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Aging America & Hearing Loss: Imperative of Improved Hearing Technologies



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PCAST Aging and Technology Study Full Working Group

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Urgent Need to Improve Hearing

- Major health and social problem
- Growing importance with aging population
- Few adults with hearing loss use hearing aids (~15-30%)



Barriers to Wider Use of Hearing Technologies

- Cost of technology (~\$2400 per hearing aid)
- Complexity of access
- Social stigma and limited consumer awareness
- Lack of engagement by health providers



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Problem Ripe for Change

- IOM/NAM recently initiated major study.
- PCAST believes a few key Federal actions now could give momentum to needed changes.



Goals of Hearing Report

- Reduce cost to consumers
- Increase the number of people who use technology
- Stimulate innovation and technology development



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Hearing Challenge: Cost

- Unlike other electronics, technical advances have not reduced cost.
- Technology itself is not that costly, with several groups selling hearing aids at lower cost (e.g., VA, Costco)
- Consumer electronics solutions (e.g., PSAPs) available at lower cost



Hearing Challenge: Consumer Shopping

- Need to allow consumers to shop for best value
- Make internet shopping more accessible
- Allow new entrants into market more easily



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Is Medical Evaluation Always Necessary?

- Small risk of unusual medical conditions, while tens of millions have untreated hearing loss.
- Opportunity to increase access to basic technology for mild to moderate hearing loss, like reading glasses.
- Continue to encourage people with severe hearing loss to see professional.



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Path forward

- PCAST analysis finds a few key changes in Federal regulations could accelerate needed changes in access to effective hearing technology.
- Open up the market to lower cost and promote innovation.
- Allow consumer-driven solutions where medical risk is very low.
- Reduce stigma and dramatically improve function.



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