



FIT TO SERVE

Supporting Veterans' Access to Hearing Aid Specialists

Hearing Aid Specialists: *Ready to serve America's Veterans*

Hearing loss is a serious challenge faced by many of America's Veterans:

- According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the most prevalent service-connected disabilities for veterans receiving federal compensation in 2013 were tinnitus and hearing loss
- Studies have shown that hearing loss can lead to depression, strain relationships, heightened stress, cause fatigue, reduce income potential, contribute to other health conditions such as dementia or Alzheimer's, and make it difficult to maintain a career

The need for Veteran hearing healthcare is significant & continues to grow:

- Veterans who served between 2001-2010 are four times more likely than non-Veterans to suffer from hearing loss
- According to the VA, the number of outpatient audiology visits rose 36% from 2009 to 2012
- The number of hearing aids ordered per year by the VA increased 39% between 2009 and 2012
- Aging Veterans who suffered hearing loss in previous service periods are experiencing degenerative hearing at increasing rates, causing greater reliance on the VA for hearing healthcare

The VA hearing healthcare system is not meeting Veterans' needs:

- Many Veterans are purchasing hearing aids from local providers at their own expense rather than dealing with the VA due to:
 - Long wait times to get appointments
 - Extensive time spent traveling to the nearest VA clinic
 - Limited follow-up service
- Often Veterans are not receiving receive adequate training or follow-up care, which should include programming and fit adjustments, rehabilitation, and counseling to ensure success
- Currently, the VA can only hire audiologists to perform hearing evaluations and hearing aid related services for Veterans
- More hearing healthcare providers are needed to address the growing need for hearing-related services due to growing numbers of Veterans with hearing loss and because of the aging baby boomer generation; however, audiology programs are only producing 600 grads/year – not nearly enough to meet current and projected needs
- Audiologists are leaving the field at an alarming rate – student dropout is 33%, attrition rate for 41-50 year olds is 41%, and 44% question their career choice – this is on top of an existing shortage

Support S. 564/H.R. 3471 to improve Veterans' access to high-quality, convenient and timely hearing health care.

The International Hearing Society stands ready and qualified to offer effective, professional hearing healthcare for America's Veterans:

- 9,000+ hearing aid specialists, represented by IHS, stand ready to provide Veterans across the U.S with comprehensive hearing healthcare, including: hearing testing, determining candidacy for hearing aids, performing fittings, providing hearing aid recommendations, performing adjustments and repairs, taking ear impressions for ear molds, providing counseling and aural rehabilitation
- Hearing aid specialists are licensed and regulated by each state
- IHS' members are educated professionals who have undergone the appropriate training and licensing processes, including successful completion of
 - 1-2 year apprenticeship training period
 - 13-month distance learning course in hearing instrument sciences
 - Comprehensive written psychometric examination to test their knowledge, preparedness and competency
 - Practical examination to test clinical competency
 - Test of state and federal laws related to the fitting and sale of hearing aids
- The hearing aid specialist field is adding 800-1000 new professionals annually—growth that can offset the diminishing number of audiologists, ensuring that Veterans get the hearing healthcare they need

The International Hearing Society offers additional resources, which along with the VA, will better meet the needs of our Veterans:

- IHS recognizes and respects the hard-working men and women of the VA who serve our Veterans by providing hearing healthcare services, among many other healthcare needs.
- IHS wants to ensure that Veterans have ready access to timely, professional hearing healthcare, and is prepared to provide critical hearing aid services alongside our colleagues at the VA.
- Hearing testing and hearing aid services could be quickly and effectively offered to Veterans through IHS members serving as VA contractors, as they are located in rural and urban settings, cover most parts of the United States, and the vast majority perform home visits.

Supporters include AMVETS, American Legion, Blinded Veterans Association, Business Coalition for Fair Competition, Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance, International Hearing Society, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, National Guard Association of the United States, National Medical Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, The Retired Enlisted Association, Vietnam Veterans of America, Veterans Health Council, VetsFirst, and many state and local organizations



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