

American Academy of Audiology  
Position Statement

**Audiology Assistants**

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# American Academy of Audiology Position Statement

## **Audiology Assistants**

### **Task Force Members**

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## INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

This position statement defines the function of audiology assistants. It provides guidance on the education and training, duties and responsibilities, patient care and safety, and the requisite supervision of assistants. The statement is intended for use by audiologists, consumers of audiological services, and persons seeking to become assistants. It is intended to be used as a guide for issues involving audiology assistants and to serve as a reference for issues of service delivery, third-party reimbursement, legislation, consumer education, regulatory action, state licensure and registration, and inter-professional relations. The background and rationale for the findings are reported in the Task Force Report (American Academy of Audiology, 2010).

Audiology is poised to experience an expansion in need for audiologic services. The appropriate use of assistants positions the profession to meet the expanding needs for patient care in a cost-effective manner, without compromising patient care.

It is the purpose of this statement to define the role of the audiology assistant in supporting audiologists in the delivery of audiologic services under the supervision of a licensed audiologist. It is incumbent upon the audiologist and audiology assistant to be knowledgeable of their respective state licensure laws. This statement is not meant in any way to negate or supersede the authority of a state to regulate the use of audiology assistants.

## DEFINITION

An audiology assistant is a person who, after appropriate training and demonstration of competency, performs delegated duties and responsibilities that are directed and supervised by an audiologist. The role of the assistant is to support the audiologist in performing routine tasks and duties so that the audiologist is available for the more complex evaluative, diagnostic, management and treatment services that require the education and training of a licensed audiologist.

## POSITION STATEMENT

It is the position of the American Academy of Audiology that audiology assistants are important to the future of this profession and they can provide valuable support to audiologists in the delivery of quality services to patients. The duties and responsibilities of audiology assistants should be delegated only by supervising audiologists. The supervising audiologist maintains the legal and ethical responsibilities for all assigned activities that the audiology assistant provides. The needs of the consumer of audiology services and protection of the patient must always be paramount. Licensed audiologists, by virtue of their education and training, are the appropriate and only qualified professionals to supervise and train audiology assistants.

## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Academy's Code of Ethics, Rule 2D states:

"Individuals shall provide appropriate supervision and assume full responsibility for services delegated to supportive personnel. Individuals shall not delegate any service requiring professional competence to unqualified persons."

The duties and responsibilities assigned to an audiology assistant will be based on the training, available supervision and practice setting. These duties and responsibilities may be further regulated by the limits imposed by state law. The scope of practice of the supervising audiologist will also dictate the duties and responsibilities assigned to the assistant. The purpose of the audiology assistant is to improve access to patient care by increasing availability of audiologic services; increasing productivity by reducing wait times and enhancing patient satisfaction; and reducing costs by enabling assistants to perform tasks that do not require the skills of a licensed audiologist. Some duties and responsibilities require direct supervision and some require indirect supervision.

The duties and responsibilities of the audiology assistant must be limited to those that do not require professional judgment. Examples of the types of services an assistant can perform (after appropriate training and demonstration of competency) include equipment maintenance, hearing aid repair, neonatal screening, preparation of patient for electro-physiologic and balance testing, hearing conservation air-conduction hearing evaluation and assisting the audiologist in testing. Record-keeping, assisting in clinical research, clerical duties and other administrative support functions can be delegated to the assistant after full and complete training and delineation of supervisory needs by the audiologist. It would not be appropriate to assign to an assistant the evaluation of patients, even when the audiology assistant does not make the diagnosis or interpret results, and it is noted that Medicare will not reimburse for diagnostic services provided by an audiology assistant. Independent adjustment of hearing aid settings would similarly not be appropriate.

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING, PATIENT CARE, AND SAFETY

The minimal educational background for an audiology assistant should be a high school diploma, or equivalent, and competency-based training. In addition, audiologists are to consult their state's licensure or registration laws as they pertain to audiology assistants.

Formalized training programs, which have regimented instructional sequences, and which utilize an audiologist in the hands-on training of the assistant, are an efficient means of training an audiology assistant. Because of the diversity in the duties and responsibilities that states allow an assistant to conduct, audiologists should evaluate training programs to determine if they cover the full proposed duties and responsibilities. The audiologist should examine whether the training system teaches tasks that are not allowed by their state licensing body, or are not appropriate in the practice setting, or are not tasks that the audiologist expects to delegate, and if so, determine whether those modules may be omitted. Use of a formal training program may be efficient, as it reduces the audiologist's time teaching concepts; however, regardless of the training system used, the audiologist remains responsible for ensuring that the assistant is competent in the assigned tasks.

The audiologist who employs and/or supervises audiology assistants shall maintain legal and ethical responsibility for all services provided by the assistants.

Training provided by a supervising audiologist should include specific instruction and demonstration of each task the assistant is to perform and continuous, direct observation by the audiologist until the assistant demonstrates competency with the task. The assistant will not perform any task with less than direct supervision until the audiologist determines the assistant is fully competent.

The audiology assistant shall engage only in those duties and responsibilities that are planned, delegated and supervised by the audiologist. The audiology assistant should be clearly identified as an assistant by means of a name tag or similar identification. Disclosure (oral or written) should be provided to patients, as appropriate. Individual state licensing laws may have additional requirements.

## SUPERVISION

While an assistant may support more than one audiologist within a practice, one state-licensed audiologist should be designated as the person ultimately responsible for the assistant and accept the primary role in the clinical, technical and administrative actions related to audiology assistants. It is the position of the Academy that services provided by an audiology assistant will be delegated by and supervised by the state-licensed audiologist. Tasks assigned must not extend beyond the defined range of knowledge and skills of the assistant.

Once the assistant is considered appropriately trained, the supervising audiologist should determine the level of day-to-day supervision and develop a monitoring strategy to help the assistant maintain accurate knowledge and skill level for his or her position. The audiologist will also determine the need for ongoing training to update the assistant's skill set and/or introduction of new procedures, techniques and treatment options.

The number of assistants supervised by one audiologist will be in concert with the provision of highest quality patient care. At all times, the supervising audiologist should hold paramount the needs of the patient and entrust to the assistant only those services for which they are qualified.

## REFERENCES

American Academy of Audiology. "Audiology Assistant Task Force Report" (2010). *Audiology Today* 22(3):68–73.

American Academy of Audiology. "Position Statement on Audiologist's Assistants" (2006). *Audiology Today* 18(2):27–28.