

International Hearing Access Committee



Telecoil and Hearing Loop Obsolescence 10-15 years and beyond

The International Hearing Access Committee (IHAC) aims to estimate the timeframe of the transition from existing telecoil audio transmission via hearing loops (HL) and other assistive listening systems (ALS) to a platform of digital audio streaming directly into hearing instruments.

Hearing instrument users require continued quality hearing access in public places which is currently provided by telecoils (TC) and HL/ALS. IHAC recognizes the European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (EHIMA) has taken serious steps since 2014 to develop a standard hearing aid profile (HAP) for Bluetooth connectivity.¹ This will ultimately permit direct streaming of high-quality stereo audio signals into hearing instruments. EHIMA admits this process is taking longer than expected.

Consumer organizations,² while excited about what the future will bring, are concerned that premature announcements will discourage research in TCs and lead to HL/ALS neglect and abandonment before such a new technology is fully matured and carefully evaluated by end users.

While an accurate estimate of the timeframe of a worldwide transition from analog to a digital audio streaming system cannot currently be made, it is reasonable to believe that TC, HL/ALS usage will **continue for the next 10-15 years and beyond.**

The rights of users to communication access must be continued and maintained during this period of technological change. End users should not be compromised by the promise or an overly optimistic timeframe for adoption and expectations of a future technology development.

Communication access via telecoils

Telecoils are designed to improve communication access for people with hearing loss³ in venues where distance, reverberation and background noise prevent comprehension.

Telecoil Advantages for hearing instrument aid users

- ease of use by people of all ages
- availability in nearly all hearing devices
- affordability, no cost to users beyond the price of the hearing aid
- energy efficiency, little or no battery drain
- universality, any TC can connect to any ALS. No matter their brand of HA or brand of ALS
- very low latency, which is important in real-time events.

Telecoil Disadvantages

- have only 1 channel, no stereo
- are sensitive to electromagnetic interferences.

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¹ <https://hearinghealthmatters.org/hearingnewswatch/2014/hearing-industry-seeks-new-wireless-standard-hearing-aids-t-coil-advocates-say-fast/>

² International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, Hearing Loss Association of America and European Federation of Hard of Hearing

³ www.access-board.gov/research/completed-research/large-area-assistive-listening-systems/1-introduction

International Hearing Access Committee



Membership

Andrew Thomas, chair, International Hearing Loop Manufacturers Association (IHLMA)

Aida Regel Poulsen, general secretary, European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH)

Dr. Ruth Warick, president, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH)

Avi Blau, vice-president, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People

Dr. Hans Seidler, German Hearing Loss Association (DSB)

Dr. Juliette Sterkens, Hearing Loop Advocate, Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)

Dr. Rob Drullman, secretary, European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (EHIMA) Technical Committee

History

Formation of the International Hearing Access Committee (IHAC) was proposed at the 4th International Accessibility Conference on Hearing Loops, Berlin, Germany, October 6-8, 2017. The Committee was established in 2018 and has held three online meetings

Purpose

1. foster understanding and increase awareness of the benefits of sound and assistive listening systems for persons with hearing loss with particular attention paid to hearing loop technology
2. further development and continued improvement in hearing instruments and the availability of hearing loop technology
3. foster improved telecoil function and innovation
4. raise awareness of the benefits of telecoils among the providers in the hearing industry.

Objectives

1. develop a worldwide strategic plan for the development and promotion of hearing technology including hearing loop technology
2. develop a mapping plan of existing technology and resources
3. assist IFHOH in the planning for the next Future Loops and Technology event/conference.

Scope

The scope of the work is recognized to encompass a wide audience:

1. consumers and advocates
2. audiologists, hearing aid and cochlear implant industry providers
3. architects, sound engineers, audio/visual designers and installers
4. facilities covered by disability laws and accessibility committees
5. manufacturers of assistive listening systems and others interested in this technology.