

# DEAF & HARD OF HEARING



## HEARING AIDS & ASSISTIVE DEVICES: *What You Need To Know*



Thank you for contacting the Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) within the Department of Labor & Industry with your questions regarding hearing aids, telecommunication devices, and other hearing assistive technology.

ODHH recognizes that purchasing hearing aids can be an overwhelming and an expensive process. Unfortunately, ODHH does not provide funding assistance for hearing aids, but we are happy to provide information to help you get started with obtaining your hearing aids, telephone device, and/or other technology and locating sources of funding assistance.

The enclosed information will walk you through the process of finding an audiologist, support groups, and hearing assistive technology (HAT), which are devices that help you hear better and be alerted to the doorbell and fire alarm, carry on a conversation with your family and friends, understand TV, hear the phone ringing, and be able to converse on the phone. HAT helps to maintain your independence and your lifestyle with hearing loss.

This packet includes the following:

- Hearing Aids: How to Get Started
- Hearing Aids: Funding Options
- Hearing Assistive Technology
- Telephones and Relay Services
- Assistive Listening Systems/Devices
- Alerting Devices
- Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Resources
- Resources

As you proceed through the packet, we hope the information presented is clear to you. If not, please feel free to contact us any time and we will provide you with guidance and more information. Contact ODHH at 800-233-3008 v/tty or 717-783-4912 v/tty or [odhh@pa.gov](mailto:odhh@pa.gov). Please note: These programs do not guarantee qualification.

Thank you,  
ODHH staff

Department of Labor & Industry | Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing | 651 Boas Street, Room 700 | Harrisburg, PA 17121  
717.783.4912 v/tty | 717.831.1928 videophone | 800.233.3008 v/tty (in PA only) | 717.705.9345 fax | [www.dli.pa.gov/odhh](http://www.dli.pa.gov/odhh)

Auxiliary aids and devices are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.  
Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

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# Hearing Aids: How to Get Started

The process of obtaining hearing aids is complicated. This document will provide the guidance you need to make the entire process simpler and less stressful.

**First, it's recommended that you obtain an examination by an otolaryngologist, or an Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT) doctor.**

The doctor will:

- Perform a preliminary assessment of your hearing loss, determine whether it is medically correctable, and identify any underlying medical conditions that may affect your fit and success with hearing aids if you need them.
- Refer you to a licensed audiologist (health care professional who specializes in hearing loss) for the fit and purchase of hearing aids.

**Next, make an appointment with an audiologist, who will further test your hearing and discuss hearing aid options with you.**

- Audiologists are licensed health care professionals who evaluate, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children.
- They prescribe and fit hearing aids, administer tests of balance to evaluate dizziness, assist in cochlear implant assessment/fitting, design and implement hearing conservation programs and newborn hearing screening programs, and provide hearing rehabilitation training.
- Audiologists working in Pennsylvania must have a license from the Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Professional & Occupational Affairs and be registered with the Pennsylvania Department of Health.
- You may visit [www.paaudiology.org](http://www.paaudiology.org) to find an audiologist near your home.
- Your audiologist will determine the most appropriate hearing aid by analyzing your test results and knowing your lifestyle. Hearing aid styles include behind-the-ear (BTE), in-the-ear (ITE), in-the-canal (ITC), completely-in-the-canal (CIC), and open fitting. Ask about including directional microphones and a telecoil. Directional microphones make it easier to understand a conversation in noise, and telecoils can be used to pick up speech from telephones and assistive listening systems.

# Communication and Rights

## COMMUNICATION DURING DOCTOR AND AUDIOLOGY APPOINTMENTS

We understand that communication may be a barrier during appointments. It is important that you have clear communication and get answers to your questions. We suggest:

- Taking a friend, family member, or a member from your church or synagogue to the appointment. This person can ensure that no information is missed.
- Requesting an accommodation such as an assistive listening device (ALD); written notes; Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), or realtime captioning; a sign language interpreter; or any other communication tool needed. It is your right to receive accessible services and to understand the information presented and the options available. You can contact ODHH if you need further information or assistance.

## YOUR RIGHTS

Knowing your rights is vital when it comes to obtaining services from a physician or audiologist.

- You have the right to effective communication.
- You are entitled, under law, to return the hearing aids within 30 days from the date of delivery for any reason. However, the audiologist can keep 10 percent of the purchase price or \$150 per aid, whichever is less, as stated in the disclosure agreement provided to you at the time of purchase.
- If a sale took place within your home, you may cancel within three business days for a full refund.
- If you purchased a hearing aid within your home and want to return it after three business days, you are responsible for non-refundable cancellation fees outlined under the disclosure agreement provided to you.
- If you did not sign or receive a disclosure agreement or if you feel your rights were violated, contact:
  - Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, Health Care Unit, or the local District Attorney  
717-705-6938  
[www.attorneygeneral.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov)
  - Pennsylvania Department of Health  
717-783-1379  
[www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov)
  - Pennsylvania Department of State  
[www.dos.pa.gov](http://www.dos.pa.gov)  
Select "Professional Licensure" followed by "Complaints."  
Options are found on left side of screen.

# Hearing Aids: Funding Options

ODHH understands that purchasing hearing aids is very expensive and many health insurance providers may not cover a portion of the cost between testing and hearing aids. As mentioned earlier, ODHH does not provide funding assistance for hearing aids; however, we have listed organizations below that do provide funding assistance for those who qualify. The listing is categorized under national, state, and local resources. We hope this gives you an opportunity to make the purchase of hearing aids possible.

## NATIONAL RESOURCES

- **Help America Hear**  
Is proud to offer the Help America Hear Program which provides NEW high quality hearing aids Nationwide to men, women, and children with limited financial resources. Please utilize the Help America Hear program as a LAST RESORT. As a prerequisite, we ask all applicants to exhaust all other financial resources including but not limited to, available credit, family support, money market accounts, mutual funds, 401(k) plans, trust funds, annuities, and savings/checking and State sponsored programs. Help America Hear is made possible by the generosity of hearing health care professionals and manufacturers who donate their time and services. The program is also sponsored by our many corporate and private donors. We trust you will respect the integrity of the program and deeply appreciate the kindness of everyone involved.  
**888-580-8886**  
**info@helpamericahear.org**  
<https://helpamericahear.org/help-america-hear-program-hear/>
- **National Hearing Aid Donation and Resources** – <https://hearingaid donations.org/resources/>
- **New Jersey Hearing Aid program** – <https://hearingaid donations.org/get-an-aid/new-jersey-hearing-aid-project/>
- **Military Audiology Association**  
This organization provides cost-effective hearing health care through state-of-the-art audiological services, including prevention, medical surveillance, education, and research.  
**militaryaudiology.org**
- **U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs**  
Eligible veterans, based on the audiological exam, may receive hearing aids, other listening devices, repairs, and batteries at no charge.  
**800-827-1000**  
**www.va.gov**

## **PENNSYLVANIA RESOURCES**

### **PENNSYLVANIA ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION (PATF)**

PATF is a state-wide non-profit organization providing education and financing opportunities for the purchase of assistive technology. PATF helps people with disabilities and older Pennsylvanians learn about funding resources. PATF also has two financial loan programs: a mini-loan program for amounts up to \$1,500 at 0 percent interest, and a low-interest loan program for amounts ranging from \$1,500 to \$60,000 at 3.75 percent interest. PATF helps Pennsylvanians of all income levels, all disability diagnoses and health conditions, and all ages.

**888-744-1938**

**[www.patf.us](http://www.patf.us)**

### **OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR)**

OVR assists people with disabilities to obtain employment and maintain employment, which may include the purchase of technology, including hearing aids, to be used on the job.

**800-442-6351**

**[www.dli.pa.gov/ovr](http://www.dli.pa.gov/ovr)**

## **LOCAL RESOURCES**

### **KEYSTONE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SERVICES (KDHHS)**

Keystone Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (KDHHS) still offers an Assistive Device and Hearing Aid Financial Assistance Program including low-cost hearing aids and low-cost hearing aids repair. Eligibility for that program is income-based. Please call the KDHHS office for more information and eligibility requirements.

**610-685-4523**

**[www.kdhhs.net](http://www.kdhhs.net)**

### **CENTER FOR HEARING AND DEAF SERVICES (HDS)**

HDS offers Hearing Aid/Assistive Listening Device Grant Program. Eligibility for that program is open to Residents of Allegheny County and is income-based. HDS offers audiological services and sells new, refurbished and recycled (as is) hearing aids. HDS also provides options for affordable hearing aids. Please call the HDS office for more information and eligibility requirements.

**412-281-1375**

**[www.hdscenter.org](http://www.hdscenter.org)**

# Hearing Assistive Technology

Hearing Assistive Technology (HAT) helps persons with hearing loss maintain their independence. HAT includes devices such as amplified phones, hearing loops, captioned phones, and alerting systems with strobe lights for doorbells or fire alarms. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has programs to assist you in selecting the right piece of equipment that will promote your independence when having hearing loss.

ODHH understands that current assistive technology options may be new or confusing to you. Whether you need assistance with hearing sound in a small group or large meeting site, or being alerted when someone is at the door, this reference page displays the many options that are available. If you need more information, please contact ODHH.

## HEARING AID

- A medical device used on or in the ear(s) to amplify or increase sound for the user with hearing loss to enhance access to speech.

## COCHLEAR IMPLANT

- A surgically implanted device that provides direct electrical stimulation to the auditory nerve in the inner ear. Cochlear implants are an option for individuals who do not benefit from hearing aids, and they are usually covered by insurance.

## TELEPHONES AND RELAY SERVICES

ODHH understands the impact hearing loss has on the individual and understands the need to maintain independence. Using telephones is a critical element in our daily routines. We continuously want to talk with our friends and families, make reservations, and inquire information from various businesses. There are several telephone options that may accommodate your hearing loss and permit you to keep your independence.

## AMPLIFIED PHONES

- Equipped with volume control to meet your decibel level needs.
- Allow you to maintain telephone usage without relay services.
- May also be hearing-aid compatible for telecoil-equipped hearing aids.



## CAPTIONED PHONES AND WEB/MOBILE APPS

(used through a captioning service)

- Good for people who have some degree of hearing loss and can speak for themselves, but struggle with understanding speech over the phone.
- Internet-based or landline telephone (in-home telephone line) works like a standard phone; however, it displays or captions every word the other person is saying. There are several manufacturers of captioned phones.
- There are several companies that provide Web and mobile phone-captioning apps. Contact ODHH for more information.



## HEARING AID-COMPATIBLE CELL PHONES

- Cell phones are rated according to the amount of interference they cause to hearing aids. “M” ratings are for the hearing aid’s microphone setting and “T” ratings are for the telecoil setting. Only phones rated 3 (good) or 4 (excellent) are suitable.



## VIDEO PHONES

- Telephones with a video display.
- Direct calls. American Sign Language (ASL) user to ASL user.
- ASL to non-ASL user via Video Relay Service.

## TTY (Teletypewriter)

- Older technology.
- Conversation is typed rather than spoken.
- Direct communication is possible with anyone who has a TTY.
- Uses Telecommunications Relay Service when calling a user who does not have a TTY.



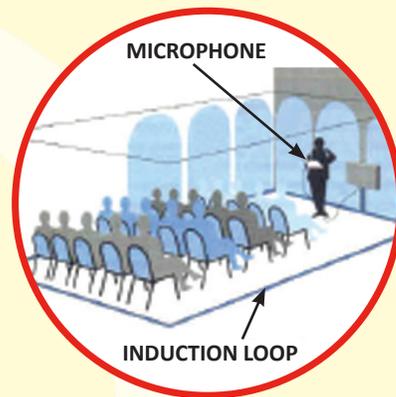
**Please contact ODHH for more information on any telephone devices and/or services, on how to get a device, or for questions about relay services.**

# Assistive Listening Systems/Devices

## WIRELESS SYSTEMS

### HEARING LOOP OR INDUCTION LOOP SYSTEM

- Transmits via electromagnetic energy directly to telecoil-equipped hearing aids, cochlear implants, or assistive listening devices with a telecoil through a wire that surrounds a room. No receiver is needed for users with telecoils in their hearing aids or cochlear implants; receivers are available for others.



### FM (FREQUENCY MODULATION) SYSTEM

- Transmits via radio frequency to a receiver, which can be adjusted to the desired volume. The sound can be sent to telecoils via a neckloop; others use headphones or earbuds. Personal FM systems are available with a pocket-size transmitter that can be worn by the speaker.

### INFRARED SYSTEM

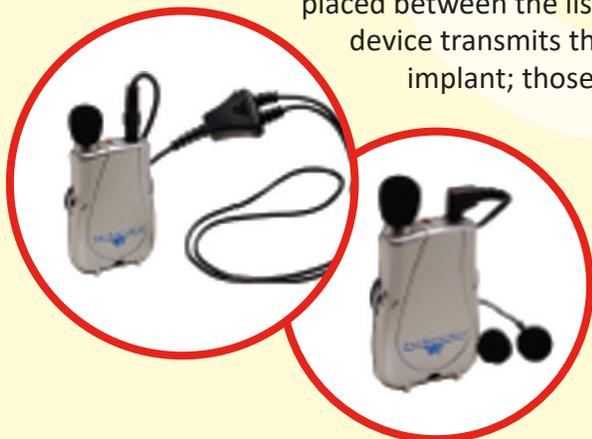
- Transmits via infrared light waves to a receiver, which can be adjusted to the desired volume. The sound can be sent to telecoils via a neckloop; others use headphones. Ideal for privacy, since the signal stays within the room, but not suitable for daytime outdoor use. Infrared systems for TV listening are popular.



## WIRED DEVICES

### PERSONAL AMPLIFIER

- A wired pocket-size device used for one-on-one settings or in small groups, where it is placed between the listener and the speaker. A neckloop plugged into the device transmits the sound to a telecoil-equipped hearing aid or cochlear implant; those without telecoils can receive it through headphones.



# Alerting Devices

## ALARM CLOCKS

- Bed shakers (vibration), lamp flashers, and extra loud audible alarms.



## FIRE ALARMS

- Smoke detector with strobe light, amplified alarm, or vibration.



## DOORBELL AND TELEPHONE RING SIGNALERS

- Amplified sound and flashing lights (lamp or transmitter with flashing light).



# Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Resources

## **HLAA-PA Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) Kit**

The Hearing Loss Association of America–Pennsylvania State Office has developed an ALD kit containing many different devices that are used or can be used by individuals with hearing loss. The kit provides information and demonstration of ALDs for members of HLAA-PA chapters and the general public with hearing loss. Contact the ALD Coordinator at [best@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:best@hlaa-pa.org).

## **TechOWL PA**

TechOWL PA is Pennsylvania’s Assistive Technology Act Program and is one of 56 programs in the nation. It has many programs that you could be eligible including Assistive Technology Lending Library, Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP) and iCanConnect.

**800-204-7428**

**[TechOWL@temple.edu](mailto:TechOWL@temple.edu)**

**[www.techowlpa.org](http://www.techowlpa.org)**

- **Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP)**

The TDDP program assists individuals with disabilities, including hearing loss, to access the phone. If you meet the eligibility requirements, you may qualify for a free phone, such as a captioned telephone (CapTel), an amplified phone, or a teletypewriter (TTY), or wireless devices.

**800-204-7428**

**[TechOWL@temple.edu](mailto:TechOWL@temple.edu)**

**[www.techowlpa.org](http://www.techowlpa.org)**

- **Assistive Technology Lending Library**

You may borrow assistive technology at no charge! The library has vibrating alarm clocks, amplified phones, visual signalers, and listening systems so you can enjoy conversations with your family and friends. One Size does not fit all; what works for your neighbor may not work for you. It creates partnerships with other organizations for people to contact the local knowledgeable staff and he/she can assist you in selecting equipment to meet your needs.

**800-204-7428**

**TechOWL@temple.edu**

[www.techowlpa.org/reep](http://www.techowlpa.org/reep)

- **iCanConnect**

The goal of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program is to ensure that every person with combined hearing and vision loss has access to modern telecommunication tools and the training necessary to use them, granting every individual the opportunity to interact with the world as an involved, contributing member of society.

**www.icanconnect.org**

**800-204-7428 or 866-268-0579 (TTY)**

**Email: iCanConnectPA@temple.edu**

<https://techowlpa.org/service/deafblind>

# Resources

There are many organizations that can provide you with hearing loss resources and support. ODHH encourages you to contact these organizations for further guidance.

## **Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell)**

AG Bell assists families, health care providers, and professionals to understand childhood hearing loss and the importance of early diagnosis and intervention. Through advocacy, education, research, and financial aid, AG Bell helps to ensure that every child and adult with hearing loss has the opportunity to listen, talk, and thrive in mainstream society.

**202-337-5220**

**[www.agbell.org](http://www.agbell.org)**

**[info@agbell.org](mailto:info@agbell.org)**

## **Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA)**

ALDA outreaches to late-deafened adults regardless of their mode of communication. ALDA gives adults with hearing loss the opportunity to socialize and accept their hearing loss. Also, ALDA is an advocate of visual communication, such as captioning and CART (Communication Assistance Realtime Translation).

**815-332-1515 v/tty**

**[www.alda.org](http://www.alda.org)**

**[info@alda.org](mailto:info@alda.org)**

## **Hearing Industries Association (Better Hearing)**

The Hearing Industries Association (HIA) was formed in 1955 and serves as a forum for hearing aid manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, and hearing health professionals. Our members are responsible for the majority of the over 3 million hearing aids that are purchased in the United States on an annual basis. Today, HIA remains the only association in America to represent hearing aid technology. The Association provides companies a unique platform to communicate on hearing health and technology issues.

**202-975-0905**

**[www.betterhearing.org](http://www.betterhearing.org)**

### **Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)**

HLAA is the nation's largest consumer and advocacy organization representing people with hearing loss, and has local support chapters throughout the country. Its mission is to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, advocacy, and support.

**301-657-2248**

**[www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org)**

- **The Hearing Loss Association of America–Pennsylvania State Office (HLAA-PA) Network Consumer Hearing Assistive Technology Trainers**

The HLAA-PA State Office provides hearing assistive technology demonstrations and presentations on how assistive listening devices operate and other available products people with hearing loss utilize including apps. The presentations enhance hearing aid and cochlear implant users. You can contact the certified Network Consumer Hearing Assistive Technology Trainers/N-CHATT; Bill Best ([best@hlaa-pa.org](mailto:best@hlaa-pa.org)). Demonstrations are held at HLAA chapters and to the general public (for a nominal fee) in Pennsylvania.

**[www.hlaa-pa.org](http://www.hlaa-pa.org)**

### **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)**

The mission of the NAD is to preserve, protect, and promote the civil, human, and linguistic rights of deaf and hard of hearing people in the United States of America.

**[www.nad.org](http://www.nad.org)**

- **Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD)**  
PSAD's mission is to maximize the participation and productivity of its deaf and hard of hearing citizens within the larger society of Pennsylvania through education, advocacy, and services.

**[www.psadweb.org](http://www.psadweb.org)**

### **PA Academy of Audiology (PAA)**

PAA is an organization for audiologists. However, consumers can find a local Pennsylvania-licensed audiologist as well as information about hearing and hearing loss.

**717-236-2050**

**[www.paaudiology.org](http://www.paaudiology.org)**

If you are interested in searching for more resources not listed in this packet, please visit **[www.dli.pa.gov/odhh](http://www.dli.pa.gov/odhh)**

Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) is an office within the Department of Labor & Industry. ODHH provides advocacy, is a clearing house of information, and makes referrals to providers and ensures these providers are communicatively accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. ODHH provides services to all Pennsylvanians, and there are no eligibility requirements to use our services.

ODHH has three offices in Pennsylvania. Please call our main office in Harrisburg to be connected to the representative closest to you.



**pennsylvania**

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY  
OFFICE FOR THE DEAF & HARD OF HEARING

**Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing**

**651 Boas Street, Room 700**

**Harrisburg, PA 17121**

**800-233-3008 v/tty (PA only)**

**717-783-4912 v/tty**

**717-831-1928 videophone**

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