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**National Academies Releases Report on Importance of Proper Fitting and**

**Training for Hearing Devices**

American Academy of Audiology notes significance of report as Americans impacted by hearing loss hits record numbers.

**RESTON, Va., July 12, 2017—**A recently released report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *The Promise of Assistive Technology to Enhance Activity and Work Participation,* includes a chapter that highlights the importance to consumers in “working with providers trained in the use of properly prescribed and fitted hearing devices,” and states that those consumers “can expect better results than those who use off-the-shelf

products.” The chapter in the scientific report draws heavily on another recent report by the same organization, titled *Hearing Health Care in Adults.*

As the baby-boomer population ages, more Americans are forced to face hearing health challenges. According to the National Institutes of Health NIDCD, approximately 15 percent (37.5 million) of American adults aged 20 to 69 have some trouble with hearing and approximately 28.8 million could benefit from the use of hearing aids.

While age is still the greatest factor in hearing loss, many younger people also experience

hearing problems due to exposure to loud music and noises including occupational noise. Among

adults aged 70 and older with hearing loss who could benefit from hearing aids, fewer than one in three (30 percent) has ever used them. With adults aged 20 to 69 only approximately 16 percent of those who would benefit from hearing aids has ever used them.

Hearing loss is seen by many to have a stigma and for others, it’s just overlooked entirely. “Untreated hearing loss is attributable in many cases as the genesis for poor school performance in children and poor work performance in adults. It has been a factor in the loss of wages and promotions and has even been attributable to financial loss in contractual and financial agreements,” stated Ian M. Windmill, Ph.D., president of the American Academy of Audiology and clinical director in Audiology at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital.

The report focuses mainly on the prevalence of hearing loss, different types of hearing loss, the extent of hearing aid use and an in-depth discussion of the types of hearing-related technologies available to consumers. It also highlights key points that demonstrate the critical connection between proper fitting and training related to hearing devices and maximizing the performance of the device and the experience of the device user. The report states, “Unlike glasses that can correct vision loss, current hearing aids cannot correct or restore normal hearing. Instead, they improve the audibility of soft sounds such as speech or music and ensure that other audible sounds do not interfere by becoming too loud.”

The report concludes, “Qualified providers and clinics with the knowledge, skill and expertise to properly evaluate, prescribe, and train people in the use of hearing devices are needed. Proper fitting and training are complex but necessary elements of maximizing performance among users of hearing devices. Consumers who work with providers trained in the use of properly prescribed and fitted hearing devices can expect better results than those who use off-the-shelf products.”

As stated in the report, audiologists provide services that include identifying patients with hearing difficulties, assessing and diagnosing their hearing needs, treating their needs through hearing aid dispensing and/or habilitation, and educating patients and caregivers about hearing loss preventions. Audiologists have a doctoral-level degree and undergo rigorous educational and clinical training.

Conclusions in the report continue, “Even with advances in technology, hearing aids and other hearing assistive devices may help but do not fully mitigate impairments or restrictions on participation caused by hearing loss. Environmental and personal factors are as important

in determining the overall communicative functioning of individuals with hearing loss. The

establishment of objective measures of real-world communicative functioning is vital to promoting a better understanding of the effects on this functioning of audiometric hearing function and hearing devices.”

The report also addresses insurance coverage of hearing aids and states, “The widespread lack of insurance coverage for hearing devices and related services is an impediment to optimizing communicative functioning and maintaining gainful employment among adults with hearing loss.”

“Many people suffering from hearing loss don’t realize the benefit in seeing an audiologist who can effectively assess and diagnose hearing and balance needs and make hearing aid recommendations,” stated Windmill. “This scientific report serves as reinforcement to the important work of audiologists.”

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The American Academy of Audiology is the world's largest professional organization of, by and for audiologists. The active membership of more than 12,000 is dedicated to providing quality hearing care services through professional development, education, research, and increased public awareness of hearing and balance disorders. For more information or to find an audiologist, go to [www.howsyourhearing.org.](http://www.howsyourhearing.org/)