

INFORMATION FROM

Associated Audiologists, Inc. "Hearing Your Best for Life"

HOW TO NAVIGATE

HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS

FOR HEARING AIDS

Health insurance benefits can be tricky to navigate, especially for an older American on Medicare. At Associated Audiologists, we provide a number of options with discounts for patients who are on traditional Medicare and pay out of pocket.

For those who have a Medicare Advantage Plan, be sure to read the fine print of what your plan covers with regard to hearing aids, or better yet, check with our team and ask them what your plan actually covers. They have the knowledge and expertise to sort through the details that you may miss.

For example, many patients are disappointed to learn when they check closer that coverage for "new hearing aids," may only be for a very basic \$500 hearing aid. It may in fact be "new," but for those who are Associated Audiologists patients,

they probably already have existing technology that is better than the covered hearing aids offered.

Or the plans may only cover the cost of a specific hearing aid from an off-brand manufacturer. Again, these can be entry-level hearing aids, and if you don't get them from an in-network provider, you may be out of luck. Sometimes, there are no providers near you that are in-network. Or those that are may be poorly qualified.

In many cases, we've found that for the same cost or a small amount more, the patient can get more advanced

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We are a participating provider for the following commercial insurance programs:

- ▶ AARP Medicare Advantage
- ▶ Aetna (HCA/HMCC plans require special exception letter that must be obtained from Aetna by your PCP)
- ▶ Aetna Medicare Plans
- ▶ Blue Cross/Blue Shield
- ▶ Cerner Healthcare
- ▶ Cigna
- ▶ Cigna Healthspring
- ▶ First Health
- ▶ Freedom Network
- ▶ Humana
- ▶ Humana Medicare Advantage Plans
- ▶ Medica Select
- ▶ Medicare (written order from PCP required prior to service)
- ▶ TriCare
- ▶ UMR
- ▶ United Healthcare
- ▶ United Healthcare Medicare Advantage Plans



Hearing Your Best



Hear Here...

By Tim Steele, Ph.D., President and CEO,
Associated Audiologists, Inc.

One of the certainties of life is change. Sometimes it's change we're excited about and embrace but in other cases, as we all know, sometimes change can be difficult or unwanted.

Like many small businesses across the country, Associated Audiologists, Inc., has not been immune to the many changes and disruptions that have occurred over the past 18 to 20 months. I would like to ask for your continued patience as we navigate new territory such as employee transitions including retirements, maternity leave, deployment, and training new staff. In addition, we are experiencing the ebb and flow of shipments due to supply chain and weather disruptions.

Although there are some things out of our control, we can still manage many other aspects of our business and the important relationships we have with our patients and their families. We remain committed to delivering our best to you. I may not be able to solve some of the larger issues we are facing but I can work to ensure our team is giving their all. I remain convinced that our relationships with one another, with you, and with our many partners will get us through this rough patch and we all will emerge stronger.

On another note, there is positive movement with some of the bi-partisan audiology legislation we have worked on for years. I am hopeful that we may begin to see audiologists and audiology services better recognized under Medicare. We appreciate your advocacy and support, too.

Times of change and transition can be challenging because we don't yet know the outcome but as a person of faith, I am optimistic that all things work together for the greater good. It will take all our efforts to get there. Thank you for trusting us with your hearing and balance care. Make sure to say hello to the new staff who have joined our team the next time you are in one of our clinics.

Clinic Upgrades Ensure Accurate Testing and Diagnosis

To keep pace with technological updates in equipment and to ensure that we provide our patients with state-of-the-art testing and diagnosis, Associated Audiologists recently replaced and upgraded several pieces of essential equipment. The practice also is committed to working with local businesses to source and purchase the many items and services necessary to keep our technology current.

Upgrades include:

- ▶ New otoacoustic emission testing equipment in our Leavenworth, Manhattan and Overland Park Clinics. This technology is used to differentiate sensory (inner ear) from neural (nerve) hearing loss.
- ▶ New audiometers at our Overland Park, Shawnee Mission and Prairie Village Clinics. Audiometers are used to determine the hearing threshold and to identify as well as quantify the degree of hearing loss of a patient.
- ▶ New tympanometers in our Leavenworth, Manhattan and Shawnee Mission Clinics. This diagnostic test assesses the function of the ear drum and middle ear.
- ▶ New computers throughout all clinics. These upgrades were made to update all computers to Windows 10, ensuring software compliance and security.



Clinic Changes

- ▶ We have expanded the space at our Shawnee Mission Clinic, adding two offices to accommodate our growing business office staff.
- ▶ In the Northland, we will be moving vestibular testing equipment to our Leavenworth Clinic. This will accommodate additional space for testing patients with hearing loss. We also will be refreshing the Northland Clinic's front desk area and reconfiguring equipment for maximum efficiency.
- ▶ David Paul, Au.D., our audiologist with the Leavenworth Clinic, will continue seeing patients with hearing loss, but will begin seeing dizzy and balance patients upon his return from Army National Guard duty in January.
- ▶ When Dr. Dorner returns from family leave, vestibular audiology services will be consolidated to our Overland Park Clinic where she will see patients three days a week.



We are on a mission:
To improve lives through comprehensive audiology care.

Navigate Health Insurance Benefits *continued from page 1*

hearing aids from a clinic such as Associated Audiologists, rather than using the so-called benefit that comes with their plan. This allows the patient choice and better quality options.

Before you sign up for a Medicare Advantage plan, check the benefits very carefully as they relate to all your health-related services. For hearing aids, call our clinics and we will check the benefits to see if they would be helpful for you. In some cases, these are mail order devices and in others, they have very few providers enrolled to offer coverage, causing confusion and delays for beneficiaries who want to utilize their benefit.

If you have a Medicare Advantage plan and want to change plans, you can do so during the next open enrollment period.

Associated Audiologists, Inc., advocates for patient choice and quality hearing care. Patients should expect and

Reminder!



COVID-19 continues to circulate in the communities we serve. In compliance with CDC recommendations, and for everyone's protection, we are using a health screening questionnaire and ask that all patients and guests wear a face mask or cloth face covering in our clinics.

Please call your clinic to learn more or to schedule an appointment.

Problems with Bluetooth streaming, apps, TV systems or remotes?

You can call these manufacturer consumer help lines.

Widex: 844-497-8844

ReSound: 888-735-4327, ext. 1

Phonak: 800-679-4871

Or, call your audiologist.



demand choice both in their options for hearing aid technology and in regard to a quality provider and professional they can work with to get their hearing aids.

We participate with many of the Medicare Advantage programs and also have special pricing and benefit match options available if we aren't in network, or if patients prefer or need more choice than their benefit provides.

To help you better understand the "ins and outs" of insurance when it comes to hearing aids, including Medicare Advantage plans, we created an e-book. Download your free Guide to Insurance and Hearing Aids at www.hearingyourbest.com/insurance-e-book/.



To determine the actual hearing aid benefits your plan offers, contact the clinic where we see you.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

When it comes to hearing healthcare, there's been little help in the past as far as financial support for those on Medicare, and current legislation limits access to the services provided by audiologists.

However, there are several pieces of legislation in the works that could one day change that. Here's an update.

Expanding Medicare to Hearing

According to the Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), policy recommendations to expand Medicare to include hearing, vision, and dental coverage have gained increasing support from influential members of Congress over the past few years. President Biden has also identified Medicare modernization as one of the key healthcare priorities for his Administration.

A legislative package to include expanded Medicare hearing services and hearing aids (as well as vision and dental services) is currently being drafted by key congressional committees for potential consideration by the full Congress. This legislation may be considered under expedited budget reconciliation procedures that require a simple majority vote for passage in the U.S. Senate, potentially increasing its chances for approval.

An Audiologist is Needed

The American Academy of Audiology (AAA), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and the ADA are working collaboratively to educate members of Congress and their staff on the critical role of the audiologist to the success of any new hearing benefit under Medicare. The foremost legislative priority for these groups is to ensure

the provisions of the Medicare Audiologist Access and Services Act, or MAASA, (H.R. 1587/S. 1731) are included in any proposal.

AAA, ADA, and ASHA are concerned that simply adding hearing aid coverage of any level—without addressing meaningful access to the diagnosis and treatment services provided by audiologists—will not ensure successful utilization of the benefit by Medicare beneficiaries. The success of any Medicare modernization and expansion effort for hearing healthcare is predicated upon making necessary statutory updates included in MAASA to:

- ▶ Classify audiologists as “practitioners.”
- ▶ Reimburse audiologists for the Medicare-covered services that they are licensed to provide.
- ▶ Eliminate the requirement for beneficiaries to obtain a physician order for coverage when seeking care from an audiologist.

Policymakers are grappling with determining the scope of coverage for all potential expanded Medicare benefits, including hearing benefits, as well as the qualifications for coverage, projected utilization, and the costs of delivering coverage in relation to available resources.



Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids

In the meantime, Congress has delayed implementation of over-the-counter hearing aid sales due to waiting for the Food and Drug Administration to release regulations that would offer a self-fitting solution for people with mild to moderate hearing loss. President Biden has ordered the FDA to produce the rules for over-the-counter hearing aid purchases by mid-November, which means they won't go into effect until sometime in 2022.

While the legislation makes it possible for individuals to purchase less expensive hearing devices (likely in the \$500 per ear range), it still recommends the individual have an audiologist perform a comprehensive hearing evaluation to be certain the hearing loss is appropriately diagnosed and that there are no underlying conditions.

And, if the degree and configuration of hearing loss is outside the range of the over-the-counter devices, the patient will need to discuss treatment options with an audiologist.

Associated Audiologists is advocating on behalf of our patients at the local, state and national levels on these important legislative issues.

Our goal is to be certain our patients have access to the services and devices they need to adequately diagnose and treat their hearing loss.

Schedule an appointment with a doctoral-level audiologist.



Why Do Hearing Aids Whistle, and What Can You Do About It?

Whistling, or hearing aid feedback, is a common occurrence for anyone who wears hearing aids. But why does it happen and what can be done about it?

Hearing aid feedback occurs when sound that was supposed to go into your ear canal leaves your ear and jumps back into the hearing aid microphone. The sound then gets reamplified, causing your hearing aids to whistle.

This feedback can happen in different situations, like when you put your hearing aids on in the morning and take them off in the evening, or when someone hugs you. This is perfectly normal because the hearing aids are reacting to the sound bouncing back from your surroundings.

Hearing aid feedback could also be a sign that something could be wrong with your hearing aids, or they need to be cleaned. In that case it's best to consult an audiologist.

Possible Solutions ...

Many hearing aids come with feedback cancellation, but this doesn't completely safeguard you from feedback. Several things can cause your hearing aids to whistle. Here are the most common reasons for feedback and how to resolve them.

- ▶ **A poor fit or improper insertion:** Just like the rest of your body, your ears change over time. They may even change shape. If they do, the earmolds can become loose and won't seal properly. This means the sound gets away from your ear and back into your hearing aids' microphones, causing feedback. To fix it, make sure they are inserted securely. In some cases, you may need different tips, or you may want to get new earmolds fitted to your ear. Weight gain or weight loss can also affect your ears and the fit of the earmolds.

In general, if your hearing aids are not put properly in your ears or fitting well, it gives the sound a chance to escape and re-enter the hearing aid microphone, so make sure they are sitting correctly in your ear. If you are unsure, see your audiologist.

- ▶ **Too much volume:** It can sometimes be tempting to turn up the volume on your hearing aids. But turning

it up too loud can force the sound to re-enter your hearing aids, which

causes whistling. Turn down your hearing aid volume and avoid the point where the sound gets so loud that it creates feedback.

- ▶ **Broken tubing:** For some hearing aids, the tube that connects to the earmold can harden and shrink. Sometimes the tubing then starts to pull the earmold, so that it doesn't have the right fit anymore. That may cause whistling and could mean you need new tubing.
- ▶ **Too much earwax:** Your hearing aids help you hear because they deliver sounds to your ear canal. But if the ear canal is blocked by too much earwax, the sound can't get through. So, it bounces back to your hearing aids – and they start to whistle. If you've got excessive earwax, it can also block your ear canal and, in addition to causing problems with your hearing aids, it can cause ear pain or discomfort. Get your ears cleaned by your audiologist and, while you're at it, make sure that there are no clogged receivers or vents.
- ▶ **Dislodged microphones:** Hearing aid feedback can also be caused by loose or displaced microphones. Your audiologist can help confirm and resolve this issue.

If you continue to experience problems with hearing aid feedback and can't figure out the reason, ask your audiologist to help you.

Associated Audiologists is a full-service professional audiology practice, servicing and repairing hearing aids from most major manufacturers. To be certain our patients' hearing aids are in good working order, we recommend regular follow-ups. You can pre-schedule these appointments. This type of routine maintenance and regular monitoring of hearing and hearing aids are critical to success, and often, we identify and replace issues such as tubing at these visits.

We always offer Monday through Friday appointments for urgent issues or problems, along with manufacturer repairs when necessary. We also offer a loaner program in the event your hearing aid needs to be sent to the manufacturer for repair, as well as curbside care and after-hours drop boxes at our clinics.

Contact your audiologist to see how we can help.

Tips to Overcome Hearing Challenges During Virtual Gatherings

With the pandemic continuing throughout the nation, important meetings or this year's holiday gatherings may be virtual for some of us, instead of in person.

If that's the case for you and you find hearing during online gatherings a challenge, you might check out some of these tips.

- ▶ **Be sure everyone introduces themselves before the gathering starts.** This can help anyone with hearing loss make sure they can hear everyone and make any necessary adjustments to their equipment.
- ▶ **Try earbuds or headphones.** Many earbuds and headphones have noise-canceling technologies that can make it easier to hear the dialogue, without needing to increase the volume, and reduce the background noise of your setting. You may want to experiment with different styles of headphones to figure out which style helps you hear your best.
- ▶ **Be in sync.** If you wear hearing aids, ask your audiologist if there is a connectivity option that would allow your hearing aids to connect via Bluetooth directly to the device you use for virtual meetings/gatherings. Many assistive technologies and the latest hearing aids do offer these options, bringing the sound directly to your hearing aids, improving the listening experience.
- ▶ **Use a webcam.** Whenever possible, use a virtual platform that



allows webcams to be used, and encourage all participants to use them. Visual cues, such as facial expressions and speech reading help people with and without hearing loss better understand conversations.

- ▶ **Don't shine lighting in the camera.** When using a webcam, it is best to have lighting in front of you rather than behind you. If the light in the room, whether it's natural light from a window or electric, is coming from behind you and shining into the webcam, it can make it hard to see facial expressions and limits visual cues.
- ▶ **Don't cover your mouth or face.** Keep your hands, hair and clothing away from your mouth or face. Speak up and talk clearly so participants can hear and understand.
- ▶ **Use the mute button.** When you aren't speaking, mute your

microphone. That reduces distractions from dogs barking, doorbells ringing and people whispering in the background.

- ▶ **Speak up.** If you have a problem hearing during a gathering, or you're having difficulties with your technology or connection, be sure to let everyone know. That isn't a problem unique to individuals with hearing loss. Connectivity issues and background noises interfere all the time. Others involved in the meeting/gathering will want to be sure you can hear every word, so don't be shy if you're having a problem.

If you wear hearing aids and are having communication challenges during virtual meetings/gatherings (Facetime, Teams, Zoom, etc.), talk with your audiologist. There are a wide range of hearing aids and assistive technologies available that can greatly improve your listening experience.

STAFF NEWS

Welcome Julie Fox

Julie Fox recently joined the administrative team at our Overland Park Clinic. Julie grew up in Shawnee and has lived in the metro area most of her life. Her professional background includes restaurant and bank management, wedding and event planning and various administrative positions, all focusing on providing an exceptional customer service experience.



In her free time, she is a professional balloon twister and face painter and can be seen at Kauffman Stadium and Arrowhead throughout the year. She is blessed to perform on community theater stages in the area and as a worship leader at her church. Her real passion is cat rescue and she volunteers for Kitty Cat Connection, Inc. most Saturdays as an adoption specialist. She has four rescue cats named Izzy, Linus, Schroeder and Archie who have been a joyful distraction this past year during the pandemic.



Dr. Paul



Dr. Dorner



Dr. York

We Have the Best Audiologists!

Recently, several of our audiologists were honored as the best in their communities. **David Paul, Au.D.**, our audiologist dedicated to caring for Leavenworth patients, was honored as the best audiologist in Leavenworth in a *Leavenworth Times* readers' poll.

Danielle Dorner, Au.D., vestibular audiologist, and **Jonathan York, Au.D.**, also were selected as two of the best audiologists in the Northland in the *Courier-Tribune's* annual readership poll. Dr. Dorner cares for patients in Overland Park and Dr. York in our Northland Clinic.

Congratulations to Dr. Dorner

Congratulations to **Danielle Dorner, Au.D.**, our vestibular audiologist, and her husband, on the birth of their first child. Dr. Dorner will be taking 12 weeks off for family leave. We anticipate she'll return to work in January 2022 and will see patients at our Overland Park Clinic.



While Dr. Dorner is away, we have a plan in place to support patients experiencing dizziness and balance problems, so if you are having a problem, please don't hesitate to call.

We hope you will join us in wishing Dr. Dorner all the best!



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www.facebook.com/hearingyourbest

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Hearing Your Best

Don't Forget Curbside Care and Drop Boxes

Don't forget the convenient options we implemented last year for patient and staff safety and convenience.

These include:

- ▶ **Curbside drop-off/pick-up** for hearing aid repairs by scheduled appointment. A staff member can come to your car to pick your hearing aids up and will return them while you wait.



- ▶ **After-hours drop boxes** are located at all our clinics in case you need to leave your hearing aids for service or repairs when the clinic isn't open. Please call to confirm drop-off hours.

We also still offer **Urgent Ear Clinic** repairs and service by appointment to keep your hearing aids functioning.

Please call the clinic where we see you before dropping by so we can determine the best way to help you, and to verify staff availability before coming in.