



# This Week in Bethesda

**MAY 5, 2017**

This is a weekly report from the HLAA national office in Bethesda, Maryland. Please also [sign up](#) for the online HLAA e-News where even more news is published.

## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you haven't already, you will soon be receiving a [letter from me](#) in the mail regarding our annual Spring Appeal. In that you will learn about how HLAA has a seat at the table whenever people with hearing loss are considered. And our involvement is more important now than ever as there are historic changes on the horizon for people with hearing loss.

HLAA is the most highly-respected organization representing consumers – that's you. We never forget that our ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of *people* with hearing loss. We have made great strides, but in some ways the work is just beginning.

As a self-supporting nonprofit organization, your continued support is critical to helping us achieve our goals. Please read the letter and consider a tax-deductible donation.

HLAA extends our deep appreciation to our incredible donors for supporting our mission.

With sincere gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Kelley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Barbara Kelley  
Executive Director

*P.S. You can also make a donation [online!](#)*



## IN THE NEWS

### Wall Street Journal Article Brings Greater Visibility to Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids

The *Wall Street Journal* published an article on May 1 called "Should Hearing Aids Be Sold Over-the-Counter?" The article highlights the need for more affordable and accessible hearing aids and also discusses the recent Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. HLAA Executive Director Barbara Kelley was interviewed for the article as was HLAA Member Patricia Holland of Waltham, Massachusetts. (Note: The online version of the article is for subscribers only, however you can link to it through the HLAA Twitter page ([@HLAA](#)) or find it on page A15 of the May 1 print edition).

### HLAA is a Hearing Loss Charity That is "Making an Impact"

[Healthy Hearing](#) recently published an article called "Hearing Loss Charities That Make an Impact." It might come as no surprise to our members that HLAA got top billing! The article states that the organizations on the list "...put hearing loss and its challenges front and center, raising money and awareness for this important cause." You can read the full article [here](#).

## ADVOCACY

### House Subcommittee Hearing Reviews the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017

On May 2, HLAA Executive Director Barbara Kelley, Director of Public Policy Lise Hamlin, and HLAA Public Policy Advisor Barry Kasinitz attended a hearing held by U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce [Subcommittee on Health](#) that reviewed four bills consistent with the committee's bipartisan efforts to support the review and regulation of medical devices as part of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) user fee reauthorization process. One of the bills discussed was the [Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 \(H.R. 1652\)](#). The meeting was chaired by Representative Michael C. Burgess, M.D. (R-TX), in a room with a hearing induction loop in the House Rayburn House Office Building.

Speaking in support of the bill, HLAA Board of Trustee Member [Frank Lin, M.D., Ph.D.](#), highlighted recent reports about hearing loss and some of the possible side effects people with hearing loss have a greater chance of experiencing.

Dr. Lin [testified](#), "These research studies also clearly suggest that hearing loss treatments such as using hearing aids and other forms of amplification could potentially





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decrease the risks and lead to real and tangible benefits for individuals, families, and society. And yet, presently, less than 20 percent of the nearly 38 million American adults with a significant hearing loss currently have access to hearing aids.”

Representatives Joe Kennedy III (D-Mass.) and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), who introduced the bill, questioned Dr. Jeff Shuren, director, FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health, and found that the FDA is in support of the bill as it is written.

The Hearing Industries Association (HIA), the national trade association of hearing aid manufacturers, also [testified](#), but spoke of limiting the bill.

More information can be found on the [Energy and Commerce website](#). (Note: there is a video of the hearing on the website but it is not captioned.)

## **It's a Call to Action – Your Voice Matters!**

HLAA has embarked on a campaign to support new legislation that, if passed, will change the face of hearing health care in America. And you can be part of it.

On March 21, the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017 (S. 670) was introduced in the Senate by U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and a companion bill (H.R. 1652) was introduced in the House by Representatives Joseph Kennedy III (D-Mass., 4th District) and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn., 7th District). The bipartisan legislation would make certain types of hearing aids available over the counter and remove unnecessary and burdensome requirements that currently create barriers for consumers who could benefit from hearing aids.

HLAA is asking for your help in sending Congress a message that passage of this bill would be life-changing for the millions of Americans who do not seek help for their hearing loss simply because they cannot afford it. We now have the power to influence Congress to change that. Contact your congressmen and let them know you support the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017. We have created a new section of our website dedicated to this issue. There is information there on how to contact your senator or representative, as well as sample letters you can use.

Every individual voice matters. And, as they say, there's strength in numbers. Along with all HLAA members, we are calling on all our chapters and state associations to mobilize and advocate for this groundbreaking legislation. Lise Hamlin, HLAA director of public policy, might reach out to you individually where we need to target specific legislators.



Executive Director Barbara Kelley said, "HLAA is the only one representing consumers on Capitol Hill. Every time we meet with the staff of a senator or representative, they are thankful we came to discuss the issues people with hearing loss have in getting affordable hearing health care. We are taken seriously and they are reaching out to us in addition to us reaching out to them. They have asked that we get our HLAA members in their congressional districts to write letters and take action. Over the next several weeks, Lise Hamlin will be reaching out to individuals and chapters where we need the most help. In the meantime, every voice matters. Please consider contacting your member of Congress. Thank you."

You can find more information – including information on how to contact Congress – at [hearingloss.org/content/call-to-action-otc](http://hearingloss.org/content/call-to-action-otc). If ever there was a time to get more involved, now is it!

## **HLAA BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

### **Meg Wallhagen to Receive Distinguished Researcher Award**

The University of Washington (UW) School of Nursing has awarded [Meg Wallhagen, Ph.D.](#), chairperson of the HLAA Board of Trustees, the 2017 Distinguished Researcher Award. The award recognizes "...an individual whose research, professional achievements and cumulative contributions have brought personal distinction, enhanced the profession, improved the welfare of the general public and brought honor and prestige to his or her field." Meg received her doctorate from the University of Washington School of Nursing in Seattle.

Meg commented, "I am truly honored by the award but the reason that I especially value and am appreciative of the award is that, in giving it, they highlighted my work in hearing loss and contributions in that area - and that's so often not acknowledged!"

Meg will be presented the award at the annual UW School of Nursing Nurses Recognition Banquet on May 10. Congratulations, Meg!

### **Kelly Tremblay and Meg Wallhagen to Present at Care Transitions Conference**

As if May 10 is not already busy enough for Meg, she will also be presenting that day at the [Care Transitions: We're All in It Together Conference](#), hosted by Aging and Disability Services, a division of the Seattle Human Services Department. Meg will be presenting along with HLAA Board of Trustee Member [Kelly Tremblay, Ph.D.](#) Kelly and Meg's [presentation](#), "Age-Related Hearing Loss: Innovated Changes in Practice and Policy," will focus on several topics related to hearing loss, including policy issues such as the





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National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine [report](#) and the [Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017](#).

## HLAA MEMBERS IN ACTION

### **HLAA Member Janice Armigo Brown Plays a Key Role in Pilot Project to Loop California's Bay Area Rapid Transit System**

The Bay Area Rapid Transit System – known as “BART” – is now one step closer to being more hearing accessible thanks in part to HLAA Member Janice Armigo Brown. Janice is a member of BART’s [Accessibility Task Force](#), a group that advises the Board of Directors on disability-related issues and advocates on behalf of people with disabilities to make BART more accessible. The Task Force undertook an initiative to have hearing loops installed in BART stations. Their hard work is paying off, and a pilot project is in the works to make it a reality. A hearing loop is currently being installed in the Fremont Station with work to be completed later in the spring. You can read more about the project [here](#). Well done, Janice – keep up the good work!

We know many HLAA members represent people with hearing loss through various roles and positions in their communities and states. If you are working on behalf of people with hearing loss in your community we’d love to [hear from you!](#)

