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INFORMATION FROM  
Associated Audiologists, Inc.  
*"Hearing Your Best for Life"*



# Hearing Your Best

Fall/Winter 2022 • Vol. 22, Issue 2

## The Latest on Over-the-Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids

In August 2022, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued its final ruling creating a new category of over-the-counter hearing aids. The goal of the ruling is to make hearing aids more accessible and affordable. This ruling was set in motion in 2017 when the FDA Reauthorization Act directed the FDA to create the new category, but due to Covid-19 and other complications, it has taken five years for it to become a reality.

### Why introduce a new category of hearing aids?

Only one in four adults who could benefit from hearing aids chose to use them, reportedly due to accessibility and cost. Making hearing aids more affordable is a public health priority, especially as the population ages and the number of people with hearing loss continues to grow. Policymakers believe making hearing aids available over-the-counter can improve access to hearing healthcare for adults.

Though this may be a benefit for many people, there are some important points to be aware of, especially if you already wear hearing aids.

### What are over-the-counter hearing aids?

OTC hearing aids are intended for adults with perceived mild-to-moderate hearing loss. They are an alternative to

the prescription hearing aids that you or a family member may already wear and which require a hearing evaluation. Prescription hearing aids will continue to only be available from hearing healthcare professionals, such as audiologists.

However, adults with perceived mild-to-moderate hearing loss over age 18 can now buy OTC hearing aids directly in stores and online. They are not meant for children or for adults who have severe hearing loss or significant difficulty hearing.

### Who can wear OTC hearing aids?

OTC hearing aids may help those who have a mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Someone with such a loss usually hears fine most of the time, but might have problems in certain challenging listening situations. Often, family and friends will notice an individual's hearing loss first and they might say they have to repeat themselves or that the person is turning the TV volume up too loud. Candidates for OTCs also must be 18 years old or older to wear OTC hearing aids and be capable of fitting the devices themselves.

### Who should not wear OTC hearing aids?

Those with moderate-to-severe hearing loss, under the age of 18, challenged by learning new things or who have complex health conditions are not candidates for OTC hearing aids.

*Continued on page 2*



# HEAR HERE

Tim Steele, Ph.D.,  
President and CEO

It's become clear that hearing healthcare is undergoing great change. This disruption started when many of the Medicare Advantage insurance plans began utilizing third-party organizations in order to offer prescription hearing aids. More recently, we've also seen new regulations implemented surrounding over-the-counter hearing aids and requirements for whom they are appropriate.

Other industries also have experienced disruption, such as the shift from traditional gas-powered engines to hybrid and electric vehicles. Another change has been in the dairy industry where there is a large demand for alternative dairy products, such as almond, oat or rice milk.

These changes sometimes seem slow and gradual, or in other cases almost instant. Associated Audiologists, Inc., has always strived to be on the cutting edge of advancements in our profession, both in technology and knowledge. We have been "at the table" for the early discussions about over-the-counter hearing aids and have had the opportunity to provide feedback as part of the FDA process.

We are now engaged in investigating OTC products that we would be comfortable offering and recommending to our patients, if appropriate. The advancements in prescription hearing aids and accessories also continues to explode. It's an exciting time but also one where we are being measured as we embrace these changes. We appreciate your patience and encourage your questions as we work through this "disruption" together so we can remain relevant and helpful to you and your loved ones. I remain grateful for your loyalty and business.

As I reflect on change, I am saddened to inform our Leavenworth patients that our front desk administrative professional, Leesa Nowlin, passed away on Friday, Sept. 23, 2022. Leesa had been battling a chronic health condition and after a brief hospital stay, passed away unexpectedly. Obviously, this has been devastating to her family, friends, our patients and employees. We dedicate this issue of Hearing Your Best to her. You will be missed Leesa!

 **1,000 Reviews Milestone!** 

Thanks to our loyal patients, Associated Audiologists has reached the 1,000-reviews milestone! Your online Google reviews are important as they help us improve our practices and processes. They also help prospective patients learn more about who we are and how you think we did during your appointment.

After you see one of our audiologists, you should receive an e-mail with a request to leave us a review. In order to do so, you must be logged into your Google account. The reviews are posted on both Google and on our website. You also may go directly to the Reviews page on our website, select the clinic where you were seen, and leave us a review. This also requires you to be logged into your Google account in order for the review to be posted.

In addition, you can leave reviews and comments for us on our Facebook page.

If we could review our patients, the review would be short and sweet, "You're the best!" We take your feedback seriously and follow up whenever necessary.

## Over-the-Counter (OTC) Hearing Aids

*continued from page 1*

### What will OTC hearing aids cost?

Prices will be determined by the manufacturers, but a "best guess" is that OTC hearing aids will run \$800-\$1,000 a pair. In addition, the individual will be responsible for fitting their own hearing aids and servicing them and there is no mandated return policy, so the consumer will need to understand their options before purchasing.

### Who should wear prescription hearing aids?

Individuals who have more severe hearing loss should continue to wear prescription hearing aids that are dispensed and fit by state-licensed, highly trained hearing healthcare professionals, such as audiologists.

These hearing aids are programmed specific to the individual's hearing loss and provide the higher levels of amplification needed to help someone with a more severe hearing loss. Prescription hearing aids typically include more advanced features such as Bluetooth connectivity and directional microphones.

### What do prescription hearing aids cost?

Prescription hearing aids range in private pay cost from \$1,500 to \$5,400 a pair. These costs vary based on the level of technology and features included in the hearing aids. Additionally, a patient who works with an audiologist usually has follow-up appointments and routine check-ups scheduled to monitor how well their hearing aids are functioning and for any changes in their hearing. A return policy is mandated in most states for prescription hearing aids.

### Who can help me pick the right OTC hearing aid?

Many places may offer OTC hearing aids: pharmacies, big-box stores or online providers. Be aware that if you choose to buy OTC hearing aids, you

will make the decision about what you buy, just like any other item on the shelf. You may be able to ask store staff for help; however, these staff members likely do not have specialized training in hearing loss and hearing technology programming. It is important to read all information on the box before buying a device. You may not be able to return the hearing aids once you buy them, and remember, they may cost in the \$800-\$1,000 price range.

Audiologists, on the other hand, have a doctoral-level degree with extensive training in the ear, hearing, and balance disorders. They can evaluate your hearing, explain your hearing loss and help you consider the hearing aid that is best for you. Some audiologists will also provide OTC devices they have vetted and may be able to help you with basic maintenance of your OTC hearing aid for a separate service fee.

### Do I need a hearing evaluation for OTC hearing aids?

Technically, a hearing evaluation is not required in order to purchase OTC hearing aids. However, it is strongly recommended. In addition, all professional organizations, including the Academy of Doctors of Audiology, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and

the American Academy of Audiologists, recommend a hearing evaluation before purchasing either OTC or prescription hearing aids.

A comprehensive hearing evaluation is the best way to determine the type and degree of hearing loss and can help you determine which type of hearing aid is the best option for you, OTC or prescription. Without a hearing evaluation, it would be difficult for you to know how severe your hearing loss is and what your best options are.

If you purchase OTC hearing aids in a retail store or online, be aware that you will be responsible for fitting the hearing aids and making sure they work correctly yourself. If you purchase prescription hearing aids from a hearing healthcare professional, they will fit and program your hearing aids, and will provide you with the necessary service and support.

### Will I be happy wearing OTC hearing aids?

If you currently wear prescription hearing aids that function well for you, you will probably find OTC hearing aids a step down from what you have. In fact, a recent study showed that “premium” prescription hearing aids have the highest user satisfaction. This preference stemmed from factors related to comfort, how the hearing

aids processed background noise and how well the study participants could hear speech in a group setting. Because of the lower cost of the technology to develop these features, self-fit OTC hearing aid satisfaction is yet to be fully studied.

### Why should I see an audiologist, even if I want to buy OTC hearing aids?

An audiologist is the best person to assess auditory function, diagnose hearing loss and provide medical referral when necessary. They can help you understand why you are experiencing difficulty and determine the type of device that would best suit your needs, which may indicate an OTC device. They can monitor your hearing over time to see if it remains stable or worsens. Regular check-ups are important as further decline in hearing may indicate the need for a stronger prescriptive setting. They can also assess if your chosen hearing aid (OTC or prescription) is providing enough amplification to meet your hearing needs, or whether you and your audiologist should discuss other options. The common goal between you as the patient and the audiologist as the provider is to help you create a plan and a path toward improved hearing.

There will be a great deal to learn in the first 6 to 12 months regarding the many OTC options that will likely be available. Associated Audiologists expects more information for consumers in early 2023 after continued due diligence and completion of pilot studies.

**Your audiologist can discuss the pros and cons of OTC hearing aids with you, and whether you may be a candidate for them. Call the clinic where we see you to schedule an appointment to learn more.**

#### References

*Adapted from materials compiled by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the Academy of Doctors of Audiology, July 2022.*

COMPARISON OF OTC AND PRESCRIPTION HEARING AIDS	
OTC Hearing Aids	Prescription Hearing Aids
▶ Self-fit	▶ Fit by an audiologist
▶ Price: \$800-\$1,000 a pair or less	▶ Price: \$1,500-\$5,400 a pair
▶ Age: 18+	▶ All ages, including children
▶ Self-diagnosed	▶ Diagnosed by an audiologist
▶ Only for: perceived mild-to-moderate loss	▶ Best for: all types and degrees
▶ Design: one size fits most	▶ Design: custom with discreet options
▶ Return policy: none mandated by FDA	▶ Return policy: mandated in most states
▶ Selection process: self	▶ Selection process: recommendation from audiologist or hearing instrument specialist



# Maintaining Good Balance is Complicated

Balance disorders can be caused by certain health conditions, medications, or a problem in the inner ear or the brain. A balance disorder can make it difficult to do everything from getting out of bed in the morning to walking across a gravel driveway.

According to the American Hearing Research Foundation, our sense of balance starts with critical information being fed to the brain for processing. Three key body systems are responsible for this:

- ▶ Visual (eyes) – Our eyes provide information about our surroundings and read things like the distance and depth between our body, for example, and the external physical environment that lies ahead.
- ▶ Somatosensory (sensory receptors found throughout the body) – The somatosensory system is the network of neural structures in the brain and body that produce the perception of touch, as well as temperature, body position (proprioception), and pain. The somatosensory system also helps with balance by keeping track of the orientation of the body and its limbs. This enables people to know instinctively where to place their arms, legs, hands, and feet while walking, running, driving, eating, and engaging in other everyday activities—without needing to consciously think about it.
- ▶ Vestibular (inner ear) – Most balance disorders are linked to the vestibular system, which is contained within the labyrinth of the inner ear. The semi-circular canals and the otolith organs (the utricle and saccule) are the specific organs of the inner ear that must function properly for people to be able to maintain their sense of balance.

When any one of these systems isn't working correctly and in coordination with the others, it can impact a person's ability to balance, often causing symptoms such as dizziness, vertigo, vision disturbances, nausea, fatigue and difficulty concentrating.

Determining the source of the problem can sometimes be complicated, but often starts with evaluation of the inner ear and the vestibular system.



**Danielle Dorner, Au.D.**, is a doctoral-level audiologist with Associated Audiologists who specializes in vestibular disorders. She utilizes state-of-the-art equipment and a number of inner ear balance tests to diagnose dizziness and balance problems.

Dr. Dorner uses the results of this testing to either treat the condition, such as with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), or if she cannot treat the patient, she refers them to the appropriate medical specialist for further evaluation and treatment.

In the case of BPPV, the most common cause of dizziness and balance problems, 95% of patients can be successfully treated.

**So, if you are experiencing dizziness and balance problems, don't continue to suffer. Schedule an appointment with Dr. Dorner at 816-642-2626.**



## Legislative Update

### No Surprises Act Implemented

No one likes surprises, especially when it comes to healthcare bills. That's why the No Surprises Act, a federal law, was passed. The act protects consumers from most instances of "surprise" balance medical billing. The first part of the act covers balance billing for emergency or out-of-network care at hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers.

The second part of the act requires all state-licensed healthcare providers and facilities to provide a written Good Faith Estimate of expected charges for items and services provided to individuals who are out-of-network or uninsured/self-pay.

At Associated Audiologists, we have always believed it is important to inform patients of the costs associated with services and products. We are working to fully understand the requirements of the new law and implement appropriate protocols not only to be compliant, but to keep our patients well-informed about the expenses they can expect.

We will provide more information on this new legislation and our protocols as they become available. Thank you for your patience, as this will require gathering some additional information from you at scheduling and check-out.

# Dr. Saylor Joins Manhattan Clinic

**Mandie Saylor, Au.D.,** Audiologist, is the newest member of the Associated Audiologist team. Dr. Saylor replaces Karly White, Au.D., who relocated to the Wichita, Kansas area in September to be closer to family.

Dr. Saylor earned her Doctorate of Audiology degree from Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, and her Bachelor of Science in communication disorders from Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. She performed her fourth-year residency with East Coast Audiology & Fyzical Therapy, Watertown, New York. While at Ohio University, she traveled to Botswana, Africa, performing hearing screenings as a member of the university's Botswana Rehabilitative Services Team.

Dr. Saylor previously worked as a captioner, providing captions via Zoom meetings and Google documents for students who are hard of hearing.

Originally from Medina, Ohio, Dr. Saylor became interested in audiology while completing her undergraduate degree in communication disorders. Her special expertise is in diagnostic hearing testing and hearing technology

and she enjoys interacting with patients, building long-term relationships with them.

"What I love about being an audiologist is seeing the outcome," Dr. Saylor said. "It's very rewarding to see how much patients progress from the time they are diagnosed with hearing loss to when they are fit with hearing aids. My goal is to provide our Manhattan patients with the quality care they have come to expect and to help them feel comfortable coming to me."

Dr. Saylor and her husband, Jeff, live just outside Manhattan with their four children, 5-year-old triplets Nolan, Lucca and Maggie, and their newborn daughter, Brynlee. Jeff is in the U.S. Army and recently relocated from Fort Drum in New York.

As an active young family, the Saylor's are enjoying exploring Manhattan's parks and trails. Dr. Saylor also is an avid Cleveland Browns fan who loves watching sports and enjoys crocheting.



## CLINIC CORNER



### Pairing Your Phone and Other Devices to Your Hearing Aids

We commonly hear from patients who are experiencing problems with Bluetooth streaming to their hearing aids, apps, TV systems or remotes.

When in the clinic, we often help pair your phone to your new hearing aids if your hearing aids are Bluetooth-compatible and we try to demonstrate your hearing aid's app, if it has one. But TV systems and remotes must be paired when you get home, and sometimes new system downloads from your phone's manufacturer or from the hearing aid manufacturer can require you to reconnect your hearing aids and phone.

If you are experiencing problems with pairing your hearing aids to your phone or other devices, you can call these manufacturer consumer help lines.

**Widex:** 844-497-8844

**ReSound:** 888-735-4327, ext. 1

**Phonak:** 800-679-4871

**Oticon:** 855-400-9766

**Signia:** 800-350-6093

**Starkey:** 800-721-3573

**Or, if you need additional or different assistance, call the clinic nearest you.**

**To schedule an appointment with Dr. Saylor, contact our Manhattan Clinic at 785-539-7361.**

#### **Congratulations to Tim Steele, Ph.D., CEO and President,**

who received the Craig W. Johnson Audiology Advocate Award at the Academy of Doctors of Audiology national convention Friday, Oct. 21. The award is presented annually to an individual

who has made significant contributions to the profession of audiology through federal and/or state advocacy. Dr. Steele was accompanied at the presentation by Lisa Battani, Au.D., left, and Stacey Baldwin, Au.D., right.



## Congratulations!



Congratulations to **Jonathan York, Au.D.**, our audiologist in our Northland Clinic. Dr. York was voted Best Audiologist in the Northland by Courier-Tribune readers in their annual competition. Dr. York joined Associated Audiologists following completion of his Doctorate of Audiology degree from Wichita State

University, Wichita, Kansas. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, Kansas. Dr. York also performed his externship with Associated Audiologists. Previously, he had worked as a paramedic/firefighter in Junction City, Kansas.

## Welcome New Staff

► **Shannon Ocsody** recently joined our Lawrence Clinic as an administrative assistant. Shannon and her family have lived in Lawrence for more than 25 years. She has been married for 27 years and has two children, an 18-year-old son and a 16-year-old daughter. She has a strong faith and through that, enjoys helping others.



► **Ally Martin** began working with Associated Audiologists in July as an audiology assistant. Ally earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Kansas in 2022. She majored in speech-language pathology and minored in applied behavioral science and American sign language. She volunteers for Hear2help, a non-profit organization that helps children afford hearing aids. In her spare time, she enjoys reading and going on walks with her golden doodle.



► **Abby Kelly** joined the Associated Audiologists team this summer as a fourth-year extern, and is in the process of completing her final year of doctoral work. She is a student at Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, where she is enrolled in the doctoral audiology program. She earned her bachelor's degree in her home state of Illinois, studying at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. When not working at Associated Audiologists, Abby is busy exploring all that Kansas City has to offer.



► **Andrew Morris** also is a fourth-year extern who came on board this summer. Andrew will earn his Doctorate in Audiology from the University of Maryland. He relocated to Kansas City from Maryland, and is enjoying discovering Kansas City area restaurants, parks and lakes with his wife and daughter. Both externs are based in Overland Park and will begin to rotate throughout the practice's clinics in 2023, learning from the Associated Audiologists team. Both are scheduled to graduate with their doctoral degrees in May 2023.



## Associated Audiologists Team Attends KSHA



Our entire team of audiologists represented the practice at this fall's Kansas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (KSHA) meeting. The practice sponsored a workshop on wax removal. The professional association is an opportunity for the audiologists to connect with their peers from across the state and participate in educational offerings that help them stay current on best practices. It is also a tradition that Associated Audiologists provides stipends to audiology students selected to present their research at KSHA. This year's award winners were **Jessica Herlinger** and **Caley Danielle**. Congratulations!

## Deepest Condolences



It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of **Leesa Nowlin** at our Leavenworth Clinic. Leesa was our beloved front desk administrative professional. Leesa started with our practice in November 2016 and has always been a highly valued member of our team. Leesa had been dealing with a chronic health condition and passed away unexpectedly on Friday, Sept. 23, after a short stay in the hospital. We extend our sincere condolences to her entire family and everyone who loved her. We will miss her calm demeanor, her acquired Oklahoma accent, her sense of humor and most of all her warmth.

# Changes to Our Outreach Clinics

## Manhattan

Due to recent staff changes and the increasing cost of doing business, our audiology outreach services in the Manhattan area are changing. We will continue to see patients at Meadowlark in Manhattan, and Nemaha Valley in Seneca. However, the Nemaha Valley outreach schedule is now on the third Thursday of each month and is covered by David Paul, Au.D., and Katelyn Waldeier, Au.D., who are from our Lawrence and Leavenworth Clinics.

Our audiology outreach services in Council Grove, Kansas, and Washington, Kansas, were discontinued in August 2022. Patients who were seen at these two outreach clinics now have the option of traveling to our Manhattan Clinic or to Seneca at Nemaha Valley.

**Please feel free to give us a call at 785-539-7361 with questions. Kelly is always glad to hear from you.**

## Tallgrass Creek

The management of Tallgrass Creek is pursuing different specialty practice relationships and notified Associated Audiologists recently that we will no longer be able to see our patients on site.

Associated Audiologists has been providing outreach services to the Tallgrass community for more than a decade. We know we have many loyal patients there who will want to continue seeing their audiologist, Stacey Baldwin, Au.D., and she welcomes them to do so in our Overland Park clinic which is just 2 miles from the Tallgrass Creek community. Tallgrass Creek transportation is available to provide transportation to and from the clinic.

In addition, Associated Audiologists continues to be an in-network provider for the Erickson Advantage (UHC) insurance plan, as well as most other plans, and as such can continue to provide in-network care for Tallgrass Creek residents.

Thank you for your business and loyalty.

**To schedule an appointment with Dr. Baldwin or another member of our team, call 913-498-2827, or visit us online at [hearingyourbest.com](http://hearingyourbest.com).**

# Changes at Our Leavenworth Clinic

## Bailey Moderson,

**Au.D.**, one of the audiologists in our Leavenworth Clinic, has recently announced that she and her husband are expecting their first child. In order to spend more time with family, she will be leaving the practice at the end of December.



David Paul, Au.D., who has been with our Leavenworth Clinic for more than seven years, will continue to see patients there and will be joined by Katelyn Waldeier, Au.D.

Dr. Waldeier earned her Doctorate of Audiology degree from the University of Kansas-Medical Center and her undergraduate degree from Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas. She performed her clinical externship with Associated Audiologists. Her expertise is in diagnostic hearing testing and hearing technology.

Please join us in wishing Dr. Moderson all the best and welcoming Dr. Waldeier to Leavenworth!

**Dr. Paul and Dr. Waldeier also see patients at our new Lawrence Clinic. To schedule an appointment with one of them at our Leavenworth Clinic, call 913-682-1870.**



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

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## Red Scarf Project

Since 2015, our patients and staff have contributed nearly 400 hand-made red scarves to the Red Scarf Project, a multi-faceted charity program that benefits these youth. The organization accepts donations of hand-knitted or crocheted red scarves, which are given to the college-age students on Valentine's Day each year.

If you'd like to help out, scarves are due this year by Dec. 1, 2022, and can be dropped off at any of our eight clinics. If you miss the Dec. 1 deadline, don't worry. We'll continue to collect scarves throughout the year and will include yours with our next donation.

Associated Audiologists also assists with this project by covering the cost of shipping for the scarves. If you would like to help, but do not knit or crochet, you can send notes of encouragement that can be included with the scarves.



**For more information on the Red Scarf Project, call 913-498-2827.**

**You also can find project details and patterns at:**

**<https://www.fc2success.org/programsmentoring-and-support/red-scarf-project/>.**