

Assistive Listening Advocacy Toolkit

Assistive Listening



Don't miss a single sound.

Hearing Loss – A Growing Challenge

Over 40 million Americans have a measureable degree of hearing loss. That's around 17% of all Americans. Compared with some of the other disabilities that Americans have, like the 1.4% with physical disabilities and the 0.14% with visual disabilities, this number is pretty staggering. The number of Americans dealing with hearing loss is on the rise due to aging and lifestyle. Noise induced hearing loss will happen to most of us as we age and it is currently on the rise in our children due to changes in their lifestyles, as well.

Are you one of the 17% that experiences difficulty hearing or understanding speech?

- in meetings?
- in places of worship?
- in theaters or movies?
- in public places such as airports or municipal buildings?

In these venues and public spaces, an assistive listening device (ALD's) can help and the good news is they are required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All you need to do is simply ask for the device.

Many venues do an excellent job of letting their visitors know that people with hearing loss are welcome and want you to use the devices so that you can have a great experience. Other venues may not be as informed about what their legal requirements are to provide accommodation for assistive listening.

This toolkit is designed to provide you with:

- Information you need to know about the ADA.
- How you can build awareness to help those that have hearing loss when they want to enjoy an experience in a venue.
- What you can do to educate others on the prevention of hearing loss.

What You Need To Know

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Signed into law in 1990, the ADA prohibits discrimination by requiring accessibility to a variety of public and private buildings. The ADA has requirements for new construction, alterations, or renovations to buildings and facilities and for improving access to existing facilities of private companies providing goods or services to the public. Essentially, owners of public facilities must remove barriers and provide people with disabilities with accommodation equal to, or similar to, that available to the general public. This includes providing **assistive listening devices** (ALDs) for people with hearing loss.

What is an Assistive Listening Device (ALD)?

Assistive listening devices expand the functionality of hearing aids and cochlear implants by helping to separate the sounds you want to hear from background noise in venues and public spaces and by enabling you to hear the speaker or audio source when you're in such a venue. When an individual with hearing loss is in a venue, they are often more than a few feet away from the sound source and in a noisy environment making it difficult to hear.

ALD's can help greatly when a person with hearing loss leaves their home and enters a venue and the good news is, the venue is required to offer these at no charge. The speaker talks into a microphone and the speech is sent straight to the ear of the individual with hearing loss, thus avoiding the degrading effects of noise and distance on speech intelligibility.

It's really that simple. An assistive listening device consists of a microphone to collect sound, a transmitter to send the signal across a distance, a receiver to intercept the signal, and any one of several different listening attachments to send the sound from the receiver to the user's ear, hearing aid, or cochlear implant blocking out all indirect and background noise. This helps greatly with intelligibility of speech and provides an individual volume control. Some devices work with hearing aids/cochlear implants and some work independently without needing a hearing aid. The recent ADA changes which took full effect as of March 15, 2012 states **Twenty-five percent (25%) minimum of receivers provided, but no fewer than two, shall be hearing-aid compatible.**

The Hearing Aid Compatible Assistive Listening Device (ALD) means "telecoil or T-coil compatible." A telecoil (or t-coil) is a small, inexpensive copper coil in most hearing aids (80% and growing) and is built into cochlear implant processors.

[What makes the ALD hearing aid compatible?](#)

A neck loop is an insulated loop of wire worn around the neck that transmits the information to the hearing aid telecoil through a magnetic field. Many people enjoy using neck loops because they can listen with both ears without wearing headphones while still enjoying the full benefit of their hearing aid amplification settings. There is an additional benefit of telecoils. If the venue is using a hearing loop as the technology for the venue, the only receiver you will need is your telecoil in your hearing aid or cochlear implant. Using a telecoil and hearing loop together is seamless, unobtrusive, and wireless. You don't have to obtain extra equipment.

If you don't use hearing aids or cochlear implants, you can use ALDs with headphones or earbuds. Even if you use hearing aids you may be able to use headphones or earbuds. However, you may prefer to take the hearing aids out when using headphones because of potential feedback problems.

[What types of venues must meet the ADA requirements?](#)

Venues or assembly areas must meet the ADA requirements for assistive listening devices. Assembly areas include, but are not limited to: classrooms, lecture halls, courtrooms, public meeting rooms, legislative chambers, motion picture houses, auditoria, theatres, playhouses, dinner theatres, concert halls, performing arts centers, amphitheatres, arenas, stadiums, grandstands, and convention centers.

Each assembly area required to provide assistive listening will provide **signs** informing patrons of the availability of the assistive listening system. These signs will comply with the *International Symbol of Access for Hearing Loss*.

[In Venues, Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants Aren't Enough](#)

Hearing aids and cochlear implants can work wonders to improve speech understanding in quiet environments and during one-on-one conversations, but there are some situations, like hearing speaker who is more than a few feet away, hearing in noisy backgrounds, and hearing in poor acoustical environments that are still quite

problematic for people with hearing disabilities. These situations typically happen in different types of venues where hearing aids and cochlear implants simply aren't enough.

Our mission is to provide assistive listening tools and resources, as well as enable advocacy for broader assistive listening device (ALD) adoption and awareness. Our main focus for those with hearing loss is on commercial awareness. In other words, our focus is on how an individual with hearing loss is affected when they are outside of their homes and in more public spaces. This topic is not discussed enough and is often misunderstood. There are great solutions and technologies available for someone with hearing loss that venues can provide to make a better and more enjoyable experience for their patrons, while meeting the ADA requirements.

[How Do I Know If A Venue Offers Assistive Listening?](#)

- Look for the assistive listening signs
- Visit the www.ALDLocator.com site, which lists many different venues that offer assistive listening devices
- Simply ask the box office attendants. Assistive listening devices are typically offered at the box office or at guest services. When you receive a device, a venue may request a driver's license or credit card to ensure that the device is returned.
 - If you've asked for an assistive listening device and the venue does not provide one, you have a few options:
 - Ask to speak to the manager or person in charge. Inform them of their legal obligation and requirements to provide assistive listening devices.
 - Inform them about ADA compliance.
 - Leave them an assistive listening "Leave Behind Card."
 - Follow up by writing a letter to the venue asking them to consider putting in an assistive listening system.
 - Write a letter to the editor of a local newspaper.
 - Report the venue to the [Department of Justice \(DOJ\)](#).
 - If the venue does offer assistive listening, consider taking the time to list the venue and which type of technology is offered to help others who have hearing loss on the [ALD Locator](#), so that they can enjoy the venue, as well.

[How Do I Become An Advocate for Assistive Listening and Create Change For Those With Hearing Loss?](#)

- Ask for assistive listening whenever you visit a venue. This action alone will build a tremendous amount of awareness.
- Write your favorite venues or venues in your community a letter to request that they provide assistive listening devices in the future.
- Inform your local community about the need for assistive listening devices by:
 - Sending a letter to your local newspaper editor.
 - Write a Public Service Announcement.
 - Develop a steering committee within your local community.
 - Send videos to venues and people in the community that help educate on why assistive listening devices help those with hearing loss.

- o Start writing blogs and articles on assistive listening devices and share them with venues and people in your community.

Fourteen Ways To Promote Hearing Loss Awareness

The great thing about promoting hearing loss awareness is that there are many options. Depending on your resources, you can do something simple or elaborate. Below you will find many different options to help you promote hearing loss awareness in your community. Browse through them and see which ones work best for you. Together, we can make a difference!

1. Each year, those with hearing loss celebrate the **Month of May as Hearing Loss Awareness Month**. This is a great time to kick-off your advocacy efforts. Consider preparing and planning for the month by getting others involved. It's a good idea to start your plans as early as December, to ensure that you'll have a series of successful events in May. Here are some ideas for the types of events you might hold for Hearing Loss Awareness Month.
 - Consider getting an official Proclamation signed by your Governor, City Mayor, County Mayor, etc. declaring May as **Hearing Loss Awareness Month**. Please note: this should be done two to three months in advance as local governments need to plan and schedule ahead of time. The request to do this should be sent to:

Director of Correspondence and Declarations
Coordinator or the Communications Director

They may issue a Hearing Loss Awareness Proclamation, which could then lead to other opportunities. You can use this proclamation as a photo opportunity and invite others to join you. Consider inviting members of your local HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America) Chapter, as well as others with hearing loss. You can also use the photo and proclamation to create a press release to create more awareness about hearing loss.

- Host an event for Hearing Loss Awareness Month.
 - o This event could be a support group for families who have family members with hearing loss. During the support group, present information about assistive listening technology that is offered in venues, which will help everyone have better, more enjoyable experiences. Educate family members on how to know if a venue has assistive listening and what to do if they're unsure, if the venue doesn't.
 - o Conduct a hearing loss awareness expo where you invite providers of hearing loss technology, tools, and resources to exhibit their products. Also invite local speech and hearing centers that can inform the community of all the local services available. There are often many services available to individuals with hearing loss at no charge.
 - o Conduct a seminar for a school board or PTA meetings and speak on how to educate parents on providing ear protection for their children. Start discussions on the dangerous decibel levels at which kids are listening to their music, etc. Request volunteers to write grants for schools or venues to receive assistive listening devices leveraging the many resources for grant monies.

- o Conduct a class on hearing loss to a grade school science class. Use Jolene as a prop and educational tool. [Download a FREE copy of the Jolene cookbook!](#)
- 2. Use Hearing Loss Awareness Logos to promote awareness. Use them in your ads, on your website, on business cards, or to create your own stationery.
- 3. Reach out to your local HLAA Chapter to see if they're interested in supporting your activities. The Hearing Loss Association of America is a national, non-profit organization for the hearing loss community.
- 4. Stage and promote a musical performance. Celebrate hearing loss awareness with a concert in your community. Distributing assistive listening devices or information on ALDs and setting up a demonstration and/or table will give you an opportunity to tell the hearing loss awareness story. You can even try to get your local news to cover the event, as well.
- 5. Hearing Loss Advocacy Jeopardy. Try creating a fun game in which you quiz contestants about hearing loss. You can stage the game after making a presentation at one of your other events.
- 6. Pick a charity to support your hearing loss advocacy. This is often a perfect opportunity to launch a charitable giving program. There are many charities that offer hearing aids for children when a hearing aid isn't financially possible. There are numerous charities that benefit hearing loss and hearing loss awareness. Pick one and make a donation of your time and resources.
- 7. Contact your Alma Mater to see if they'd be interested in a discussion about expanding awareness of hearing loss and which venues on campus offer assistive listening. You may also want to contact the business school at your Alma Mater specifically and explain why the ADA section for businesses is so important, so that they are aware which types of businesses and venues are required by law to meet the requirements for assistive listening devices.
- 8. If you're a member of your local Chamber of Commerce, consider speaking at your local business meeting group or equivalent thereof. Contact your business organization early in the year to get on its schedule in time for your event to start a discussion about expanding awareness of hearing loss and why this is important in the business community.
- 9. Conduct a tour of a venue that has assistive listening. Nothing tells a story of hearing loss and assistive listening better than experiencing it firsthand. Give a behind-the-scenes tour to your local media, government officials, school group, or business or community organization to show them the assistive listening technology and explain why it's so important.
- 10. Adopt a local school. If you're interested in a long-term commitment to your local schools, consider a school-business partnership. Bringing together students with hearing loss and experts is a great way to introduce them to hearing loss advocacy. This type of partnership can take many forms.
- 11. Provide a scholarship. Scholarships are a great way to create good will, encourage interest in hearing loss advocacy, and perhaps gain publicity.
- 12. Organize an informational exhibit about assistive listening by placing an advertisement to solicit old assisted listening equipment in your local paper, on Craigslist, or coffee shops. You can invite other businesses, clients, and the local media to contribute items for your exhibit. Then partner with a teacher at a local school, a local museum, library, or business to create a dynamic display to create awareness of assistive listening technology. You can even create your own Jolene to make your exhibit more interactive. This exhibit can also become the basis for receptions, presentations, and other public events. [Download a FREE copy of the Jolene cookbook!](#)

13. Take advantage of your hearing loss awareness event to offer a “Hearing Loss Best Practices” seminar to executives, professors, and students on campuses or at your office.
14. Use Social Media to create awareness about hearing loss. There are many social media sites that can help you promote hearing loss awareness and events. Sites like, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter offer a variety of features to promote your event(s). You could also consider starting your own blog about hearing loss, about events, or your organization.

Assistive listening devices can make a world of difference to someone who is hard of hearing. Being an advocate and a supporter of the HoH community by promoting awareness throughout your communities and to venues within those communities really does improve the lives of many people. Your efforts are contributing to helping others have more positive experiences and continue doing what they love doing.

Sample Letter To Have Assistive Listening Devices Installed

Below you will find a sample letter written to a fictional, independent movie theater about assistive listening devices.

Dear [Independent Movie Theater],

As a person with hearing loss, I am writing in regards to a recent, unpleasant experience I had at your facility that I wanted to make you aware of. I visited your theater last Wednesday to see a film. I am an avid viewer of independent films and see them as often as I am able. Unfortunately, your facility did not offer any assistive listening devices. I did not enjoy my movie and until you have rectified this situation I will not be returning to your theater.

It is both unwise and illegal for your facility to not provide assistive listening devices to your patrons. As one of many in this community with hearing loss, I certainly hope that you will consider providing them in the future. Not only will you miss out on my business, but many others as well.

Sincerely,

Sam Jones

Sample Letter To An Editor about Assistive Listening Devices

Below you will find a sample letter championing a fictional theatre for installing a hearing loop,, which you can repurpose for your own use in your own community.

Congratulations to the Dickenson Theater. This facility looks poised to become a premier venue for those with Hearing Loss.

The Dickenson Theater wants to make their facility optimally accessible to the growing number in the community with hearing loss. The theatre is having a hearing loop installed, which communicates sound directly to t-coil equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants. The hearing loop allows individuals with hearing loss to enjoy performances without having to seek out and wear special equipment.

As advocates for those with hearing loss, the Dickenson Theatre had the hearing loop installed to make their patrons with hearing loss feel more welcome in their facility. They also wanted to use the technology to raise awareness about hearing loss and what venues could do to be more supportive in their communities.

The Dickenson Theater can be assured that they'll be very glad they had the hearing loop installed. Although it may have been a more costly option up front, it will certainly pay off in the end as they will see more members of the community with hearing loss coming to their theatre to enjoy performances.

On behalf of many people with hearing loss in this community, I want to thank the Dickenson Theater for having a hearing loop installed.

Jane Smith

Sample PSA

General Event Information

Event Title:

Event Category:

Event Start Date:

Event Start Time:

Enter a note about the event time ("arrive early," "registration closes at 2 p.m.")

Description of your event long version:

Description of your event short version:

Who is your audience:

Event Image:

Artist/Group:

Artist/Group Web Address:

Artist/Group Email Address:

Venue Information

Venue Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Country:

Map:

Telephone:

Web Address:

Email Address:

Presenting Organization Information

Name:

Telephone:

Web Address:

Email Address:

Designation: N/A for profit not-for-profit

Sample Steering Committee Outline

When forming an Assistive Listening Advocacy Steering Committee, you will want to map out the following things:

Table of Contents: This is a list of everything included in your Steering Committee Outline.

Background: This section defines the background of the committee and outlines the goals the committee hopes to reach. For example, your committee may have the goal of raising awareness about hearing loop technology. You could outline that goal in this section.

Objectives: Here you will list all of the specific objectives of your Steering Committee.

Role: In this section, you will highlight the role of your Steering Committee.

Strategies: This section allows you to list how your Steering Committee will achieve its goals.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Chair: Here you will define the responsibilities of your Steering Committee's Chairperson. Typically, these responsibilities include: setting agendas for each meeting, making the purpose of each meeting clear to all members of the committee, keeps the meeting on topic and on time, ends each meeting with a summary and assignments, follows-up with absent members, and finds replacements for members who discontinue participation. You may want to add other responsibilities depending on your specific needs.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Members: This is where you will define the responsibilities of Steering Committee Members. You may want to require certain amounts of participation and attendance. You may also want to consider a certain amount of passion and devotion to the Steering Committee's cause.

By Law Objectives: The By Law Objectives will more than likely include the following sub-sections:

- Membership
- Number of Members on the Steering Committee & Decision Making
- Frequency of Meetings
- Agenda, Minutes, and Decision Papers

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

(Your name here)

(Your telephone number here—include a cell phone # or a number to a voicemail you check regularly and your email address; also include a number where you can be reached on the day of your event.)

(Your company/venue/organization's web address here)

HEADLINE ABOUT YOUR EVENT

(Your City, State) (Date of Release) – (Name of your company/venue) will host a (type of event) on (include specific time and date of event) to promote advocacy for assistive listening and the Hard of Hearing Community.

(Describe Your Event—include a brief two to three paragraph description of your event. It's a good idea to answer the following questions: who, when, what, where, and why. Successful press releases also often include a quotation from someone involved in the event, so try to incorporate one in your press release, if possible. It's a good rule of thumb to keep your press release to one page.)

Paragraph One: Talk about the details of your event

Paragraph Two: Talk about why you're hosting your event and try to incorporate a quotation about it.

Paragraph three: Sum things up.

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(Insert a general statement about your company/venue at the end of your press release.)