



## **For Employers: Information & Resources for HR Departments**

### **Demographics**

The latest 2008 study released from Johns Hopkins shows 55 million people between the ages of 20-69 with hearing loss in the US. This is epidemic proportions. The chances therefore are very likely that most companies have employees with hearing loss. Due to stigma it is questionable whether they will self identify.

### **The Need for Health Insurance Coverage**

Hearing loss is not curable. The main treatment option today is hearing aids that are frequently not offered under health insurance plans and individuals have to purchase them out of pocket. For people with severe to profound hearing loss cochlear implants that are usually covered by health insurance are increasingly popular and effective. Employers should offer health insurance coverage in its basic benefit package for hearing screening, audiology services and hearing aids.

### **Non Discrimination in the Workplace on the Basis of Hearing Loss**

Federal Law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title 1, protects qualified employees with hearing loss from discrimination on the basis of disability in hiring, promotion and staying on the job. The regulating agency is the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission <http://www.eeoc.gov>. To view the EEOC document Deafness and Hearing Impairments in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act go to <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/ada.html>

### **Company Policy**

A written policy on non-discrimination of employees with hearing loss and other disabilities should be in place and managers and anyone in a hiring position should be aware of and practice this policy. A stated policy from the highest levels of management also "makes it safe" for employees to self-disclose. Employees with hearing loss typically are hesitant to disclose their hearing loss for fear of threatening their job and their being seen as less capable. With appropriate reasonable accommodations, as covered under the ADA, qualified employees with hearing loss will be productive members of the team.

### **Impact of Hearing Loss on Employees**

Employees with hearing loss are frequently underemployed and/or retire early due to a lack of knowledge about accessibility solutions and/or an unwillingness to request them. The psychosocial impact of difficulty in communicating impacts relationships with co-workers and supervisors unless an open, informed and inclusive policy about accessibility for employees with hearing loss is understood and practiced by employees at all levels.

## **Reasonable Accommodations**

Today we are surrounded by mainstream technology such as email, IM, PDAs, visual paging, Wiki sites – visual and text options for communicating that make for accessibility tools for employees with hearing loss. In addition there is an array of assistive technology, strategies, job restructuring that are all examples of reasonable accommodations under the ADA that provide workplace access for employees with hearing loss. For more information about hearing assistance technology in the workplace go to:

<http://www.hearingloss.org/hat>

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/accessforall/hearing.htm>

[http://www.assistivetech.net/at\\_reports/assistive\\_listening\\_devices.php](http://www.assistivetech.net/at_reports/assistive_listening_devices.php)

<http://www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib072205.html>

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/fact.html>

Job Accommodations Network, 1-800-526-7234 V/TTY, <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

The Job Accommodations Network is a database of workplace accessibility applications for all types of disabilities – how to do it and what it costs. It is a valuable third party resource available to employers and employees when an accessibility situation arises on-the-job that needs a solution.