

Statement in Support of the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017

We are pleased to join a bipartisan group of our House colleagues to support the *Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017*, which would increase access to affordable hearing aids by giving consumers new options, increasing competition, and removing unnecessary barriers to innovative technology.

The time to increase access to affordable hearing technology is now. Hearing loss in older adults is widespread. More than two-thirds of people in their seventies have hearing loss, and that figure jumps to nearly ninety percent of people over the age of 80. Indeed, the risk of hearing loss in older adults is about 10 to 20 times higher than the risk of heart disease – and 100 times higher than the risk of cancer. Untreated hearing loss can be socially isolating, and is associated with serious health conditions such as cognitive decline, falls, and depression.

And recent research from the CDC finds that about 1 in 4 American adults who report excellent to good hearing already have some form of irreversible hearing loss without knowing it, meaning the need for hearing aids will only grow over time as these individuals age and as seniors make up an increasingly large share of our population.

Unfortunately, only 14 percent of the roughly 48 million Americans with hearing loss use a hearing aid – and cost is a major reasons for this treatment gap. The average cost of one hearing aid is more than \$2,000, and most people need two devices.

The *Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act* implements recommendations made by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and creates an FDA-regulated category of hearing aids that would be available directly to consumers. The legislation has been endorsed by consumer and senior groups, hearing health practitioners, and hearing loss advocates.

Hearing aids shouldn't be a luxury only available to those who can afford steep out-of-pocket costs. This bill is a commonsense, bipartisan approach to bringing down costs, loosening up outdated regulations, and improving hearing healthcare, and we urge continued support for it in both chambers of Congress.

Senator Elizabeth Warren
Senator Chuck Grassley
Senator Margaret Wood Hassan
Senator Johnny Isakson