

# Hearing Health Care Access: Survey of Audiologists

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## Objective

Determine barriers to hearing health care and feasible initiatives to address identified barriers for adults in Canada.

## Background

Approximately 54% of Canadians aged 40-79 years old have at least a mild hearing loss. A large proportion of people, 75-80%, with hearing loss don't seek hearing health care, don't obtain hearing aids, or discontinue use of devices over time. Untreated hearing loss affects communication and health-related quality of life and is linked to social isolation, greater risk of falls, higher risk of hospitalization and readmission, and reduced financial security. The **Canadian Coalition for Adult Hearing Health (CCAHH)** is working to identify barriers and facilitators of hearing health care access for adults with hearing loss in Canada.

## Methods

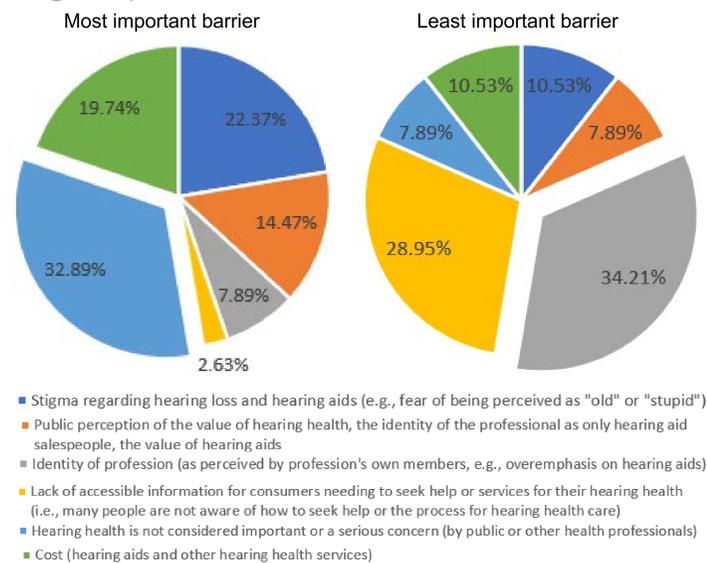
A survey was distributed from February to March 2019 to audiologists via the Canadian Academy of Audiology (CAA) and Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC). The survey consisted of three open-ended questions and four closed-ended questions. The survey was available in either French or English. French text responses were translated using deepl.com, then checked by bilingual audiologists.

## Results

Eighty-five audiologists completed the survey. Audiologists were asked to rate the importance of barriers and facilitators to hearing health care

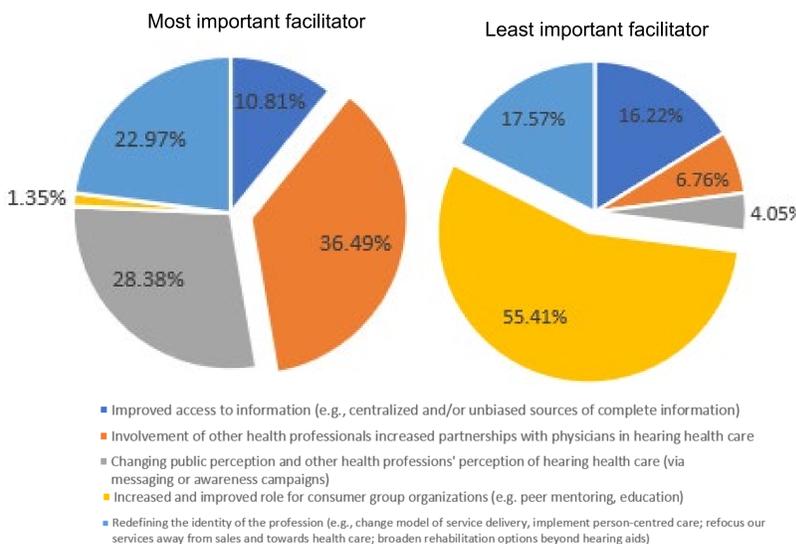
The most important barrier to hearing health care according to audiologists was that **"hearing health is not considered important or a serious concern."**

The least important barrier to hearing health care according to audiologists was **"identity of profession (as perceived by profession's own members e.g., overemphasis on hearing aids)."**



The most important facilitator to hearing health care according to audiologists was the **"involvement of other health professionals and increased partnership with physicians in hearing health care"**.

The least important and feasible facilitator to hearing health care was **"increased and improved role for consumer group organizations (e.g., peer mentoring, education)"**.



## Conclusion

Audiologists identified hearing health as a relatively **insignificant public health concern** as the most important barrier to hearing health care, similar to findings in other international studies (McMahon et al., 2021). The **cost** of audiology services, specifically hearing aids, was identified as a barrier to hearing health care. Cost of service, technologies, and the lack of insurance coverage has also been identified as a global concern for hearing health care access (Schuh & Bush, 2022). The implementation of an **interdisciplinary approach to hearing health care** was reported to be an important and feasible facilitator to hearing health care. Instilling hearing health care as a priority among primary care providers through information campaigns and direct education is a critical step to increasing hearing health care access (e.g., Lin et al., 2016).

There were notable discrepancies between the open- and closed- ended questions. The subset of audiologists that responded to the open-ended question did not emphasize the same facilitators that were highlighted in the closed-ended responses. This discrepancy may be due to the nature of the open questions, that invited respondents to comment on any aspect of the issues that they wished to.

Based on the findings of the survey, and in conjunction with research literature and interviews with experts, the CCAHH is working on an initiative partnering with physicians to increase their skills and practices with respect to supporting adult hearing health.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to CAA and SAC for distributing the survey to their members. Thank you to Stephanie Monette for assisting with the French version of the survey.

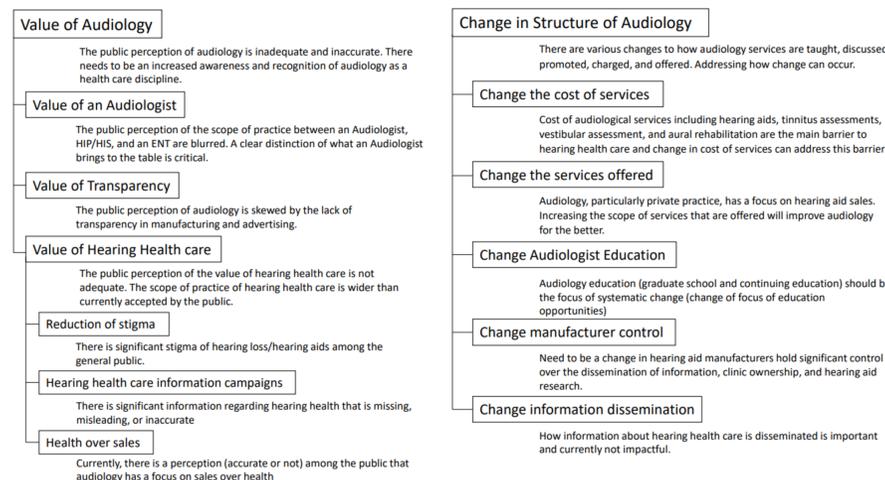
Thirty-one audiologists responded to three open-ended questions. Audiologists were asked to expand on or discuss any additional barriers to hearing health care, expand on or discuss any additional facilitators to hearing health care access, and discuss any final thoughts or ideas regarding barriers or facilitators to hearing health care access.

### Audiologists reported:

- The public perception of audiology is inadequate and inaccurate.
- A need for increased awareness and recognition of audiology as a health care discipline.
- A lack of understanding by the public and other health professions between audiologists, hearing instrument practitioners, and otolaryngologists.

### Audiologists recommended:

- Changes to hearing health promotion, service delivery, and education to audiologists (e.g., extended education opportunities)
- Changes to the cost of audiology services (e.g., unbundling services) and the kind of services that are offered (e.g., increased emphasis on aural rehabilitation).



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