

# NEW Washington State Law Helps People with Hearing Loss Choose the Best Hearing Aid to Maintain Lifestyle

## Good News for Hearing Aid Consumers

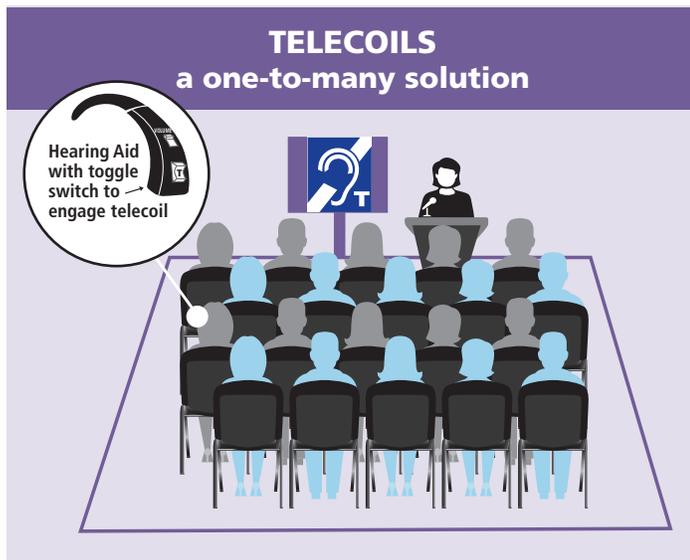
In April 2019, Governor Inslee signed into law Senate Bill 5210. This law requires any person who engages in fitting or dispensing hearing aids to inform their customers – prior to fitting – about the uses, benefits, and limitations of current hearing assistive technologies, considering solutions that are compatible with the public Assistive Listening Systems required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

**This law helps consumers choose the best hearing aid product to help maintain their independence, and to stay engaged, connected and healthy.**

**Currently, telecoils are the only hearing assistive technology that meets the requirements of this new law.**

## What Is a Telecoil?

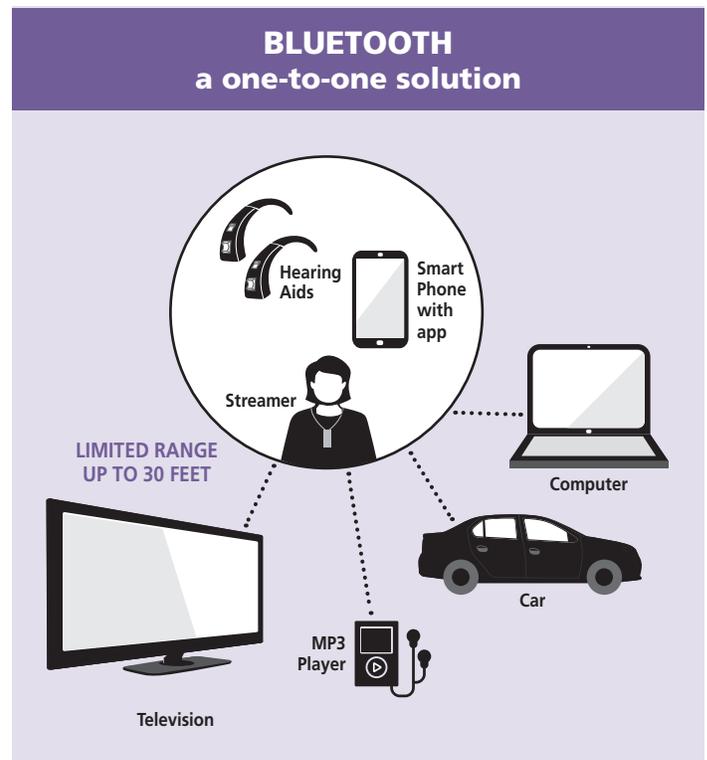
An essential feature in hearing aids and cochlear implants, **telecoils enable people to wirelessly connect to Assistive Listening Systems in public venues with their hearing devices.** When coupled with an Assistive Listening System, telecoils eliminate background noise and increase comprehension. Telecoils work with all ADA mandated Assistive Listening Systems: hearing loops<sup>1</sup>, FM and Infrared. People with hearing aids must have a telecoil enabled device – and know how to use it – in order to effectively connect to these systems.



In its simplest form, a hearing loop is a wire surrounding an assembly area that is connected to a hearing loop amplifier. The loop silently transmits the sound from the microphone to the telecoils that act as receivers in hearing aids or cochlear implants. For people without telecoils, the loop signal would be accessed using a separate receiver and headphones.

## What About Bluetooth?

Bluetooth is a relatively short-range wireless technology used to connect hearing aids and cochlear implants to personal devices. While this technology is evolving, Bluetooth does not provide the long-range transmission required in large public venues, and does not serve multiple users.



## Why Both Telecoils and Bluetooth Should Be Offered to Hearing Aid Consumers

Telecoils and Bluetooth both serve important but different purposes in the lives of people with hearing loss.

- **Telecoils provide a one-to-many solution** – delivering the audio signal from an Assistive Listening System simultaneously to every person with an activated, telecoil-enabled hearing device within the venue.
- **Bluetooth technology provides a one-to-one solution** – delivering enhanced audio streaming from personal technology devices to individuals with Bluetooth-enabled hearing devices.

Consumer advocates recommend hearing aid users be informed and have the benefits of both telecoils and Bluetooth demonstrated because people can use telecoil enabled hearing aids in conjunction with a neckloop to connect to personal devices, but Bluetooth solutions may provide a more seamless solution.

## Why Consumer Education Is Needed

Telecoils are standard or available in 70% of hearing aid models<sup>2</sup> and standard in 100% of current cochlear implants. **Yet a recent consumer survey revealed that almost two-thirds of first-time hearing aid buyers were not told about telecoils.**<sup>3</sup>

Without understanding telecoils, people with hearing loss might not choose the best hearing aids for their needs and lifestyle, nor experience the full functionality of their hearing aids. And they might not gain full public communication access, despite investing perhaps thousands of dollars in their hearing aids.

The new law prioritizes this vital information by requiring audiologists and hearing aid specialists to explain telecoils and Bluetooth to their patients and customers prior to initial fitting and purchase. **Just a few minutes of an audiologist's or hearing aid specialist's time can change the life of a person with hearing loss.**

Six states have already enacted similar consumer protection laws: Arizona, Delaware, Florida, New York, Rhode Island, and Utah. Similar legislation is being introduced in Indiana, Wisconsin and New Mexico. The organizations that supported SB 5210 are proud that **Washington State is helping to lead this consumer movement in support of people with hearing loss.**

### THIS LEGISLATION WAS SUPPORTED BY

Hearing Loss Association of America

Hearing Loss Association of America Washington State Association

Washington State Senior Citizens' Lobby –  
Unanimous support of member agencies

Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing –  
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration  
Washington State Department of Social & Health Services

For a complete list of supporting organizations, see <https://loopseattle.org/Advocacy>

## Hearing Aid Consumer Actions:

- Ask your hearing health provider about telecoils & Bluetooth
- Learn more about hearing loss accommodations
- Ask for hearing loop installations in public venues, including places of worship, doctors' offices, theaters hospitals and civic centers
- Join the Hearing Loss Association of America - Washington State Association

1. Hearing Loops are also called induction loops and audio frequency induction loop systems (AFILS).

2. Derived from Consumer's Guide to Hearing Aids, 2018

3., 4., 5. Committee for Communications Access, New Mexico. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-W55CRM2Q/>

6. ADA 706.3: <https://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards>

## Population Impact – Who Has Hearing Loss?

A substantial number of Americans live with hearing loss.

- 1 in 5 Americans has a hearing loss  
*Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2011*
- Nearly 50% of people older than 60 years have hearing loss  
*President's Council on Science and Technology 2015*
- Nearly 25% of Americans 65 to 74 and 50% of those 75 and older have disabling hearing loss  
*NIDCD, Quick Statistics about Hearing, December 2016*
- 2.7 million Veterans receive disability benefits for hearing loss or tinnitus. Hearing injury is the most common medical issue for veterans.  
*AARP.org, 2018*
- 19% of noise-exposed workers have a hearing loss  
*Worker Hearing Loss, CDC, 2017*
- Hearing loss among U.S. adults is projected to almost double by 2060, increasing to 73.5 million  
*Addressing Estimated Hearing Loss in Adults in 2060, NCBI-NIH, 2017*

## Consumer Desire for Telecoil Information

When asked, "If you are hard of hearing, do you believe audiologists and dispensers should be required to counsel their clients on telecoils prior to fitting them with hearing aids?" **95% of survey respondents answered "YES."**<sup>4</sup>

When asked, "If you are hard of hearing, would you like to see a law requiring such telecoil counseling in your state?" **92% of survey respondents answered "YES."**<sup>5</sup>

## Communication Access Is Required by Federal Law

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates Assistive Listening Systems in public venues.<sup>6</sup> Look for these symbols to identify available hearing loss accommodations.

International symbol  
for hearing loss access



International symbol  
indicating a hearing loop  
system is available

