

United States Senate

September 19, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

The Honorable Douglas Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

We write to express our strong support for expanding access to over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids for our nation's Veterans that are impacted by mild-to-moderate hearing loss, and to highlight the potential benefits of such an initiative.

It is estimated that nearly 30 million American adults suffer from some degree of hearing loss¹, with the Veteran population facing significant challenges in this regard due to their service-related exposure to high-intensity noise, such as gunfire, explosions, and machinery. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), hearing loss and tinnitus are the most prevalent service-connected disabilities among Veterans², with more than 2.7 million Veterans receiving compensation for hearing loss. Despite the high need for hearing solutions, only a fraction of those who could benefit from hearing aids seek intervention (much less early intervention), in part due to the complexity and cost of accessing traditional hearing aids through the VA.

In 2017, the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act³ was signed into law by President Trump as part of the Food and Drug Administration Reauthorization Act, which was designed to increase accessibility and reduce costs associated with hearing aids for adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued final rules in 2022 to implement OTC hearing aids statute, providing an affordable and accessible alternative for many individuals⁴. However, it is concerning that, unlike their civilian counterparts, Veterans are currently unable to access these OTC hearing aids through the VA, as outlined in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive 1034⁵.

¹ Center for Devices and Radiological Health. "OTC Hearing Aids: What You Should Know." *FDA*, 4 May 2023, www.fda.gov/medical-devices/hearing-aids/otc-hearing-aids-what-you-should-know.

² Theodoroff, Sarah M et al. "Hearing impairment and tinnitus: prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes in US service members and Veterans deployed to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars." *Epidemiologic reviews* vol. 37 (2015): 71-85. doi:10.1093/epirev/mxu005

³ Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act, Pub. L. No. 115-52, § 709, 131 Stat. 1065, 18 August 2017.

⁴ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "Medical Devices; Ear, Nose, and Throat Devices; Establishing Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids." *Federal Register*, 17 August 2022, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/08/17/2022-17230/medical-devices-ear-nose-and-throat-devices-establishing-over-the-counter-hearing-aids>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "VHA Directive 1034: Prescribing and Providing Eyeglasses, Contact Lenses, and Hearing Aids." *Veterans Health Administration*, 24 October 2019.

Allowing Veterans to access OTC hearing aids, particularly those with mild-to-moderate hearing loss, could have significant benefits. Not only would it improve their quality of life by reducing the severity of cognitive decline, depression, and other health challenges commonly linked to hearing loss⁶, but it would also provide substantial cost savings for the VA health care system, especially as untreated hearing loss has been shown to be associated with higher health care costs and utilization⁷. Additionally, Veterans would benefit from devices that are available at a fraction of the cost of traditional prescription hearing aids, and the VA could redirect the savings to further support the wide array of services needed by our Veterans.

We strongly believe that allowing Veterans to access these advanced, yet affordable, hearing solutions can address some of the current barriers in the system, such as long wait times for audiologist appointments and the limited availability of certain types of hearing aids, particularly as enrollment in the VA system continues to grow⁸. Expanding access to these devices is a step toward ensuring our Veterans receive timely, high-quality care that aligns with the options available to civilians. To that end, Congress is working on legislation directing the VA to develop a demonstration program to assess the fiscal impact and clinical effectiveness of OTC hearing aids within the VA system, and we hope you will support our efforts to advance this proposal swiftly.

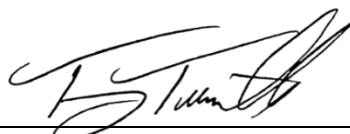
As the VA works to modernize its approach to deliver timely care and improved outcomes for our Veterans, we look forward to partnering with you and your team to ensure that Veterans, regardless of their physical location, have access to high-quality hearing solutions that enhance their health and well-being, while also reducing the financial burden on the VA.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and welfare of our Veterans. I am confident that, together, we can make significant strides in addressing the hearing health needs of our nation's heroes.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator

⁶ Deal, Jennifer A et al. "Incident Hearing Loss and Comorbidity: A Longitudinal Administrative Claims Study." *JAMA otolaryngology-- head & neck surgery* vol. 145,1 (2019): 36-43. doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2018.2876.

⁷ Reed, Nicholas S et al. "Trends in Health Care Costs and Utilization Associated With Untreated Hearing Loss Over 10 Years." *JAMA otolaryngology-- head & neck surgery* vol. 145,1 (2019): 27-34. doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2018.2875.

⁸ VA Wilmington Health Care. "400,000+ Veterans enrolled in VA health care over past 365 days, 30% increase over last year." *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, www.va.gov/wilmington-health-care/news-releases/400000-Veterans-enrolled-in-va-health-care-over-past-365-days-30-increase-over-last-year/.