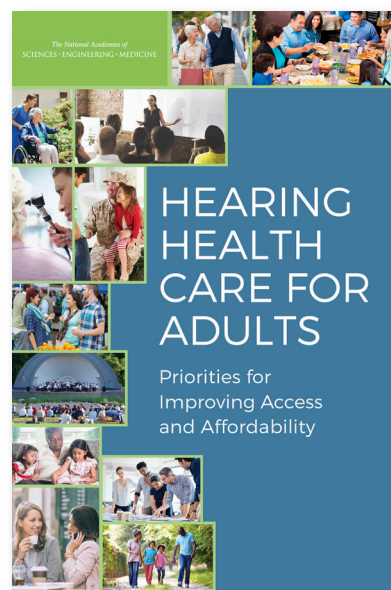


Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability

AN ACTION GUIDE FOR HEARING HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

The services provided by hearing health care professionals can play a vital role in helping people who have hearing loss by assessing their communication needs, identifying and providing treatment options, educating individuals and their families as they make decisions about services and technologies, providing support, and raising awareness about additional resources available in their communities and online.

Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability, a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, offers recommendations to hearing health care professionals focused on improving the accessibility, affordability, and quality of hearing health care services.



Study Sponsors

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Department of Defense

Department of Veterans Affairs

Food and Drug Administration

Hearing Loss Association of America

National Institute on Aging

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

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Opportunities to inform and educate patients

Understanding the attitudes, concerns, communication needs, and priorities of each individual with hearing loss is key to providing effective hearing health care services. Given the ever-evolving technology options and the range of available services (e.g., functional communication assessments, auditory rehabilitation), hearing health care professionals have opportunities to:

Ensure that health literacy is a priority in patient communications

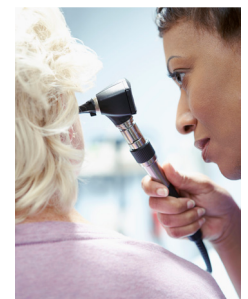
Given the broad range of health literacy levels of people in the United States, hearing health care professionals have opportunities to be aware of health literacy needs and provide information to patients that is clear, understandable, and takes health literacy into account.

Highlight and explain the range of options in technologies and services

Hearing health care professionals have opportunities to help raise consumer awareness of the full range of services, technologies (including hearing aids and hearing assistive technologies) and connections to other communications systems that may be appropriate for their individual needs.

Inform patients about community resources

Disseminating information about patient rights and about community resources can be of great benefit to individuals living with hearing loss. For example, vocational rehabilitation services can assist qualified individuals with hearing loss by providing hearing aids and hearing health care services if needed in order to obtain employment. There are also many online resources to help individuals and their families learn more about hearing loss.



Opportunities to help patients become more informed consumers

High-quality health care—regardless of the type of care, the geographic location where it is delivered, or the patient population receiving the care—must be safe, effective, patient-centered, timely, efficient, and equitable.

Ensure access to hearing health care records and provide information about portability

Empowering patients in their use of hearing health care includes improving awareness of how they can access their records. The portability and accessibility of an individual's own medical records is a legal right guaranteed under the Privacy Rule of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Hearing health care professionals have opportunities to inform their patients that the audiogram as well as other hearing-related health records are part of an individual's designated record set, and access should be provided to health records held by HIPAA-covered hearing health care professionals.

Hearing health care professionals also have the opportunity to provide consumers with information about the portability of hearing aid programming—prior to purchasing hearing aids—so that they are able to make more informed purchasing decisions. Due to the nature of some hearing aids being designed such that they can only be programmed by certain hearing health care professionals, consumers need to understand the implications this will have on having their hearing aids programmed, adjusted, and serviced at later dates.

Inform patient decision making through itemized billing

Hearing health care professionals have opportunities to provide itemized billing for services and technologies. Separating out the price of the technologies from the price of associated professional services allows consumers to distinguish among the many components of hearing health care services, and it can promote informed decision making by allowing them to make informed comparisons and choose the care that is appropriate and affordable for their needs. Itemized and transparent lists of prices for technologies and professional services may help consumers understand all of the facets of services that may be helpful in addressing their hearing loss, including assessing their communication abilities and the need for intervention, selecting and fitting of hearing aids or other technologies as needed, and providing auditory rehabilitation services to enhance communication, as well as ongoing care and support.

Although increasing transparency in pricing can help consumers make more informed decisions, some consumers and their family members still might not know exactly what services they need and will require additional help. Consumer education that accounts for an individual's health literacy level will be needed to complement transparent pricing and itemized billing.

Key messages and recommended actions

The report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommends key institutional, technological, and regulatory changes that would enable consumers to find and fully use the appropriate, affordable, and high-quality services, technologies, and support they need. A broad overview of the recommendations and findings is provided below.

Findings

- Hearing is vital to communications, health, function, and quality of life. Individuals need to be alert to their hearing health, as hearing loss can range from mild to profound and tends to increase with age, onset can be gradual, and each individual's hearing needs are unique.
- Hearing health care involves a wide range of services and technologies with ever-expanding and evolving options; however, many people do not have access to these options or cannot afford them.
- Hearing loss is a public health and societal concern; engagement and action are needed across the spectrum of relevant stakeholders, including individuals and families, professionals, nonprofit organizations, industries, government, and the health care community.

Recommended actions

- Improve population-based information on hearing loss and hearing health care
- Develop and promote measures to assess and improve quality of hearing health care services
- Remove FDA's regulation for medical evaluation or waiver of that evaluation prior to hearing aid purchase
- Empower consumers and patients in their use of hearing health care
- Improve access to hearing health care for underserved and vulnerable populations
- Promote hearing health care in wellness and medical visits for those with concerns about their hearing
- Implement a new FDA device category for over-the-counter wearable hearing devices
- Improve the compatibility and interoperability of hearing technologies with communications systems and the transparency of hearing aid programming
- Improve affordability of hearing health care by actions across federal, state, and private sectors
- Evaluate and implement innovative models of hearing health care to improve access, quality, and affordability
- Improve publicly available information on hearing health
- Promote individual, employer, private sector, and community-based actions to support and manage hearing health and effective communication

NOTE: All findings and recommendations are of equal importance and are not prioritized.

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