a South African company that's using technology developed by Framingham-based Bose Corp. A Lexie hearing aid with built-in rechargeable batteries will sell for \$999, while a version that uses replaceable batteries will cost \$849.

Consumers have long been able to buy cheaper and less sophisticated "personal sound amplification devices," which don't require FDA approval. These devices merely increase audio volume without addressing more complex hearing problems. For instance, some people have trouble hearing higher audio frequencies, and need specially fitted hearing aids that are custom-tuned to address the problem.

The new regulations allow for "self-fitted" hearing aids which let the user make the necessary adjustments, usually with the help of a smartphone app that uses the phone's Bluetooth chip to talk to the hearing aid. With the app, a user can adjust high- and low-frequency audio levels and set up different audio profiles depending on the environment. There might be one setting for use at home and another for riding the subway, for instance.

Over-the-counter hearing aids aren't for everybody, said Brian Maguire, Lexie's senior vice president for North America. "These devices are for mild to moderate hearing loss," he said. "If you have something more severe, you definitely want to go to a hearing

professional.”

Still, the National Institutes of Health estimates that nearly 29 million US residents could benefit from hearing aids, but they’re used by only about 30 percent of people above age 70, and just 16 percent of people between ages 20 and 69. But hearing aids may become more popular, as the new rules make them cheaper and easier to find.

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