



**HIA SUPPORTS EFFORTS TO EXPAND HEARING AID USE
BUT CAUTIONS AGAINST “DO IT YOURSELF” APPROACH**

WASHINGTON, DC, DECEMBER 3, 2016 —The Hearing Industries Association (HIA) supports efforts to increase the accessibility and affordability of hearing aids, but expressed concerns about over the counter (OTC) hearing aids, which would be retailed without essential services including a proper hearing evaluation, fitting and follow-up, potentially putting the hearing health of consumers at risk, the association said in response to new legislation sponsored by Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Charles Grassley (R-IA).

“Addressing hearing loss is a priority for HIA and the U.S. health care system because we know that untreated hearing loss is a medical condition that is associated with more serious conditions, such as dementia, depression and anxiety,” said Carole Rogin, president of HIA.

The Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2016 would compel the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to allow OTC hearing aids. This will require consumers to self-diagnose both the cause and degree of their hearing loss, to purchase hearing aids without professional assistance, and then to adjust their hearing aids on their own. It would do so in spite of the fact that no studies have indicated that people can accurately self-diagnose either the cause or extent of their hearing loss. This is critical as all do-it-yourself (DIY) proposals acknowledge that such an approach is only appropriate for people with mild to moderate hearing loss related to aging. However, loss can be due to many other causes in addition to aging.

In addition, the FDA is in the midst of evaluating its hearing aid regulations, including a review of DIY proposals. It is critical that the results of this review not be pre-determined and dictated by Congress. HIA believes that current federal and state requirements for a trained hearing care professional to determine the nature and severity of the hearing loss, and to provide a proper diagnosis, fitting and follow-up prior to dispensing a hearing aid, optimizes outcomes for people with hearing loss.

Rogin pointed to a 2015 study that found that only 39 percent of hearing aid users were satisfied with their hearing aids in Japan, where hearing aids are widely sold OTC in jewelry, electronics and similar retail stores. Here in the U.S., 81 percent of users are satisfied with their hearing aids. Further, the hearing aid adoption rate is only 14 percent in Japan, compared to 30 percent in the U.S. Abandoning professional services leads to poorer outcomes and hence lower adoption rates.

“OTC and other DIY solutions have failed overseas, and we can’t afford to replicate such models for the 36 million Americans with hearing loss,” said Rogin.

HIA notes that access and affordability are already increasing due to the expansion of “disruptive” market forces already in play, such as hearing aid sales at Big Box stores, through Internet sales and increasing numbers of third-party payment programs, all of which include

the professional care inherent to successful adoption of hearing aids. These new channels have helped to significantly lower hearing aid prices and expand access.

“The Warren-Grassley bill has the right objectives, but the wrong solutions,” said Rogin. “Rather, we should increase efforts to educate consumers and primary care physicians about the importance of addressing hearing loss, including proper testing and evaluation – and continue to find new and innovative ways to deliver hearing aids.”

Specifically, HIA calls for:

- Primary care doctors to routinely screen patients over 60 for hearing loss and to refer patients with problems to a hearing care professional.
- The U.S. Congress should act on a tax credit advocated by the industry and groups representing people with hearing loss which would help people afford the hearing aids that they need.

About HIA

HIA, headquartered in Washington, DC, is the national trade association of manufacturers of hearing aids, implantable hearing devices, assistive listening devices, component parts and power sources for amplification devices. For more than 40 years, the HIA-funded Better Hearing Institute (BHI) has worked tirelessly to increase public awareness of the importance of hearing health and treating hearing loss. For decades HIA, through BHI, has been conducting research and educational outreach so people with hearing loss can benefit from proper treatment.

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