

JOINT RELEASE FROM THE AMERICAN COCHLEAR IMPLANT ALLIANCE (ACI ALLIANCE)
AND THE HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (HLAA)
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Congressmen Tom Barrett and Mike Thompson Receive Inaugural Champion for Hearing Health
Award at World Hearing Day Reception on Capitol Hill

Bipartisan co-chairs of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus honored for their leadership
advancing hearing care access for veterans and all Americans

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACI Alliance) and the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) presented the inaugural Champion for Hearing Health Award to Congressman Tom Barrett (R-MI) and Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA) at a World Hearing Day reception on Capitol Hill, supported by Cochlear. The award recognizes outstanding congressional leadership in advancing hearing health policy and expanding access to hearing care for all Americans.

As bipartisan co-chairs of the Congressional Hearing Health Caucus, Congressmen Barrett and Thompson have been instrumental in raising the profile of hearing health in Congress and advocating for policies that improve access to hearing care and technology. Both are military veterans who bring personal conviction to this work: Rep. Barrett served 22 years in the U.S. Army with multiple combat deployments, and Rep. Thompson, a Purple Heart recipient, served with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam and has hearing loss related to his military service. Rep. Thompson has championed legislation to expand access to audiology services and add hearing benefits under Medicare.

The award comes at a critical moment for hearing health in America. Hearing loss is one of the most common service-connected disabilities among U.S. veterans, with more than 1.5 million veterans receiving VA disability compensation for hearing loss. Veterans are 30 percent more likely than non-veterans to have severe hearing impairment. Beyond the veteran community, approximately 48 million Americans experience some degree of hearing loss, yet only about one in five who would benefit from hearing aids uses them, and just 5–6 percent of those who could benefit from a cochlear implant have received one.

World Hearing Day, observed annually on March 3 and organized by the World Health Organization, provides a global platform to raise awareness of hearing loss and promote access to hearing care. The 2026 theme focuses on hearing care for children, while the reception celebrates hearing health leadership across all populations, with a particular focus on the veteran community given the close ties with both honorees.

The reception, held at the Cannon House Office Building, featured a lived-experience address by William Howard, a veteran and cochlear implant recipient, and remarks from Executive Director of ACI Alliance, Donna Sorkin and Executive Director of HLAA, Barbara Kelley who both presented the awards alongside Howard. The event brought together congressional leaders, hearing health advocates, clinicians, and industry stakeholders.