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Jan. 30, 2024

## NAU joins statewide project to provide free hearing healthcare

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Hearing aids can be prohibitively expensive for people without insurance, sometimes costing as much as \$6,000. In response, NAU's [Communication Sciences and Disorders Department](#) has partnered with the [Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing](#) to expand the Hearing Healthcare Assistance Project, which provides free hearing healthcare for eligible people 21 and older without insurance.

"People with hearing loss experience trouble communicating with loved ones that often lead to feelings of isolation and depression," said Michael Skelton, clinical professor and audiologist at NAU's [Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic](#) who led the university's effort to join the state project.

In 2021, Arizona State University received a donation of new hearing aids but did not have funding for audiology testing and hearing aid fitting services. The Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing stepped in and expanded the Hearing Healthcare Assistance Project to fund audiology testing, hearing aid fitting, follow-up appointments and aural rehabilitation services. The University of Arizona joined the project in the fall, providing support to Tucson-area residents. Now, with NAU signing on, there's support for Northern Arizonans, too.

Anyone in need of hearing healthcare services is encouraged to contact the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing, which was established in 1977 to improve the quality of life for deaf and hard of hearing residents and serves as the statewide bureau of information referral center for issues related to hearing loss. The commission refers those eligible to the nearest state university participating in the project. In scenarios where applicants already have access to hearing health resources, the project can also assist them in navigating their options.

NAU's Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic offers hearing healthcare and hearing aid services from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. At these appointments, students and a supervising audiologist guide patients through the diagnostic, counseling, hearing aid selection and fitting process. During hearing aid follow-up appointments, patients provide feedback to the audiologist on the sound quality and clarity of the hearing aids. The audiologist can adjust various sound levels to help patients acclimate to the new hearing aids. Patients receive hearing aids with

telecoils, which enable the hearing aid to directly connect to assistive listening systems in places such as movie theaters and lecture halls.

The Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic offers other helpful resources, including aural rehabilitation classes to learn about one's hearing loss and communication strategies, funded by the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing. Classes help people with hearing loss communicate with partners and caregivers by concentrating on overcoming communication breakdowns.

"With this new project, Northern Arizona patients with limited financial resources can now get the hearing aids they need to communicate with loved ones and improve their overall quality of life," Skelton said.

Those in need of hearing healthcare services should contact the Arizona Commission for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing by calling (602) 542-3323, emailing [info@acdhh.az.gov](mailto:info@acdhh.az.gov) or visiting [acdhh.org](http://acdhh.org).

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