



### **We declare that as people with hearing loss**

***We have the right to hear, anywhere in the world, today and in the future, using public or private assistive listening systems.***

***We must have hearing instruments\* that connect directly and easily via both Auracast and telecoils to assistive listening systems. Only these are “ADA-Access-Ready” hearing instruments.***

### **The criticality**

To ensure access for all, it is critical that both Auracast and telecoils be included in hearing instruments for at least the next decade and probably longer. We aim to ensure that people with hearing loss can benefit from both current and emerging technologies to guarantee equal access to communication for everyone for years to come.

Both technologies are crucial in ensuring high-quality, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible audio experiences for individuals with hearing loss in public and private spaces. Combining both technologies gives every person with hearing loss the option to access existing ADA assistive listening systems (hearing loops, FM/RF, and infrared systems) and the capability to access the emerging Auracast streamed assistive listening.<sup>†</sup> This ensures flexible and universal access in the United States and whenever people travel throughout the world.

Since 2009, national and international groups have written multiple declarations about the criticality of including BOTH telecoils and Bluetooth. This declaration extends that assertion to new technology.

### **The purpose of this document**

- To raise issues and awareness of challenges that hearing instrument users<sup>††</sup> have because of decisions by others. “Nothing about us without us.”
- To help guide needed changes in assistive listening systems.
- To help guide the inclusion of emerging technologies, such as Auracast.
- To have a comprehensive declaration for the United States. [International declarations and statements](#) have been created for the past 15 years.

**Distribution:** cochlear implant, hearing aid, and ALS manufacturers; professional national organizations for audiologists and hearing instrument specialists; advocates; and others.

To make this a reality, we declare that

1. Hearing instrument manufacturers



Hearing device manufacturers must enhance their product lines to meet the critical needs of users. They must acknowledge and communicate that even with the latest hearing instrument technology, hearing instruments alone cannot overcome many daily challenges in public and private places. The hearing instruments themselves must be able to fully extend their capability by coupling to assistive listening systems. Manufacturers must make this connection easy for both providers and users by providing the following:

- a. **Produce multiple models with hybrid connectivity with BOTH Auracast and telecoils.** NEITHER should be optional: Users should not be forced to choose between telecoils or Auracast if models offer only one or the other; users require BOTH.
- b. **Include connectivity options alongside other hearing instrument features.**
  - i. Users should not need to choose between connectivity and rechargeability, disposable batteries, waterproofing, and other features.
  - ii. DeafBlind users need simultaneous ALS and audio description connectivity, with independent volume controls.
- c. **Include the technology for both Auracast and telecoils in the instrument itself** and not as an accessory. Accessories are easily forgotten, left at sites/locations, easily misplaced, add cost, require battery recharging, add another thing to malfunction, make troubleshooting complex, and are not easy to use for people with technology challenges, dexterity, or cognitive needs.
- d. **Produce direct-to-hearing instrument connections.** No intermediary control or “handshake” device should be required to access the ALS nor should a receiver with a neckloop be required. Intermediary devices add complexity and barriers for individuals with limited dexterity, limited cognitive abilities, or limited tech familiarity. The need to borrow equipment adds to the stigma of hearing loss.
  - i. Examples, *direct-to-hearing instrument connections*. Hearing loops to telecoils in hearing devices (not in accessories) and Auracast streamed assistive listening to Auracast compatible device (no intermediary device).
  - ii. Examples, *non-direct-to-hearing instrument connections*. FM/RF, infrared systems, and Auracast streamed assistive listening that requires a receiver with a neckloop (intermediary devices).
- e. **M/T and M/A settings** are included.
  - i. M + T capability. Capability to quickly switch back and forth between M, T or mix of M+T (M=Microphone, T=Telecoil)
  - ii. M + A capability. Capability to quickly switch back and forth between M, A or mix of M+A (M=Microphone, A=Auracast)
- f. **Product packaging** to prominently show the connectivity available with the device or the lack thereof. Users have the right to know what they purchase, whether prescription devices or OTC hearing aids.
- g. **Provide user education on connectivity** that users or providers can readily use, including the value of ALS, how to connect, and troubleshooting.

## 2. Audiologists and hearing instrument providers



Audiologists and hearing instrument providers are responsible for providing devices that enable users to hear in as many places as possible, activating telecoil programs, demonstrating the benefits of all features, and educating the user.

- a. **Proactively act upon their legal and ethical responsibilities.**
- b. **Order hearing aids with Auracast and telecoils in the instrument.**
  - Telecoil and Auracast capabilities must be the default for all devices ordered.**
  - i. If hearing instrument models offered are limited in features or only provide Auracast, professionals can provide frank feedback to the manufacturers and file complaints when appropriate. No patient should ever say, “I just spent thousands of dollars, and my hearing aid doesn’t even have a telecoil.” Or “Why didn’t you turn on my telecoil two years ago when I purchased my hearing aids? I missed so much. Now my life is forever changed.”
- c. Be knowledgeable about the locations and types of **ALS in their communities.**
- d. **Provide ALS equipment** for communication, demonstration, and hands-on patient training in their practice.
- e. **Proactively provide patient education** on ALS benefits, how to use all features and programs, how to connect with their instruments, the patient’s legal rights to hear clearly using assistive listening systems, and where ALS can be found in the patient’s community.

## 3. Professional organizations for audiologists and hearing instrument providers



- a. **Include the professional’s ethical obligation** to give patients access to clear sound in public and private places, where access is mandated under the ADA.
- b. **Include ALS in professional best practice guidelines** for hearing instrument fittings for users of all ages, emphasizing the importance of direct-to-instrument compatibility, ALS benefits, and patient education. This needs to be part of essential hearing aid fitting services.
- c. **Provide ADA training** about patient rights to hearing access.

## 4. Assistive listening system manufacturers



- a. **Ensure direct connectivity to hearing instruments** without an intermediary or handshake device developed by the hearing instrument manufacturers is fully functional.
- b. **Produce equipment that maximizes comfort, sanitation, and usability for users.**
  - i. New inventions are needed for multiple activities.
  - ii. Produce functionality for the DeafBlind community. Audio description and ALS need to work easily and in tandem.
- c. **Sell complete kits that meet the ADA.** An owner/operator should not need to read the small print to see if neckloops are absent or if the kit is sized for a smaller room.
- d. **Provide evidence of claimed capabilities for produced equipment** by practical, reputable third parties that include people with hearing loss and DeafBlind.
- e. **Proactively provide owner/operator education** with print and media materials, including how to use all features, technical manuals, legal ADA requirements, studies performed, the importance of correct microphone selection and use, regular testing, recommended maintenance, and basic troubleshooting.

## 5. Assistive listening system installers



- a. **Recommend ALS** that are easy to use, give direct-to-hearing instrument compatibility, are versatile, and are discrete.
- b. **Produce a written report** for the client that provides i) measured “end-to-end latency” of the system and ii) how the Assistive Listening System as a whole and its components meet IEC, ANSI and/or other standards.

Respectfully signed,

The Center for Hearing Access (CHA) and the undersigned organizations agree with the principles in this document.

### About assistive listening systems

- Assistive listening systems clarify sound by substantially reducing the negative effects of distance, noise, and reverberation.
- Hearing instruments typically provide 4-6 dB Signal-To-Noise Ratio (SNR) improvement; remote microphones 14-18 dB SNR improvement; assistive listening systems 5-30 dB SNR improvement.

### Resources

Center for Hearing Access (2024)

- [What is needed for Auracast Streamed ALS to be available and usable](#) (2 pages, pdf)
- [Assistive Listening Research](#). Research collection, Zotero online library with 50+ resources.

Burwinkel, J. R., Barret, R. E., Marquardt, D., George, E., & Jensen, K. K. (2024, February). [Hearing Loops and Induction Coils: Improving SNR in Public Spaces](#). *Hearing Review*, 31(2), 22–25.

Kaufmann, T. (2024, March 21). [How “Public Access Ready” Hearing Aids Could Offer a Competitive Edge](#). *The Hearing Review*.

Sabin, C., Drullman, R., & Thomas, A. (2023, June 22). [Why Auracast™ Broadcast Audio Needs to Coexist with Current Assistive Listening Technologies](#). *Bluetooth® Technology Website*.

### Footnotes

\*hearing aids (prescription or OTC), cochlear implants, and bone conductive devices.

†The full technical name is “Auracast™ Broadcast Audio used as part of an Assistive Listening System (ALS)” and is simply identified as Auracast streamed assistive listening (AL) in this document.

††Patients, consumers

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### **About the Center for Hearing Access**

Founded in 2024, the nonprofit Center for Hearing Access is a national advocacy and education initiative of The John G. Shedd Institute for the Arts in Eugene, OR. We champion and educate users, sites, audiologists, and hearing instrument specialists about all ADA-compliant assistive listening systems and other strategies to increase access to theaters, libraries, conferences, government offices, courtrooms, places of worship, and other public and private spaces. Effective hearing access can be life-changing for people with hearing loss to maintain community engagement. We create and provide advocacy materials, ADA information, a speaker's bureau, videos, templates for users and owners/operators, articles, and vendor lists.

### **Supporters**

We, as organizations that support and advocate for users, agree with the principles in this document.

#### **Center for Hearing Access**

Eugene, OR

[Center for Hearing Access Website](#)

#### **Canadian Hard of Hearing Association**

Ontario, Canada

[Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Website](#)

#### **SayWhatClub**

Woodinville, WA

[SayWhatClub Website](#)

#### **Wisconsin Academy of Audiology**

Wisconsin

[Wisconsin Academy of Audiology Website](#)

Other organizations are considering adding their name. If your organization is interested in being added, please contact the Center for Hearing Access.

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