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For Immediate Release  
May 24, 2012

### **State Health Officials Urged to Alert Consumers to the Potential Risks of Buying Hearing Aids without Being Evaluated by a Licensed Hearing Healthcare Professional**

National and international professional organizations dedicated to hearing healthcare have sent letters to state health departments urging officials to alert consumers to the potential risks of purchasing hearing aids over-the-counter or through the Internet without first obtaining a comprehensive hearing evaluation by a licensed hearing healthcare professional.

“We are writing you today to ask for your assistance in advising consumers who suspect that they have hearing loss to seek a comprehensive hearing evaluation by a licensed hearing healthcare professional prior to purchasing hearing aids over-the-counter or through the Internet,” the letter states.

The letter—signed by the Academy of Doctors of Audiology, the American Academy of Audiology, the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and the International Hearing Society—notes that May has been designated as Better Hearing and Speech Month, providing an excellent opportunity for communicating the information.

“The potential risks that result from the omission of a comprehensive hearing evaluation and treatment by a licensed hearing healthcare professional include failure to detect an underlying medical cause of the hearing loss, additional hearing loss as a result of improper fitting and/or programming of hearing aids, and ear trauma sustained as the result of improper fitting and/or insertion of ear molds or hearing aids.”

“Hearing aid sales and delivery models that circumvent the hearing healthcare professional also pose financial risks to consumers because they are more likely to purchase unnecessary or inappropriate devices.”

The goal is for all states to issue a statement similar to one released by the Minnesota Department of Health stressing the importance of seeing a hearing healthcare practitioner for hearing loss and advised that failure to do so “skirts state and federal legal protections and could result in harm.”

In February, the five organizations issued a statement that highlighted both the “health and efficacy concerns about the use of consumer-administered hearing tests and the direct sale of hearing aids to the consumer without the involvement of a licensed hearing health professional – an audiologist, hearing aid

specialist, or otolaryngologist.” The statement further noted that a medical evaluation by a licensed physician is also recommended for adults prior to a hearing aid purchase.

For more information on the Minnesota Department of Health statement:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2011/hearing102611.html>. A sample letter and the February 9, 2012, Joint Statement are included after About Us.

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About Us:

**Academy of Doctors of Audiology**

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**American Academy of Audiology**

[www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org)

[www.HowsYourHearing.org](http://www.HowsYourHearing.org) Consumer Web site

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**American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery**

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**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

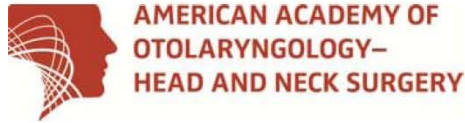
[www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

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**International Hearing Society**

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May 15, 2012

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

We are writing you today to ask for your assistance in advising consumers who suspect that they have hearing loss to seek a comprehensive hearing evaluation by a licensed hearing healthcare professional prior to purchasing hearing aids over-the-counter or through the Internet. National and international professional organizations dedicated to hearing healthcare issued the attached joint statement in February 2012 related to this issue. The statement highlights both the “health and efficacy concerns about the use of consumer-administered hearing tests and the direct sale of hearing aids to the consumer without the involvement of a licensed hearing health professional – an audiologist, hearing aid specialist, or otolaryngologist.” The joint statement further notes that a medical evaluation by a licensed physician is also recommended for adults prior to a hearing aid purchase.

The potential risks that result from the omission of a comprehensive hearing evaluation and treatment by a licensed hearing healthcare professional include failure to detect an underlying medical cause of the hearing loss, additional hearing loss as a result of improper fitting and/or programming of hearing aids, and ear trauma sustained as the result of improper fitting and/or insertion of ear molds or hearing aids. Hearing aid sales and delivery models that circumvent the hearing healthcare professional also pose financial risks to consumers because they are more likely to purchase unnecessary or inappropriate devices.

There are many possible causes of hearing loss including: aging, cerumen impaction, ear infection, genetic disorders, head injury, ototoxic medication, Meniere’s Disease, noise exposure, otosclerosis, and acoustic/vestibular tumors. Some of these conditions may require referral for medical or surgical intervention; however, individuals who purchase hearing aids through the Internet or over-the-counter will not have the benefit of the licensed hearing healthcare provider to identify any potential problems prior to purchase.

Many state laws also recognize the importance of consumer protection and safety by placing restrictions on the dispensing of hearing aids by direct mail and/or the Internet. On October 26, 2011, the Minnesota Department of Health released a statement stressing the importance of seeing a hearing healthcare

practitioner for hearing loss and advised that failure to do so “skirts state and federal legal protections and could result in harm.”

It is our hope that \_\_\_\_\_state of department of health will issue a similar notice to consumers in your state. As you may know, the month of May has been designated nationally as Better Hearing and Speech Month and will provide an excellent opportunity for you to communicate this important information to your constituents.

Please contact us anytime if we can be of service in providing additional information and resources about this important issue.

Thank you in advance for your consideration,

**Academy of Doctors of Audiology**

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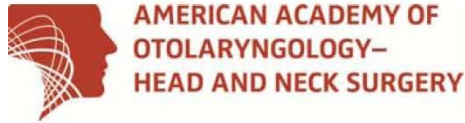
**American Speech-Language-Hearing  
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**Enclosure:** Joint Statement on Consumer-Administered Hearing Tests and Direct-to-Consumer Hearing Aid Sales



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## **Joint Statement on Consumer-Administered Hearing Tests and Direct-to-Consumer Hearing Aid Sales**

**February 9, 2012**

The Academy of Doctors of Audiology (ADA), American Academy of Audiology (AAA), American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), and International Hearing Society (IHS) stand together, committed to increasing awareness of the benefits of amplification, and to finding safe and effective solutions that help the 75% of consumers who could benefit from hearing aids but cannot afford to purchase them or have chosen not to use them.

While we appreciate the desire of persons, companies, and organizations to reach more individuals in need of hearing aids, our organizations believe that patients must have access to a comprehensive hearing evaluation performed by a hearing health professional, be appropriately fitted by an individual licensed/registered in the state to dispense hearing aids, and have access to auditory rehabilitation and counseling to ensure appropriate fit and use of the hearing aid device. We urge all persons, companies, and organizations who are interested in assisting patients to work with the hearing health community in ensuring that patients have access to the professional services of all qualified hearing health professionals.

Federal and state laws related to the dispensing of a hearing aid are currently in place to protect and ensure consumer safety. Regulations issued by the Food and Drug Administration require that patients under the age of 18 receive a medical evaluation by a licensed physician prior to the purchasing of a hearing aid from a dispenser. A medical evaluation by a licensed physician is also recommended for adults prior to a hearing aid purchase. Many state laws also recognize the importance of consumer protection and safety by placing restrictions on the dispensing of hearing aids by direct mail and/or the internet.

All of our organizations have both health and efficacy concerns about the use of consumer-administered hearing tests and the direct sale of hearing aids to the consumer without the involvement of a licensed hearing health professional – an audiologist, hearing aid specialist, or otolaryngologist. We encourage our respective members and other hearing health care providers to work collaboratively to ensure patient safety and enhance consumer protections related to the purchase of hearing aids and related devices.