Accessible and Affordable Hearing Healthcare

*hi HealthInnovations™* launched in 2011 with a specific goal: improve the access and affordability of hearing healthcare to the 36 million Americans with hearing loss. To address this serious consumer need, *hi HealthInnovations* has started increasing access to hearing tests while providing more affordable, high-tech hearing aids and robust customer support.

Hearing loss is currently the third most common chronic condition among older Americans, yet it is under-diagnosed and treatment is often expensive. While 90 percent of people with hearing loss can benefit from hearing aids, fewer than 20 percent currently use them largely due to the high cost. For those untreated, hearing loss can contribute to serious social, medical, and economic consequences. The problem could become even more pronounced unless there is greater access to more affordable hearing healthcare as baby boomers are reaching the age when hearing loss is more prevalent and one in five teens already has some hearing loss.

According to National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD/NIH), the National Council on Aging, and other institutions, hearing loss can affect a person's ability to stay connected to friends and family, contributing to social isolation, lower earnings, depression and dementia. Social isolation, in turn, is a potent risk factor for morbidity and mortality. By contrast, hearing aid users report significant improvements in relationships, self-esteem, overall quality of life, mental health and safety. Moreover, early treatment of hearing loss can help people maintain a higher quality of life, in part because users have an easier time adjusting to hearing aids.

Organizations such as the NIDCD/NIH and HLAA have long stressed the need for greater affordability and access to hearing healthcare. In 2009, NIDCD/NIH formed a research working group to address this pressing public health issue. The group highlighted innovative service delivery models as ways to help consumers overcome barriers to access and affordability, including telemedicine, price unbundling, and expansion of care providers.
More Testing Options to Support Early Detection and Treatment

There are many benefits to detecting and treating hearing loss early. However, hearing loss is typically a gradual process, which means many people do not recognize they have it and could benefit from early treatment. To engage more consumers in detecting hearing problems early, hi HealthInnovations has worked with Dianne Van Tasell, a Ph.D. in speech and hearing sciences, and experienced audio engineers to develop a patent-pending hearing test for primary care physicians. This is a pure tone audiometric test that measures hearing sensitivity, and the results are recorded in an audiogram.

The clinical test gives primary care physicians a tool to detect hearing loss as part of a general exam. This increases the likelihood of detection and treatment of hearing loss, considering most people engage the health care system through their primary care physician. In addition, approximately 70 percent of consumers say they are most likely to talk to their primary care physician about hearing loss, according to a survey by AARP and American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Counseling and Aural Rehabilitation

To further improve access, hi HealthInnovations employs staff audiologists and hearing specialists to provide hearing testing in many U.S. cities, including Phoenix, San Antonio and Miami. These professionals detect hearing loss and help fit people with hearing aids.

If hearing loss is detected, hi HealthInnovations audiologists and hearing specialists offer education, counseling, and aural rehabilitation over the phone, online and in-person. These professionals also conduct hearing health seminars in local communities and educate consumers about the valuable resources available to them through organizations such as the HLAA.
In addition to *hi HealthInnovations* audiologists and hearing specialists, consumers can choose to work with other hearing providers. Consumers will likely pay for those providers’ services separately from the price of the hearing aid, a pricing model known as unbundling or itemization. An unbundled pricing model increases cost transparency and empowers consumers to pay for services that they value, helping make hearing aids more affordable for consumers.

**High-tech, Affordable Hearing Aids**

*hi HealthInnovations*’ hearing aids are custom-programmed to a user’s specific hearing needs based on their hearing test results. Every hearing test result and hearing aid order is reviewed by a licensed audiologist or hearing specialist to ensure suitability. People with asymmetrical hearing loss are required to obtain a medical clearance from their physician before they can order hearing aids.

*hi HealthInnovations* hearing aids use advanced technology to enhance speech understanding and listening comfort. Technological features include the following: comfortable open-fit design; directional processing; fully automatic digital algorithms that adapt to the user's environment; advanced feedback manager; tri-mode noise reduction system; 12 gain adjustment bands and telecoil. For consumers requiring occluding ear molds, ear impressions can be made in-person by either *hi HealthInnovations* audiologists and hearing specialists, as well as other hearing providers.

Each hearing aid comes with free batteries and ear tubes/wax guards that will last most users six months, as well as a 70 day money-back guarantee and free programming adjustments. Prices for the hi BTE™ models are $749 each and the hi ITC™ models are $949 each. Consumers can obtain hearing aids at even more affordable pricing through many UnitedHealthcare commercial and individual plans, as well as Medicare Advantage, Medicare Supplement, and Part D plans.
hi HealthInnovations uses several approaches to offer high-tech hearing aids at more affordable prices, including by leveraging UnitedHealth Group’s purchasing power. As a result, the cost savings are transferred directly to consumers.