



January 17, 2019

Healthy People 2030 Advisory Committee
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

RE: Proposing A New Core Objective for Healthy People 2030

Dear Advisory Committee Members:

The American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACI Alliance) appreciates the opportunity to submit a proposal for a new core objective for Healthy People 2030. ACI Alliance is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to advance the gift of hearing provided by cochlear implantation (CI) and other implantable prosthetic hearing implants through research, advocacy and awareness. The membership includes clinicians who provide the CI intervention (e.g., ENT surgeons, audiologists, speech language pathologists, other professionals on implant teams including educators of deaf children, psychologists, researchers, adult cochlear implant recipients, parents of children with cochlear implants and other advocates. The organization seeks to ensure appropriate access to, and quality of, clinical care relating to cochlear implantation and other auditory technologies.

Impact of Untreated Hearing Loss in Older Adults

Untreated or undertreated hearing loss in older adults is a growing health crisis in the United States that can be positively addressed with use of appropriate hearing technology. Hearing loss impacts all races, all genders, all socio-economic classes and is a world-wide issue. In 2010, hearing loss was the 11th leading contributor of living with a disability. Now it is estimated to be number four (Wilson et al., *Global Hearing Healthcare: New Findings & Perspectives*, 2017). It is projected that the number of adults with hearing loss will double over the next four decades.

Without intervention with appropriate hearing assistive technology, adults with untreated or undertreated hearing loss may experience a downward trajectory in quality of life. Not only does it impact communication and socialization, hearing loss also has comorbidities with increase chance of falls and dementia. Adults with untreated hearing loss have a 20% higher chance of an early death (Genther et al., 2014).

The financial impact of adult hearing loss is growing. In 2002, lost productivity attributed to hearing loss was \$1.4 billion; this is expected to grow to \$9 billion by 2030 (Stucky, Wolf & Kuo, 2010).

In light of the social and economic impact of untreated or undertreated hearing loss, American Cochlear Implant Alliance makes the following proposal for a new core objective:

To increase patient referrals for appropriate hearing intervention by primary care physicians by raising awareness of the associated health effects of undertreatment via medical and continuing education.

Fewer than 15% of primary care doctors perform any sort of hearing assessment as part of regular patient care (Kochkin 2009). Most primary care physician are unaware of when or how to refer a patient for a cochlear implant (CI) are an option for those who no longer sufficiently benefit from hearing aids. Few medical schools provide training on the CI intervention so even recent medical school graduates are unaware of when to make a referral. (Sorkin DL. Cochlear implantation in the world's largest medical device market: Utilization and awareness of cochlear implants in the United States. *Cochlear Implants International*, Vol 14, Supplement 1, March 2013).

Recommendations

- Increase awareness of the full scope of comorbidities associated with untreated or undertreated hearing loss via medical and continuing education.
- Develop and disseminate clinical guidance documents such as that on cochlear implant referrals <https://www.acialliance.org/page/AdultCandidacy>

Please contact us at dsorkin@acialliance or nwestin@acialliance.org should you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Donna Sorkin
Executive Director

Nichole Westin
Government Policy Manager