



**STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE AND HEARING**

P O BOX 2649  
HARRISBURG PA 17105  
717-783-1389

[st-speech@state.pa.us](mailto:st-speech@state.pa.us)  
[www.dos.state.pa.us/speech](http://www.dos.state.pa.us/speech)  
Fax 717-787-7769

***Let's talk about .... Audiology***

***A Consumer Guide to Understanding the Profession in Pennsylvania***

Hearing loss is the third most common health problem in the United States. More than 36 million Americans have some type of hearing problem. Although hearing problems are commonly associated with the normal aging process, more than half of all hearing impaired persons are under the age of 65. Hearing difficulties are often unrecognized by the person involved. Children and teenagers seldom complain about the symptoms of hearing loss and adults may lose their hearing so gradually they do not realize it is happening. As a result, most people wait 7 to 10 years before seeking help. There are many reasons for hearing loss, including exposure to loud noises, history of ear infections, genetic/family history, disease, or age. The good news is that there is help for persons with hearing loss. If you suspect a hearing problem, contact a licensed audiologist who can evaluate your hearing and determine the type and degree of your hearing loss.

***SOME SYMPTOMS OF A HEARING LOSS***

Muffled sounds of speech  
Difficulty understanding words, especially with background noise  
Asking others to repeat words or speak more slowly  
Ringing in your ears  
Increasing volume on the radio or television  
Avoiding social gatherings or withdrawing from conversations

***WHAT IS AN AUDIOLOGIST?***

Audiologists are licensed health care professionals who evaluate, treat, and manage hearing loss and balance disorders in adults and children. Audiologists prescribe and fit hearing aids, administer tests of balance to evaluate dizziness, assist in cochlear implant programs, design and implement hearing conservation programs and newborn hearing screening programs, and provide hearing rehabilitation training. Audiologists hold a doctoral degree (AuD or Ph.D) or masters degree from an accredited university with special training in prevention, identification, assessment, and treatment of hearing and balance disorders. All licensed audiologists in Pennsylvania are required to continue their education and remain current in the profession.

***WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN AUDIOLOGIST AND A HEARING AID DEALER?***

In Pennsylvania there are three groups that can provide hearing aids; **physicians** (usually otolaryngologists also called "ear, nose and throat" or ENT doctors), **audiologists** and **hearing aid dealers**. Physicians and audiologists are licensed by professional boards of the Pennsylvania Department of State and hearing aid dealers are registered by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. A licensed **audiologist** holds a doctoral degree (AuD or Ph.D) or masters degree from an accredited university with special training in prevention, identification, assessment, and treatment of hearing and balance disorders. A licensed audiologist must also complete a year of professional experience under the supervision of a qualified supervisor or licensed audiologist. A **hearing aid dealer** must pass a certification examination and have 6 months of training under the supervision of a sponsor fitter registrant. There are no minimum educational requirements for a hearing aid dealer.

### ***HOW DO I FIND A LICENSED AUDIOLOGIST?***

Audiologists work in a variety of settings including private practice, hospitals, ENT offices, clinics, universities, and K-12 public schools. To locate an audiologist you may obtain a referral from your primary care physician, from your health insurer's "network" listing, or search your local yellow pages or online under "audiologist" or "hearing aids". Professional organizations, such as the American Academy of Audiology [www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org) as well the Pennsylvania Academy of Audiology [www.paaudiology.org](http://www.paaudiology.org) have listings of their members.

### ***WHAT IS THE STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN SPEECH-LANGUAGE AND HEARING AND HOW CAN IT HELP ME?***

The State Board of Examiners in Speech-Language and Hearing regulates the practice and licensure of persons offering speech-language and hearing services in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Board's purposes are to safeguard the public health, safety and welfare; to protect the public from being misled by incompetent, unscrupulous and unauthorized persons; to assail unprofessional conduct on the part of qualified speech-language pathologists, audiologists and teachers of the hearing impaired; and to insure that the highest possible quality of speech-language and hearing services are provided for all people with communication disabilities in the Commonwealth.

Make sure the **professionals** who serve you are **licensed and in good standing**. You can check the license of your audiologist by looking for his/her name on <http://www.licensepa.state.pa.us/>.

### ***What do I do if I have a complaint?***

If you believe the practice or the service provided by a licensed audiologist is unethical, immoral, below an acceptable standard of practice or out of the scope of the profession, or if you believe someone is practicing audiology without a license you are urged to file a Statement of Complaint Form with the Department of State's Professional Compliance Office.

You may request a Statement of Complaint Form by mail, by calling the Professional Compliance Office Hotline at 1-800-822-2113 (if you are calling from within Pennsylvania) or at 1-717-783-4859 (if you are calling from outside Pennsylvania). Or if you prefer, you may use the online Statement of Complaint form, available at: [www.dos.state.pa.us](http://www.dos.state.pa.us), then select these menu options: "Professional Licensure" followed by "Complaints;" these options are listed on the left side of the screen.

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Phone - (717) 783-1389  
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