

Response To Consumer, Regarding Regret Not Having Auracast in Hearing Aids

January 25, 2024

By Juliëtte Sterkens, AuD

Our HAAA Get In The Hearing Loop Committee recently received an inquiry from a consumer who expressed concern about the fact that her husband's brand-new hearing aids did not include Auracast.

This is how one committee member, Dr. Juliëtte Sterkens, responded.

I am an audiologist with over 40 years of experience. I am the professional advisor for hearing loop (and other assistive listening) technology with HAAA. I would like to respond to your comment that somehow your husband will be missing out on not having Auracast in his brand-new Oticon hearing aids.

I am in contact with audio and assistive listening experts around the world, with practicing audiologists as well as audiologists and with representatives from the large 5 hearing aid manufacturers. In early December 2023, I attended an Auracast Pioneering Innovation Experience at the Cochlear HQ in Sydney Australia which involved representatives from the US-based Bluetooth Special Interest Group (BT SIG) where we were given an opportunity to listen to simulated broadcasts of audio using Auracast.

I can assure you that an international IEC Standard regarding Auracast (to ensure that every installed system will work for the users of - small and larger - hearing aids and cochlear implants) is likely still 2-3 years out. The deployment of these new systems will likely not take off until AFTER that standard is adopted as this IEC Standard will give audio engineers around the world, and especially those in countries where the installation of public assistive listening is tightly regulated (like the UK and EU) the guidelines they need for proper installation.

While companies like Cochlear, Resound and Signia have introduced some model hearing aids and CI processors with built-in Auracast (BT 5.3) these devices might still need a firmware update in the future, SONOVA, the world's largest HA company - unlike GN Resound – announced it will *not* make their latest hearing aids Auracast compatible. When Sonova might do this, is unknown.

It is my opinion, that having an Auracast compatible hearing aid today – is comparable to having an electric vehicle but not having any charging points anywhere in your state, except for the charger that came with your car. It will likely take a decade – if not longer – before the adoption of Auracast transmitters will become common place. Users not only need new hearing aids and cochlear implant processors but require a complete Auracast “ecosystem” where they can use their hearing aids to hear better.

Consumers with hearing loss, not only need Auracast compatible hearing aids, but they also need Auracast compatibility in their smartphone (note my latest iPhone 15 is currently not compatible) and download special apps to choose the right Auracast audio stream. To fully benefit, consumers with hearing loss will also need devices at home such as Auracast compatible TVs, laptop, tablets, and the technology in their automobiles. Consumers without hearing aids will need to update their smartphones and wireless earbuds. Furthermore, the installation of Auracast transmitters needs to be completed at airport gates, airport TVs, sports bars, fitness clubs, in university halls, courtroom & city hall chambers,

conference centers, and local places of worship, theatres and high school auditoriums. Computers used in public places (like universities, public libraries, and senior centers) will likely also require updating.

As of this date, no independent studies have been completed to verify the BT SIG and Hearing Industry claims are true that Auracast is easy to use for young and old, and that hearing aid and CI users will not experience interference or latency issues in large venues that may impair the (already precarious) speech intelligibility of the users.

This is a round-about way of telling you that today and for the foreseeable future, your husband will be unable to find publicly installed Auracast systems that meet a reasonable standard because that standard doesn't exist yet or any Auracast systems at all, for that matter.

The good news is that your husband will benefit TODAY from the telecoils in his hearing aids and the thousands of ADA mandated assistive listening systems installed around the country and especially hearing loops. If you are unfamiliar with telecoils and hearing loops, some resources:

- please visit HLAA's Get In The Hearing Loop info www.hearingloss.org/GITHL for a toolkit
- email this HLAA Committee at loop.locations@hearingloss.org for a custom list of hearing loops in your state or visit <https://hearingloop.org/state-lists>
- email GITHLinfo@hearingloss.org for questions about hearing loops

As a consumer advocate, I recommend consumers get hearing aids that can "do it all." Just like cars needs headlights **and** windshield wipers. Consumers are advised to make sure they purchase hearing devices that are convenient to use (being rechargeable for example), include telecoils to be able to receive the signals from hearing loops and FM/IR devices with neckloops **and** are compatible with Auracast for future use, so that their devices can benefit them in a variety of public places and for years to come.

Auracast technology is promising but its development and installation in public venues around the country and the world will take time, likely on the order of 5-10 years if not longer.