



**Hearing Loss
Association
of America**

Employment Toolkit

www.hearingloss.org

The nation's voice for people with hearing loss

Hearing Loss Association of America Employment Toolkit



Table of Contents

- I. Acknowledgement
- II. Introduction
- III. Communication 101
 - Communication Tips : How to Communicate with a Person who has a Hearing Loss
- IV. Applying for a Job
- V. Interview Strategies
- VI. On the Job
- VII. Hearing Aids, Health Benefits and Insurance
 - Coverage of Hearing Aids
 - Fact Sheet
- VIII. Hearing Loss and the Law in the Workplace
- IX. For Employers: Information & Resources for HR Departments



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Acknowledgement

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The Mission Statement of Hearing Loss Association of America

The Mission of Hearing Loss Association of America is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss by providing information, education, support and advocacy.

About Hearing Loss Association of America

The Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), founded in 1979, publishes the bimonthly Hearing Loss Magazine, holds annual conventions, Walk4Hearing, hosts online learning with the Hearing Loss Academy, and more. HLAA has more than 200+ chapters and 14 state organizations. The national headquarters is located at 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814. Phone: 301.657.2248.



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Introduction

Looking for work, landing a job, and keeping your job can be difficult under the best of circumstances. Whether you are a college student seeking employment for the first time, someone who is returning to the workplace, or someone who wants to keep your job, employment issues can seem like a minefield if you have a hearing loss.

There are ways to be successful at the workplace with a hearing loss. Landing a good job, fitting into the workplace, and successfully advocating for the right accommodations that will make you a productive and valued employee can all be accomplished. But you need the right tools, need to do your homework, find out what's right for you and for your employer, and find ways to successfully advocate for yourself.

There are many employment handbooks that will help you write a resume, answer interview questions, find ways to fit into the workplace, even find ways to become a leader once in the workplace. We urge you to educate yourself, use as many resources as you can to find and excel in the job that's best for you.

In these pages, we will focus on the issues that face employees with hearing loss, provide tools to help you overcome obstacles, and give tips to make your life a little easier in the workplace.



Communication 101

The Invisible Disability

Hearing Loss is often called an “invisible disability.” When people look at you they don’t see your hearing loss. Worse, they have no idea what impact your hearing loss has on you. They use their own perfectly fine hearing as the basis for understanding your hearing. It does not occur to them that you may have difficulty understanding what is being said. This is just as true in the workplace as it is at a party, in a restaurant, at the airport, or in a store. But in the workplace this failure of understanding can affect your job, your career, and your livelihood.

Accessibility for people with hearing loss means being able to hear and understand communication and an audio signal in whatever form it takes: face to face - one on one and in groups; over the telephone; public address announcements; recorded sound - TV, radio, movies, internet based; amplified sound – theater, public presentations; alerting and emergency notifications.

As a person with a hearing loss in the workplace, it’s your responsibility to know what works best for you and communicate that to your employer.

- Pay attention to the situations where you do best and what causes the most difficulty – and why
- Maximize your residual hearing, using Assistive Listening Devices and visual clues. Consider taking speechreading classes.
- Anticipate problems and seek to minimize them.
- Tell your co-workers how to speak to you – offer them a written “Communication Tips Sheet”
- Make sure your own workspace has the kinds of lighting and seating with minimal backlighting and background noise that allows you to communicate best.
- If using a telephone is difficult, request volume controlled phones and/or access to telecommunications relay services, particularly captioned telephone services including WebCapTel. For conference calls, request agendas, names of participants in advance. You might also request that people identify themselves before speaking and that they refrain from using a speakerphone.
- Request information in writing: job assignments, meeting agendas, queries for information are best if written on hard copy or email in advance.
- Request accommodations when needed, such as: Assistive Listening Devices (FM, Infrared, Audioloop), captioning, CART (computer assisted real time transcription), communication strategies, visual and tactile alarms, oral interpreters, Cued speech transliteration.
- If a hearing dog is appropriate for you, provide your employer with the information needed to accommodate your dog on the job.



Communication Tips

How to Communicate with a Person who has a Hearing Loss

For one-to-one meetings with a person who has a hearing loss:

- Provide background information on the topic to be discussed in writing in advance.
- Background noise, music, cross-conversations, reverberation, and distance from the speaker all contribute to a difficult listening environment. Ask what can be done to make hearing easier.
- Face the person with hearing loss and make sure the lighting is even and that you are not backlit to allow speechreading (lipreading) to augment his or her hearing.
- Speak clearly at a moderate pace.
- Don't shout: shouting distorts your voice and increases the tension level.
- Try not to cover your mouth with your hand or a pencil or chew food or gum while talking.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat, misunderstood words; make written note of essential information.

For group meetings that include people with hearing loss:

- Provide agenda items, names of attendees and supporting materials in writing in advance.
- Provide seating so that the person with hearing loss has his or her back to any windows and sits as close to the main speaker as possible.
- If assistive listening devices (ALD's) are being used, ensure that participants use them effectively, that is, that no one speaks until recognized and speaks directly into the ALD's microphone. If CART is provided, reserve seating for the person with hearing loss together with the CART writer.
- If on a teleconference, ensure that participants speak one at a time, identify themselves before speaking, and use the handset instead of a speakerphone to reduce background noise or other interference.
- Remote CART should be booked well in advance to provide live, text versions of telephone calls; WebCapTel is another option, as long as the person with hearing loss has registered in advance.



Applying for a Job

To begin with, you need to know the basics of applying for a job regardless of disability: how to write a resume, how to request an interview, how to collect information about the company and position you're applying for, how to dress and groom yourself for the interview and how to conduct yourself during the interview. Refer to books on preparation for job interviews and use the resources provided on the HLAA website.

Only apply for jobs for which you are qualified.

The ADA prevents discrimination against qualified employees. Make sure the essential functions of the job match your skills.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has pinpointed four key issues determining whether a job function is essential:

1. Does the job require performing one specific function? For example, a telephone operator's job may have only one essential function.
2. What degree of expertise or skill is required?
3. What's the work experience of other employees in this job?
4. Could another employee perform the marginal tasks not essential to the job? (For example, could another employee field the telephone calls for you?)

Get experience through volunteer work.

If you think you lack the skills or experience for the kind of job you want, you may develop them through volunteer work. Many cities and counties provide volunteer centers to link people who are willing to work for free to places that need extra help. Not only does volunteering help enhance your skills, but it will build your resume and show a prospective employer that you were willing to take your time to volunteer.

Develop new skills and take advantage of training opportunities.

Take advantage of opportunities to go back to school, or to take part in workshops or educational forums to increase your skills and value to your prospective employer.



Interview Strategies

How and when to inform a prospective employer about your hearing loss is a complex issue which can have emotional components.

- **Don't insert the issue of hearing loss in your resume or letter of inquiry.** The fact is that this may discourage many prospective employers from granting you an interview at all.

Once the interview has been granted, you must determine yourself whether you should reveal your hearing loss at the interview. Some of the considerations:

- **Does the employer screen prospective employees with phone interviews?** If you have trouble hearing on the phone, and you need the assistance of IP Relay or Captioned Phone services, you may want to advise the employer so you can make the phone call to them at a designated time. You should also be prepared to advise them that any delay in response is a result of the nature of captioned phone and Relay services.
- **Do you need an accommodation at the interview?** If you need to request the employer provide an accommodation at the interview, clearly, you need to reveal your hearing loss in advance if services to be at hand at the time of the interview.
- **Do you own your own assistive listening device?** If you depend on an assistive listening device and own one, plan to bring it along with fresh batteries. This shows you take charge, problem-solving ability to manage your own hearing loss. It gives the prospective employer a chance to see you in action and to get to know you better.
- **How many people will be present at the interview?** While you may be able to handle a one-to-one interview without accommodation and without revealing your hearing loss, a large room with many people attending may put you at a disadvantage if you have not revealed your hearing loss.
- **Will you need accommodations on the job?** If you expect that you will need accommodations for meetings or other on the job situations, you may do well to provide that information at the interview, so the employer is not surprised later.
- **How comfortable are you with your hearing loss?** If you can inform your prospective employer about your hearing loss in a matter-of-fact way, it's advisable to do so right at the interview. Demonstrating a matter-of-fact, can-do and positive approach to your hearing loss will work to your advantage in the interview.

When you arrive at the interview, be prepared to make on the spot changes. You may need to ask people to change seats, face windows, pull down blinds.

Be matter of fact. Don't apologize for your hearing loss, and don't spend a long time talking about it. They want to know what you can do for them. Let them know what an asset you will be to their organization.

Psych out your interviewer(s)

Put yourself in the interviewer's shoes. They don't know you, don't know about hearing loss and want to be sure they hire the right person for the job. Put them at ease, comfortable with you as a person who has a hearing loss.

Watch for clues that they are uncomfortable. They probably won't know about hearing loss and may feel that they don't know how to behave. They might wonder if the presence of a worker with a hearing loss will affect the "chemistry" of the department. Is the worker with hearing loss going to be less efficient, slower, more dependant, more demanding, less capable? Can the individual really get the job done? How will the person with hearing loss communicate on a regular basis? Will accommodations cost a lot? Why hire you?

You must convince them that they want you! Sell your:

- Skills
- Experience
- Demonstrated competence
- Self-assurance
- Personality

Questions that the employer cannot ask

According to the EEOC NOTICE Number 915.002 of 10/10/95:

Under the law, an employer may not ask disability-related questions and may not conduct medical examinations until after it makes a conditional job offer to the applicant. This helps ensure that an applicant's possible hidden disability (including a prior history of a disability) is not considered before the employer evaluates an applicant's non-medical qualifications.

An employer may not ask disability-related questions or require a medical examination pre-offer even if it intends to look at the answers or results only at the post-offer stage.

Once a conditional job offer is made, the employer may ask disability-related questions and require medical examinations as long as this is done for all entering employees in that job category. If the employer rejects the applicant after a disability-related question or medical examination, investigators will closely scrutinize whether the rejection was based on the results of that question or examination.

If the question or examination screens out an individual because of a disability, the employer must demonstrate that the reason for the rejection is "job-related and consistent with business necessity."

In addition, if the individual is screened out for safety reasons, the employer must demonstrate that the individual poses a "direct threat." This means that the individual poses a significant risk of substantial harm to him/herself or others, and that the risk cannot be reduced below the direct threat level through reasonable accommodation.

Also, an employer may not ask a third party (such as a service that provides information about workers' compensation claims, a state agency, or an applicant's friends, family, or former employers) any questions that it could not directly ask the applicant.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/preemp.html>

In short, the prospective employer MAY NOT ask:

- Are you taking prescription drugs?
- Are you HIV positive?
- How many sick days did you take last year?
- Have you filed for worker's comp?

They MAY ask:

- Can you perform the functions of the job?
- Can you meet the attendance requirements for the job?
- Do you have the required experience?
- Are you using illegal drugs?

Getting Comfortable with the Process

Your attitude is important. Don't focus on your hearing loss. Don't bluff. If you pretend you have heard something when you have not, the interview will just think that you have poor communication skills or that you cannot answer the question appropriately.

Revealing your hearing loss is personal, but in some cases, it will help you:

I was interviewed for a job in a very old noisy office with a window air conditioner. I was interviewed by five people...and I used an FM assistive listening system for the interview. I briefly explained why I was using it and after a few seconds, I think everyone forgot it was there. I was able to position the microphone in the center of the table...so we did not have to keep passing the mike.

Control your anxiety before the interview

Job seeking is a stressful process for anyone, but doubly stressful for people with hearing loss. The very thought of the interview may be harrowing. Put your energy into good planning and identifying your skills. This will boost your confidence.

- List your strengths. Don't just think about them, actually make a list.
- Be ready with concrete examples of your accomplishments, both on the job, as a volunteer, and in other areas of your life.
- Keep your focus on why you are valuable to the organization.
- Practice stress-relieving activities such as relaxation, meditation, exercise, positive thinking – whatever you have found works for you.
- List your fears about the interview and how you would handle each one. “What’s the worst thing that could happen?”

Practice interviews

Start out applying for jobs in which you are only marginally interested. Use these interviews for practice.

Or work with a friend or agency that allows you to practice typical interview questions.

Summing up

- Learn how to write a good resume and cover letter.
- Only apply for jobs you are qualified for.
- If you need experience, volunteer.
- Focus on your skills and experience, not your hearing loss.
- Plan for your interview, including how you will hear at the interview.
- Psych out your interviewer.
- Be positive: face and control your fears.



On the Job

Congratulations! You've landed the job you wanted! Celebrate first, then sit down and think about how you can be successful on the job with your hearing loss.

Remember that your employer wants you to be a productive member of the team. Don't make your hearing loss your employer's problem. Do your homework, know your needs, and find solutions. Show that you know how to take charge and provide solutions that work, and alternatives if your first solution isn't practical in your workplace.

Know your needs

1. List all the job responsibilities and essential duties
2. Come up with possible solutions or accommodations needed
3. Meet with key people who have the authority to provide the requested accommodations

Challenging Responsibilities

- Phone work
- Meetings
- Social events

Possible Accommodations on the Job

- **Work Station Adjustments.** Sometime the newest employee gets the office next to the copy machine. That may work for most, but won't work for you. Be ready to explain to the boss how you want to be as productive as possible but that unlike people whose hearing is intact, you can't filter out the sound of the copy machine, so your phone work will suffer. If you show the reasons why this is important, your new boss may be willing to make the change.
- **Assistive Listening Devices (ALD's)/Assistive Listening Systems (ALS).** If you need your employer to purchase a system or device, you need to explain why and do the legwork. Find out what kind of systems will work, an estimate of the cost, and options for places to purchase the systems.
- **Telephones.** By federal law, telephones on your desk should be Hearing Aid Compatible (HAC) or readily available on request. If you need a captioned telephone service, or access to Internet supported captioned telephones, you will need a dedicated line, and perhaps a CapTel phone. Give your boss supporting materials to explain how they work, why you need a dedicated line in addition to the multiple phone line. Be sure to let your boss know that once the line is installed, the phone service itself is provided at no additional cost.
- **Telephones on the road.** If your company typically provides employees with a cell phone and/or Blackberry, make sure the phone you have is HAC and capable of either email or

text messaging. If you need a neckloop, make sure there is a port for that. And test the phone before going out on the job to be sure you can hear with no interference.

- **Modification of non-essential duties.** In the past, people in your position may have taken on extra duties that were not related to the job description. Such duties could include covering incoming phone calls. If needed request another co-worker take those tasks in exchange for doing a task you are better able to cover, such as picking up a client at the airport.
- **Assignments.** Written memos or notes, written summaries of discussions and emails will go a long way to ensure that you and your boss are on the same page. If your boss does not have time to write these things for you, take the time to summarize your understanding of all assignments in writing and give hard copy or email a copy to your boss to confirm your understanding of the assignment. Keep a file of those assignments and your boss' confirmation that you are on the right track.
- **Meetings.** Request agenda in advance, meeting summaries or notes after the event. Explain to your boss that this will not only help you keep up to speed, but if made available to all employees, could help them as well.
- **CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation).** CART provides virtually instant translation of the spoken word to text. A CART writer transcribes every word that is spoken and displays it on a laptop computer or using an LCD projector can project it onto a screen. A transcript of the meeting can be saved to disk if needed. CART is particularly helpful in large meetings where an ALS may not be able to "hear" everyone speaking. CART services may be new to your boss. Explain that not only will you benefit, but that it will help keep a record of the meeting for future reference and if the transcript is requested can be used for minutes of the meeting. If there is a concern about privacy, explain that like a court reporter, the CART writer's code of ethics demands confidentiality.
- **Emergency notification systems.** Strobe lights on fire alarms, vibrating pagers, low and multiple frequency alarms, or other emergency assistive technology should be in place soon after you take the job. In an emergency, you do not want to be left behind. If your boss suggests a "buddy system," let her know that the buddy system is a great back up, but cannot be relied upon: the responsible co-worker could be traveling or out sick at the time of the emergency. You need a system that is as reliable as the auditory system, and that provides the alarm at virtually the same time as your hearing co-workers.
- **Training programs.** To keep up with changes in your field, you may need to take classes that give you cutting edge information for your field. Most work places encourage employees to take such classes, so do take advantage of time off if it's offered, but be willing to take your own time or find on-line courses. Be sure to request accommodations for on site classes well in advance.
- **In-service training.** Request accommodations as needed for all in-service training.

A word about Tax Incentives

Federal tax credits and deductions to help offset the cost of accommodations may be available to your employer. Some states also offer tax incentives. See the IRS web page: **Tax Benefits for Businesses Who Have Employees with Disabilities**

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=185704,00.html> (Page Last Reviewed or Updated: January 05, 2009) For additional information on tax benefits, contact the US Internal Revenue Service at 800-829-3676 (voice) or 800-829-4059 (TTY).

Sample Tracking Sheet of Job Responsibilities, Challenges and Solutions

Job Duties	Method	Frequency	Solutions	Costs
Contacting Clients	Telephone	Daily	HAC phone	None – in place
Contacting Clients	Email	Daily	Internet Access	None – in place
Contacting clients	Teleconference with up to 50 people	Weekly	WebCapTel	Cost of dedicated line
Contacting clients on the road	HAC cell phone with data service	Weekly	Blackberry with data service	Personal Blackberry already in place; company to pick up the cost of the data service
Meetings with co-workers	Face to face in conference room – 10 people	Weekly	ALS; request for written meeting agenda emailed in advance, written summary of action items immediately after the meeting	Cost of wide area listening system with multiple microphones; no cost to agenda and meeting summary as they are already provided
Meetings with boss	Face to face in office – one to one	Weekly	ALD; request for emailed follow up re: assigned tasks	None – personal ALD used; I will take charge of meeting summary
Meetings with entire staff	Face to face in meeting hall – 100 people	Monthly	CART	Cost of CART services
Staff picnic	Face to face outdoors – 100 people	1 x per summer	Personal ALD	None – use personal system
Workstation	Next to copy room	Daily	Request move to another open office	Cost of relocating
Workstation	Emergency alerting	When needed	Request low frequency alert	Cost of purchase & installation



Hearing Aids, Health Benefits and Insurance Coverage

When it comes time to purchase a hearing aid, often the employer's health insurance package does not include coverage for hearing aids. The reason may simply be because it was never considered. However, with 17% of the population having a hearing loss, chances are, there are many in the workplace who would benefit from the inclusion of hearing aids in the health insurance package.

If you want your employer's health insurance plan to provide coverage for hearing aids, you are the one who needs to make that happen. Here's some advice on how to go about it:

- Begin by identifying the office responsible for managing and making decisions about health care benefits.
- Meet with the appropriate individuals and explain why you or someone in your family needs hearing aids. Be sure to discuss how hearing aids enhance your ability to function at work.
- For a child, note that hearing aids allow fuller participation in the classroom and enhanced language development.
- If you already have hearing aids, discuss how much they cost.
- Also note that the hearing aid fitting and follow-up must include services from a qualified hearing care provider.
- Review the information in the "Fact Sheet: Hearing Aids, Health Benefits and Insurance Coverage" before going and leave a copy with the benefits personnel.

The "Fact Sheet: Hearing Aids, Health Benefits and Insurance Coverage" included in this Tool Kit, provides salient information about hearing loss, hearing aids and health care coverage for hearing aids to help you make a case for health care coverage of hearing aids to your employer. Feel free to download this document and leave it with your employer to bolster the case you make for hearing aids coverage.

Be sure to look at the situation from your employer's perspective. The first question on your employers mind will be: how much will this cost? If your company is going through a time of belt tightening, they may be resistant to making a change. To reduce their resistance, point to the "Fact Sheet" which includes information about the State of Minnesota Employees Insurance coverage which estimated the cost of providing this benefit was pennies a month. Clearly, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Good luck!



Fact Sheet: Hearing Aids, Health Benefits and Insurance Coverage

1. Hearing aids are a critical first step in treating hearing loss. Being properly fitted with hearing aids can make a major difference in an individual's ability to understand speech. Consequently, hearing aids can make a major impact on quality of life.
2. More than 80 percent of all hearing loss is sensorineural. This type of hearing loss is generally not amenable to medical or surgical treatment. Fortunately, it can be helped most of the time by being fitted with hearing aids.
3. Hearing aids are effective. The new circuitry designs of today can effectively compensate for hearing loss experienced by people of all ages with a wide variety of hearing loss, from mild to profound.
4. Hearing loss is a health issue, and not necessarily a natural process of aging as perceived by some people. If not treated, it can impact on the general and psychological health of the individual through higher stress and anxiety levels resulting in more medical visits and hospital stays. Studies show that people with hearing loss are at risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, stress and chemical dependency which can impact their performance at work and their lifestyles at home.
5. Hearing loss affects a large percentage of the population. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2006), 37 million adults in the United States had trouble hearing.
6. There is a stigma attached to hearing loss which, for some people who are hard of hearing, may result in an attempt to hide or deny their hearing loss. This is particularly true of employees who fear being seen as less competent if they admit to hearing loss in the workplace. Many people do not want to "make an issue" of their hearing loss, and, therefore, do not request insurance coverage of hearing aids.



Hearing Loss & the Law in the Workplace

As a person with a hearing loss, you cannot expect others, even your employer, to know what you need. In fact, the accommodations that are best for you in the workplace may not be the best for someone else. Only you can know what works for you. You must do your own homework before recommending what accommodations the employer should consider putting in place.

Likewise, you cannot expect your employer to know and understand what laws are in place to support you in the workplace, how they specifically apply to people with hearing loss, and what the limitations of those laws are. You must be the expert on hearing loss, and the expert on how you can reach your full potential as an employee.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and amendments passed in 2007, is a major piece of civil rights legislation that has gone a long way to help people with disabilities gain equal access in many facets of life, from attending a public meeting to telecommunications, and yes, even including the workplace.

However the ADA is not the only law, and sometimes not the best law to provide protection in all circumstances. Some state laws are far stronger than the ADA. And despite what some people believe, it is not an affirmative action law: it does not mandate employers hire or promote a person with a disability before another more qualified person. The ADA does attempt to “level the playing field”. If all that is needed to become eligible for that job or that promotion is a volume controlled phone on your desk, the ADA provides for that accommodation so that you are in a better position to compete.

The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a very good source of information about the ADA and other laws that apply in the workplace. Included on their website is a fact sheet on the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) “Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act”:

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a qualified applicant or employee with a disability. The ADA applies to private employers with 15 or more employees and to state and local government employers. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforces the employment provisions of the ADA.

The ADA defines an individual with a disability as a person who: (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, (2) has a record or history of a

substantially limiting impairment, or (3) is regarded or perceived by an employer as having a substantially limiting impairment.

An applicant with a disability, like all other applicants, must be able to meet the employer's requirements for the job, such as education, training, employment experience, skills, or licenses. In addition, an applicant with a disability must be able to perform the "essential functions" of the job the fundamental duties either on her own or with the help of "reasonable accommodation." However, an employer does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation that will cause "undue hardship," which is significant difficulty or expense.

For the complete Fact Sheet, visit the EEOC Web site: <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html>

Other applicable Laws

The Job Accommodation Network is a service provided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). It's a wonderful resource for information about the laws and kinds of accommodations that may be used in the workplace. It has much information about the ADA, as well as other laws that provide protection to people with disabilities. JAN provides the following about other disability laws (<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/links/other.htm>):

Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act mandates non-discrimination by the federal government in its hiring and requires affirmative action, insures accessibility of buildings constructed with federal funds, mandates non-discrimination and affirmative action by federal contractors, prohibits discrimination in programs and activities, and requires standards for electronic and information technology.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)

The ADEA protects individuals who are 40 years of age or older from employment discrimination based on age. The ADEA's protections apply to both employees and job applicants. The ADEA permits employers to favor older workers based on age even when doing so adversely affects a younger worker who is 40 or older. It is also unlawful to retaliate against an individual for opposing employment practices that discriminate based on age or for filing an age discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation under the ADEA. The ADEA applies to employers with 20 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and labor organizations, as well as to the federal government.

Telecommunications Act

Section 255 and Section 251(a)(2) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, require manufacturers of telecommunications equipment and providers of telecommunications services to ensure that such equipment and services are accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities, if readily achievable. These amendments ensure that people with disabilities will have access to a broad range of products and services such as telephones, cell phones, pagers, call-waiting, and operator services that were often inaccessible to many users with disabilities.

For more information, contact the Federal Communications Commission at (888) 225-5322 (V)/(888) 835-5322 (TTY) or online at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro>.



For Employers: Information & Resources for HR Departments

Demographics

The latest 2008 study released from Johns Hopkins shows 55 million people between the ages of 20-69 with hearing loss in the US. This is epidemic proportions. The chances therefore are very likely that most companies have employees with hearing loss. Due to stigma it is questionable whether they will self identify.

The Need for Health Insurance Coverage

Hearing loss is not curable. The main treatment option today is hearing aids that are frequently not offered under health insurance plans and individuals have to purchase them out of pocket. For people with severe to profound hearing loss cochlear implants that are usually covered by health insurance are increasingly popular and effective. Employers should offer health insurance coverage in its basic benefit package for hearing screening, audiology services and hearing aids.

Non Discrimination in the Workplace on the Basis of Hearing Loss

Federal Law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title 1, protects qualified employees with hearing loss from discrimination on the basis of disability in hiring, promotion and staying on the job. The regulating agency is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission <http://www.eeoc.gov>. To view the EEOC document Deafness and Hearing Impairments in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act go to <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/ada.html>

Company Policy

A written policy on non-discrimination of employees with hearing loss and other disabilities should be in place and managers and anyone in a hiring position should be aware of and practice this policy. A stated policy from the highest levels of management also "makes it safe" for employees to self-disclose. Employees with hearing loss typically are hesitant to disclose their hearing loss for fear of threatening their job and their being seen as less capable. With appropriate reasonable accommodations, as covered under the ADA, qualified employees with hearing loss will be productive members of the team.

Impact of Hearing Loss on Employees

Employees with hearing loss are frequently underemployed and/or retire early due to a lack of knowledge about accessibility solutions and/or an unwillingness to request them. The psychosocial impact of difficulty in communicating impacts relationships with co-workers and supervisors unless an open, informed and inclusive policy about accessibility for employees with hearing loss is understood and practiced by employees at all levels.

Reasonable Accommodations

Today we are surrounded by mainstream technology such as email, IM, PDAs, visual paging, Wiki sites – visual and text options for communicating that make for accessibility tools for employees with hearing loss. In addition there is an array of assistive technology, strategies, job restructuring that are all examples of reasonable accommodations under the ADA that provide workplace access for employees with hearing loss. For more information about hearing assistance technology in the workplace go to:

<http://www.hearingloss.org>

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/accessforall/hearing.htm>

<http://www.assistivetech.net>

<http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib072205.html>

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu>

Job Accommodations Network, 1-800-526-7234 V/TTY, <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

The Job Accommodations Network is a database of workplace accessibility applications for all types of disabilities – how to do it and what it costs. It is a valuable third party resource available to employers and employees when an accessibility situation arises on-the-job that needs a solution.

7. Hearing aids are a major uncovered health care expense. The average cost of a hearing aid in 1997 was \$971. By 2004, this increased to \$1,800. Since most people have hearing loss in both ears, the expense is considerable for the individual.
8. Children need hearing aids to maximize their residual hearing to enable them to learn language and to participate fully in the education process. Children need new hearing aids regularly during their growth years. Therefore, this is a logical area in which to "spread the risk" by providing insurance coverage so that more employees and family members can afford needed hearing aids.
9. Some insurance policies cover hearing aids. This has had a negligible effect on premiums to date.
 - The California Public Employees Retirement System (CalPERS) -- Benefits include hearing test and hearing aid evaluation at no cost. Coverage of up to \$1,000 (per insured individual) every 36 months for hearing aids. This benefit also covers earmolds, hearing aid instrument, initial batteries and other needed equipment.
 - The State of Minnesota Employees Insurance -- Employee insurance provides coverage for hearing exams and hearing aids (with coverage of 80 percent of one hearing aid per year as durable medical equipment) for all its employees. The estimated cost of providing this benefit is between 15-23 cents/month for a single employee; and between 37-57 cents/month for an employee and family members.
 - Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHB) – Several of the FEHB insurance plans have expanded their coverage to include coverage of hearing aids for adults. The Federal Government is the largest employer in the US. FEHB covers some 8 million federal employees, retirees and their dependants.
 - Tricare – Active and retired military personnel and their dependants.
 - Veterans Administration – the VA will cover the cost of hearing aids for service-related hearing loss.
 - In the States – recent legislation in some states have mandated health insurance coverage for of hearing aids, typically for dependant children, but in a few states all are covered. Visit <http://www.hearingloss.org/advocacy/govtassistance.asp> for a list of state insurance laws.