



**TEXAS ACADEMY
of AUDIOLOGY**



MARCH 2024

What's new?

**Stephanie
Williams, AuD:
New TAA
President**

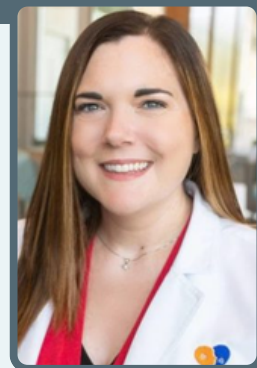
**Q&A: Changes to
BCBS Federal
Employees
Program Hearing
Aid benefits**

**Legislative
Update: Send
letters to your
senators!**

**The Scoop:
The Scott Haug
Foundation**

A Message from your TAA President

**Stephanie Williams, AuD
TAA President**



I am grateful for the opportunity to serve Texas audiologists as the TAA president for 2024. I know that audiology is an ever-changing field and we have faced a lot of challenges in recent memory. I have been proud to see how our board and members have advocated for our profession and the people we serve over the past year. As we prepare for the 2025 legislative session, we will need the support and input of all Texas audiologists. Please remember to renew your membership and encourage your colleagues to join us! Our board wants to serve as a voice at the table for audiologists wherever one is needed, and that voice is stronger with more people behind it. If you have questions or concerns or – even better – you would like to get involved in any of the areas you read about in this newsletter, please reach out to us. Our board is here to serve you.

I am looking forward to this year. We already have a lot going on in our legislative and professional issues committees. Conference planning is well underway and we would love to have you join us in Houston from October 17-19. I look forward to hearing from you and see you in Houston!

Q&A: 2024 Changes to Federal Employee Program (FEP) Hearing Aid Benefits

Anna M. Jilla, Au.D., Ph.D.

Jo Mayo Endowed Assistant Professor of Audiology
Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas

What changed for hearing aid claims in January 2024?

In early 2024, certain amendments were made to the Federal Employee Program (FEP) utilization management guidelines for Hearing Aids through federal plans coordinated by Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS). These utilization management guidelines provide specifics on coverage requirements, such as demonstrating medical necessity or the need for prior approval or pre-authorization.

Effective January 2024, there are now prior authorization (prior approval) requirements for reimbursement for prescription hearing aids under BCBS federal plans. These changes do not apply to over-the-counter hearing aids or personal sound amplification products; non-prescription hearing devices remain non-covered under the BCBS FEP program. This updated FEP guidance from BCBS notes that hearing aids without prior approval will not be covered in post-service review.

How do I submit for prior approval?

The process to obtain prior authorization seems to vary down to the state-level. Pre-authorizations have been obtained through health information exchanges and/or by faxing the pre-authorization form and supporting documentation to BCBS. Audiologists in Texas may consider using the Texas Standard Prior Authorization Form

(<https://www.tdi.texas.gov/forms/lhlifehealth/nofr001.pdf>) for their submissions.

Providers are still encouraged to also check with Blue Cross and Blue Shield FEP Provider Relations if other forms would be preferable or required.

What do I submit for prior approval?

With your prior approval form, be sure to also include: (1) audiologic report, (2) letter of medical necessity, and (3) copy of relevant office visit notes in support of medical necessity. A full list of medical necessity requirements can be found in the BCBS FEP utilization management guideline here: <https://www.fepblue.org/-/media/PDFs/Medical-Policies/2024/January/UM-Guidelines/FEP-UM-Guideline-005-Hearing-Aids-2024-benefit-update-PMPC-correction.pdf>.

Briefly, these requirements note that hearing aids must be FDA-approved and dispensed with a prescription from a licensed healthcare provider (e.g., audiologist, physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant). Audiometric testing in support of medical necessity should have occurred within the six months prior to the hearing aid provision. Other documentation requirements (e.g., clinical appropriateness) are fully discussed and provided in the BCBS FEP utilization management guideline (see link above).

Are there any other medical necessity requirements?

Yes. The BCBS FEP utilization management guideline notes that air-conduction hearing aids are considered medically necessary for individuals with a moderate hearing loss (40 dB or greater pure-tone average). This 40 dB cutoff for medical necessity serves as the primary guidance, but the coverage policy also states “consideration should be given on an individual basis, for hearing loss of 40 decibels or less with a prescription from an audiologist.”

What is the Texas Academy of Audiology doing to address these changes?

The Texas Academy of Audiology is working alongside other state organizations to discuss concerns about the hearing loss requirements for medical necessity. We are also working closely with national organizations to discuss concerns about administrative burden associated with prior approval requirements in healthcare. We will provide further updates as they become available. In the meantime, members are encouraged to contact professionalissues@texasaudiology.org with any questions related to this new policy or for assistance with denials.

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1-4.26 dB SRR improvement compared to legacy products. Jørgensen et al (2022)

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TAA 25th Annual Conference in Houston

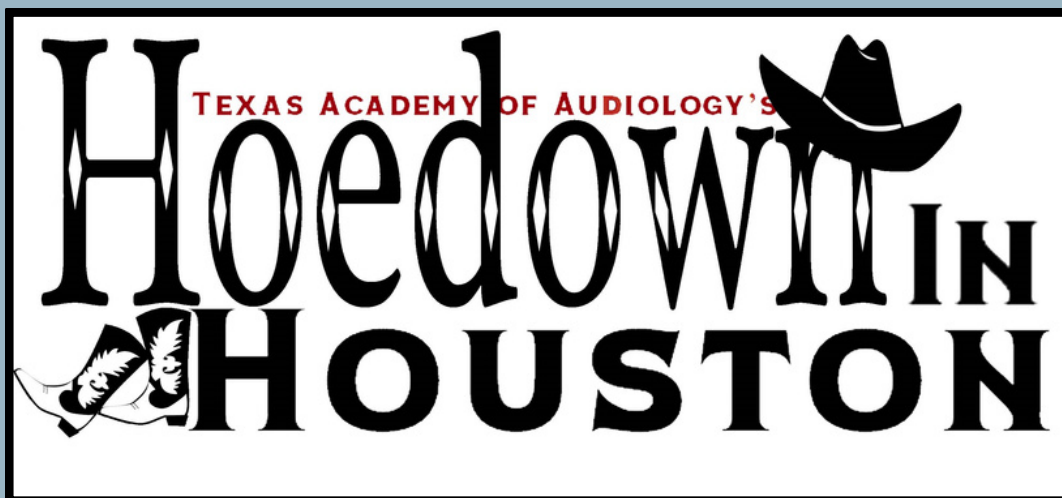
Carmen Landry, AuD
TAA Conference Chair

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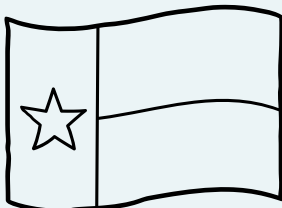
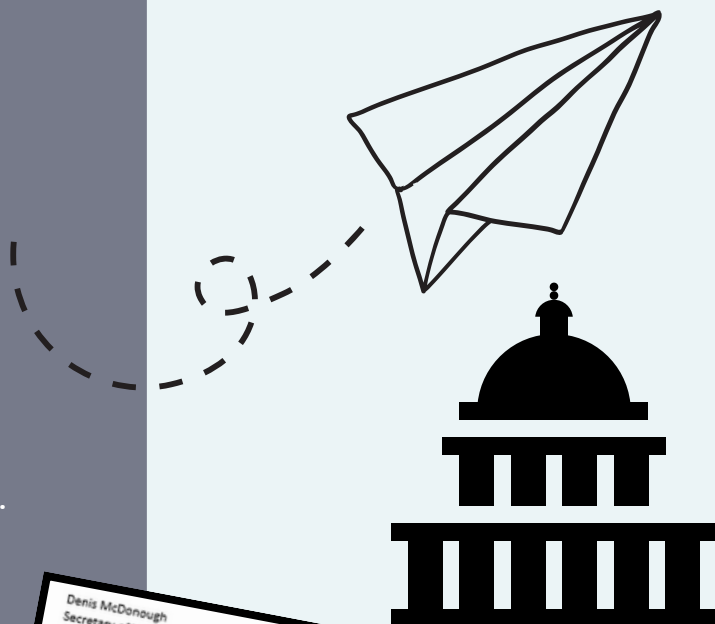
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Let's make a difference for Texas Veterans!
Hunter Gerhart, AuD.
TAA VP of Legislative Issues

Please take some time this week to send some letters out to your state representatives. Templates are available on the TAA website and you just need to download and add your state congressperson's name and address and add your signature. Please mail these out soon! Or better yet, stop by their offices and hand the letter to them or their staff in person.

TAA membership can make a big impact on legislative issues that are important for our patients and our profession.

See the TAA Website for letter templates!





First “HearO of the Academy” Recipient named Dean of the Texas Senate

Alexander Morris, AuD

At the 2023 annual conference, the Texas Academy of Audiology awarded legendary **Texas Senator Judith Zaffirini** with the first HearO of the Academy award for her support of audiology legislation during the 88th Texas Legislative Session.

The HearO of the Academy award is presented to a non-audiologist for their exceptional support of the field of audiology and/or the patients we serve by focusing on issues that directly affect the profession or patients with hearing loss and balance disorders. The award confers an honorary TAA Lifetime Membership upon the recipient as an expression of the academy’s gratitude and commitment to supporting patients with hearing and balance disorders across the lifespan.

Senator Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) is a trailblazing figure in Texas politics, serving as the first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas Senate. Representing the 21st Senatorial District since 1987, she is renowned for her advocacy in health and human services policy, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the very young, very old, very poor, veterans, and persons with disabilities. With an impeccable voting record and a staggering legislative output—including 1,388 bills and 38 substantive resolutions passed—she has solidified her bipartisan effectiveness. Recognized with over 1,200 awards and honors for her legislative achievements, Sen. Zaffirini's dedication to public service is matched only by her distinguished career as a communications specialist and educator, holding multiple degrees from UT-Austin and boasting 13 years of teaching experience. Adding to her distinguished list of accomplishments, on December 31, 2023 she was appointed as Dean of the Texas Senate—the first woman in Texas history to hold this position.

The Texas Academy of Audiology would like to extend a warm congratulations to Sen. Zaffirini as we celebrate her appointment as Dean of the Texas Senate! Congratulations, Senator Zaffirini!

THANK
YOU



The Scoop from The Scott Haug Foundation

Scott Marquardt
Scott Haug Foundation President

Greetings from the 40 year old Scott Haug Foundation! It's my pleasure to update you on what the foundation has planned for the TAA conference in Houston.

We at the Foundation have a dream for this year. We want to raise \$40,000 for our 40th anniversary. This may sound crazy, but I believe we can do it. All of the money goes towards student scholarships. I hope you'll join us at the conference Friday morning and be willing to help us reach this milestone!

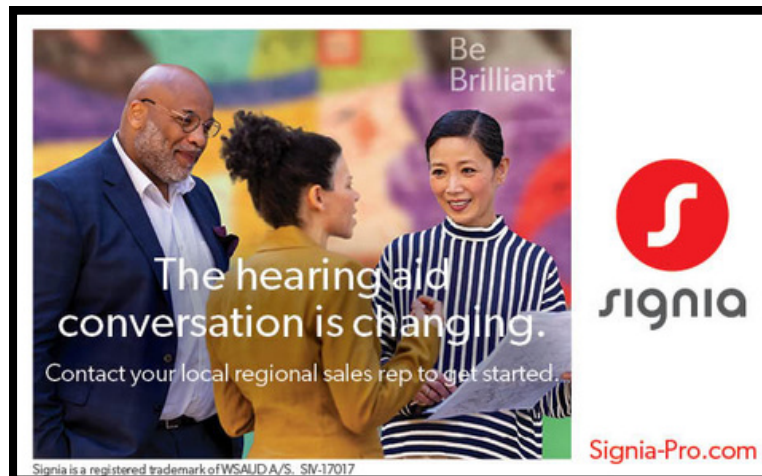
The Foundation will once again be organizing a golf tournament but stay tuned for some significant changes to the venue. We are working on securing Top Golf for a Thursday night tournament! No need to be a golfer. Sign up and have fun with your audiology friends. The money we raise goes directly towards student scholarships. The more money we can raise the more we can put towards our deserving students.

Friday night we hope you'll join us for A Tejas Hoedown in honor of Kurt Trede. It's a night that sure to be full of memories and fun. Work has begun collecting nominations for the student scholar awards. Each year we recognize outstanding third-year students from each of our five Texas universities.

Do you know a phenomenal audiologist? Every year the Foundation recognizes the Outstanding Texas Audiologist. In Texas we have many amazing audiologists that deserve to be recognized for their contributions to the profession and to the communities we serve. To learn more about the process of nominating an audiologist go to: www.scotthaug.org

The Scott Haug Foundation is a 501c3 organization so all donations are tax deductible.

40 years ago, the founders of the SHF knew the importance of getting together in person for learning and fun. That fact hasn't changed today. I hope you'll join us and we can't wait to see you in Houston Oct 17-19th!



Donations can be made all year round using Venmo:
<https://account.venmo.com/u/ScottHaug84>

Or by mailing checks to: Scott Haug Foundation
1671 Stallion Springs Dr.
Fischer, TX 78623

Please set yourself a reminder to join us in Houston October 17-19,
2024.

You won't want to miss out!

Membership Update 2024 Membership Now Open

2024 Membership Now Open

The Texas Academy of Audiology relies on annual membership dues to support Texas audiologists in every facet. 2024 membership is open! Please renew your membership and if you have never joined- please join today!

Membership not only enables TAA to advocate on your behalf, but also grants you access to exclusive timely webinars, our annual in-person conference and renewed access to our TAA Facebook Page. Each year, we review and update Facebook members to include new members and roll off anyone who is not currently a member.

We have seen over half our membership attend our past two conferences but would love to see even more this year in Houston! Mark your calendars for October 17-19, 2024.

Please renew TODAY and see more conference details at www.texasaudiology.org!

Feel free to reach out with any membership questions:
Holly Pavlicek, Au.D.
hdpavlicek@hotmail.com



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TAA Political action committee (@taa-PAC)

ATTN: TEXAS AUDIOLOGISTS



Kimberly DeBona

@TAA-PAC

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Attention Texas Audiologists!!

As we all know, an election is upon us, and the PAC needs your help. We have distributed \$9000 for the Primary election to candidates who help us champion our cause in the legislature. Now our coffers are very low so we need your contributions to have more funds for the General election.

Please consider donated to the TAA PAC today!

You may go online to the TAA website

https://texasaudiology.org/PAC_Donation

Or you may Venmo with the QR code below or
@TAA-PAC last 4 of cell: 7091

Finally, you can mail a check payable to TAA PAC
to:

Kimberly DeBona
4016 Tiffany Trl
College Station, TX. 77845

Please consider supporting your TAA PAC before
the end of the year. We can't do it without your
support!

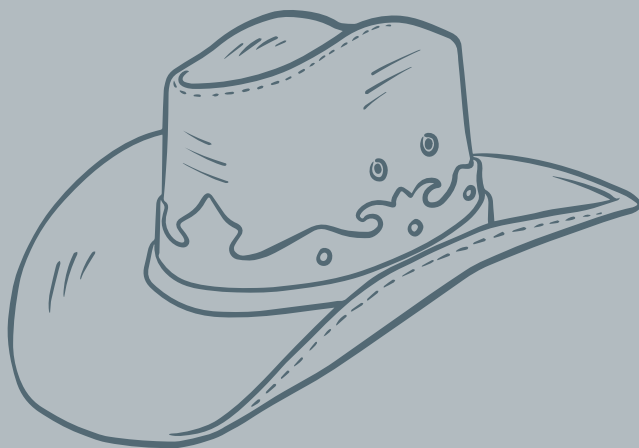


Attention All Pediatric Audiologists!

Stephanie Williams, AuD

Are you an audiologist who sees patients aged birth-5 years of age for any diagnostic or hearing device service? Texas Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (TEHDI) and the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is going to be referring all families looking for EHDI audiological services to the EHDI-PALS website to find care and is asking that all Texas audiologists working with this age group register as soon as possible. If you are not on this site already, please do that today by going to ehdi-pals.org. If you have registered your facility already, but it has not been updated recently, please do so today as the system requires yearly updates.

In other updates, the Pediatric Working Group is continuing to plan for improving access to pediatric audiology in Texas and also to engage outside stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of early intervention. If you would like to be a part of this team, please email me at stephanie.williams@utdallas.edu.



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WHO IS HIRING?

SEE ALL OF THE CURRENT JOB LISTINGS:
[HTTPS://TEXASAUDIOLOGY.ORG/CLASSIFIEDS.PHP](https://texasaudiology.org/classifieds.php)

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