

NJAHHP 2014-2015 Public Policy Agenda

Introduction:

NJAHHP's 2014-2015 Public Policy Agenda was developed and approved by the Association's Board and serves as an advocacy roadmap to promote the hearing health profession in New Jersey. The development of this plan is based on member input to ensure the State's consumers have access to quality hearing health care performed by trained and licensed hearing aid specialists and audiologists.

Expanding Access to Affordable Quality Hearing Healthcare

The number of individuals with reported hearing loss is growing in New Jersey (and across the nation), resulting in a greater need-and-demand for quality hearing care by licensed hearing health professionals. NJAHHP is aggressively working to improve access and affordability, while maintaining the highest standards in care, so that every New Jerseyean with hearing loss is able to receive the care they deserve and expect. To achieve these critical goals, NJAHHP is working on several different policy fronts.

State Level

Promoting Affordability: Hearing Aid Tax Credit (A-1108/S-1296)

NJAHHP supports A-1108/S-1296 which provides a refundable gross income tax credit of up to \$1,000 per hearing aid (adjusted annually for inflation). To qualify for the credit, the hearing aid must be prescribed or recommended by a state licensed audiologist or hearing aid dispenser; the patient must have resided in New Jersey for at least 12 months prior to the purchase; and the patient must have a gross income less than \$150,000.

A-1108 (Vainieri Huttle/Sumter)—Introduced on January 16, 2014 and referred to Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee. S-1296 (Allen)—Introduced February 25 and referred to the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee.

Maintaining the Highest Level of Professional Standards in Hearing Aid Dispensing

To ensure the health and safety of New Jersey patient consumers, NJAHHP supports maintaining the highest levels of professional standards for hearing aid specialists and audiologists to dispense and fit hearing aids. New Jersey's hearing aid licensing standards are among the most rigorous in the nation, requiring candidates to pass the International Licensing Examination, as well as a written examination addressing the State's laws and regulations and a hands-on practical evaluation of their competencies for hearing aid dispensing. This intensive licensing process ensures both hearing aid specialists and dispensing audiologists have the adequate training and highly-specialized knowledge to properly fit and dispense hearing aids to the state's consumers.

Educating Consumers about Dangers of Internet and Direct Sale of Hearing Aids

NJAHHP strongly opposes the direct sale of hearing aids over the Internet to New Jersey consumers, which threatens the quality, safety and satisfaction in hearing healthcare that the state's patient consumers deserve and expect. Countless studies show that patient satisfaction with hearing aid devices is directly related to comprehensive care from hearing specialists.

NJAHHP is educating consumers about the dangers and limitations of purchasing hearing aids over the Internet, while at the same time, encouraging the state to enact more stringent consumer protection regulations that would quell this hazardous practice in New Jersey. NJAHHP believes the state should be more proactive in warning patients about the pitfalls of purchasing hearing instruments via the Internet without prior fitting and testing by a hearing instrument specialist or dispensing audiologist.

Advocating for Fairer Insurance Reimbursement and Greater Patient Coverage

NJAHHP members know that hearing health professionals constantly face challenges working within the Medicare, Medicaid and private health care insurance systems. Health plans vary significantly in their coverage policies and reimbursement rates, resulting in fewer patients with hearing loss getting the care they need. NJAHHP is advocating for greater transparency in insurance coverage for hearing aids and supporting direct access so that patients can obtain these critical treatments service.

Federal Level:

Fit to Serve: Promoting Veterans' Access to Hearing Aid Specialists (H.R. 3508)

NJAHHP supports the International Hearing Society's 'Fit to Serve' campaign, which is advocating for the inclusion of hearing aid specialists in the US Veterans Administration health system. On November 15, 2013, Congressman Sean Duffy (R-WI) and Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN) introduced H.R. 3508, a bill that would grant the VA authority to lift restrictions on its fee-for-service policy and employ hearing instrument specialists to provide hearing health-care services to veterans at local facilities.

NJAHHP, in conjunction with IHS, encourages swift passage of H.R. 3508. Incorporating hearing aid specialists into the VA health system is long overdue and will create efficiencies, improve outcomes, and increase access to care for our Veterans.

Reducing the Cost of Care: Hearing Aid Assistance Tax Credit Act (H.R. 1317/S. 1694)

NJAHHP supports making hearing health care more affordable by providing a tax credit towards the purchase of hearing aids.

H.R. 1317 (Latham, McCarthy, Payne, Carter, Capuano, Schwartz and McKinley)—
Introduced March 21, 2013 and referred to House Committee on Ways and Means.

Provides a \$500 tax credit towards the purchase of a hearing aid per ear every five years for those with an adjusted gross income under \$200,000.

S. 1694 (Harkin/Heller)—Introduced on November 13, 2013 and referred to Senate Committee on Finance. Provides \$500 tax credit for one hearing aid per ear every five years with no restrictions.

Advancing Patient Safety: Quelling Internet and Direct –to-Consumer Hearing Aid Sales

NJAHHP supports the efforts of the International Hearing Society to quell the practice of internet and direct-to-consumer hearing aid sales, which threaten the health and safety of hearing healthcare patients. A few years ago, NJAHHP was at the forefront of pushing back on a policy that would have enabled a health insurance company to sell hearing aids over the Internet based on consumer-administered hearing tests performed on their personal at-home computers.

The Association will continue to stay engaged on this issue on the federal level, pointing to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and guidance documents relating to Internet and retail sales of hearing aids that highlight the dangers of purchasing the devices without counsel of hearing healthcare professionals. Moreover, NJAHHP encourages the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to provide strict oversight of deceptive advertising by sellers that skirt the necessary regulation of hearing aids by calling their product a "personal amplification device".