Public Knowledge of the Treatability of Communication Disorders and Other Findings

YouGov Poll Commissioned by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA)
Summary Report of U.S. Adults Ages 18+, March 2022
## Objectives

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is interested in collecting data on public awareness of conditions that are treated by audiologists and speech-language pathologists. This includes:

- Prevalence of concerns about balance/risk of falls, cognition, hearing, speech/language, and swallowing/eating.
- If and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected those with concerns.
- General knowledge and opinions about treatment.

## Methodology

- Data was collected between March 22 and March 24, 2022. The survey was carried out online.
- A nationally representative sample of US Adults 18+ (n=2,964) was collected and balanced to be representative of all US adults 18 and over.
Key Findings

• Nearly half of U.S. adults report concern about one of more difficulties in the following areas: balance/risk of falls, cognition, hearing/ringing in the ears, speech/language, and swallowing/eating. Four-in-ten report concerns for an older relative.

• Around half of Americans are extremely/very confident that they know where/from whom to seek treatment for each of the above types of difficulties.

• One-third of Americans believe hearing/ringing in ears is very treatable by an audiologist. Balance/risk of falls are less associated with being treatable by an audiologist, with 1 in 5 believing they are very treatable.

• Almost half of Americans believe speech/language difficulties are very treatable by a speech-language pathologist. Cognition and swallowing difficulties are less associated with being treatable by a speech-language pathologist, with around 1 in 5 believing these are very treatable.

• The most commonly taken actions among those with concerns were scheduling an appointment with a medical professional (28%) and suggesting that a loved one talk to a professional (25%). However, 17% say they avoided situations where difficulties were obvious, and more than one-third (35%) report taking no action.

• Nearly two-thirds reveal that their number one concern regarding these difficulties is safety. Just over one-third of those with children with difficulties state that developmental concerns is one of their top concerns.

• The vast majority indicate that their concerns existed prior to the pandemic. The most commonly cited reasons for difficulties appearing or worsening were decreased interactions with others (38%) and decreased availability/access to medical professionals (37%).

• Half of those who had difficulties themselves believe the pandemic did not impact their timeline to seek help. Almost one-third who had difficulties themselves put off seeking help for a year or more.

• 15% of Americans have personally received care from an audiologist, and 9% from a speech-language pathologist. Overall, satisfaction with that care is high, with 77% of those who have personally received treatment indicating they are very or somewhat satisfied with the care received.

• 61% indicate they are at least somewhat open to receiving care via telehealth.
Around half of Americans are extremely/very confident that they know where/from whom to seek treatment for the difficulties specified below.

Only around 1 in 5 are not very/not at all confident about where/from whom to seek treatment.

### Confidence in Where to Seek Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Extremely confident</th>
<th>Very confident</th>
<th>Somewhat confident</th>
<th>Not very confident</th>
<th>Not at all confident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance/risk of falls</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/ringing in the ears</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/language</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swallowing or eating</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it comes to treatability, one-third believe hearing/ringing in ears is very treatable by an audiologist and almost half of Americans believe speech/language difficulties are very treatable by a speech language pathologist. Balance/risk of falls are also less associated with being treatable by an audiologist, with 1 in 5 believing they are very treatable. Cognition and swallowing difficulties are less associated with being treatable by a speech-language pathologist, with around 1 in 5 believing these are very treatable.

**Treatability of Difficulties, by Professional Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties</th>
<th>Very treatable</th>
<th>Somewhat treatable</th>
<th>Not very treatable</th>
<th>Not at all treatable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audiologist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance/risk of falls</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/ringing in the ears</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech-language pathologist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance/risk of falls</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/ringing in the ears</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/language</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swallowing or eating</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3a. To the best of your knowledge, how treatable, if at all, are each of the following difficulties with the help of a speech-language pathologist?

Q3b. To the best of your knowledge, how treatable, if at all, are each of the following difficulties with the help of an audiologist?

n = 2,964
Nearly half of U.S. adults report concern for one of more difficulties stated below.

Four-in-ten report concerns for an older relative.

Q1. Do you have concerns about each of the following? Please select all that apply in each column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns for...</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Child/Children</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Close Friend</th>
<th>Older Relative</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance/risk of falls</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognition</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing/ringing in the ears</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech/language</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swallowing or eating</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 2,964
The most commonly taken actions were scheduling an appointment with a medical professional (28%) and suggesting that a loved one talk to a professional (25%).

However, 17% reported avoiding situations where difficulties were obvious, and more than one-third (35%) report no actions were taken.

**Actions Taken Upon Recognizing Difficulties in Self or Loved One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled appointment to see medical professional/other professional in the field</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested they talk to a medical professional in the field with difficulties</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researched these difficulties (e.g., speech, language, or feeding/swallowing abilities)</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted my child’s school to express concern and/or ask for an evaluation of skills (K-12)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled an appointment to see a professional in the field with difficulties</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted early intervention/birth to three/other childhood services</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoided situations where these difficulties might be obvious to others</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked other people to suggest they talk to a medical professional/other professional in the field</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4. As a result of noticing [your/a loved one’s] [speech/language, hearing/ringing, balance, cognition, swallowing or eating] difficulties, which, if any, of the following have you done? Please select all that apply.

n = 1,955 (difficulties for self/loved one)

n = 1,611 (loved one)

n = 442 (children)
Nearly two-thirds reveal that their number one concern regarding these difficulties is safety.

Just over one-third with children with difficulties state that developmental concerns is one of their top concerns.

Q5. Which of the following are likely to cause you to seek/encourage care for [your/a loved one]'s [speech/language, hearing/ringing, balance, cognition, swallowing or eating] problem? Please select all that apply.

Drivers for Seeking/Encouraging Care for Self or Loved One

- Concerns about safety (e.g., risk of falling, safety while driving, etc.)
  - 65%
- Developmental concerns (i.e., a child isn't meeting expected milestones)
  - 34%
- Concerns about social isolation
  - 31%
- Difficulty with social situations/relationships/dating, etc.
  - 31%
- Concerns about finding, maintaining, or advancing employment
  - 19%
- Concerns about success at school
  - 14%
- Other
  - 6%

n = 1,955 (difficulties for self/loved one)

n = 442 (difficulties for children)
The vast majority, similar among those with difficulties themselves or a loved one with difficulties, indicate that their concerns existed prior to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Just under 1 in 5, similar among those with difficulties themselves or a loved one, state that their concerns came about during the pandemic.

Q6. How, if at all, has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic impacted your concerns about [your/a loved one]'s [speech/language, hearing/ringing, balance, cognition, swallowing or eating] problem?

Impact of Pandemic on Difficulties Reported for Self
- Existed before the pandemic / No change due to the pandemic: 70%
- Came about during the pandemic: 18%
- Worsened during the pandemic: 12%

Impact of Pandemic on Difficulties Reported for Loved One
- Existed before the pandemic / No change due to the pandemic: 72%
- Came about during the pandemic: 17%
- Worsened during the pandemic: 11%

n = 1,371 (difficulties for themselves)
n = 584 (difficulties for loved one and not self)
The most commonly cited reasons for difficulties appearing or worsening were decreased interactions with others (38%) and decreased availability/access to medical professionals (37%).

A quarter believe the use of masks and delays in therapy are the reasons why their concerns came about/worsened during the pandemic.

Q7. You mentioned that these concerns [came about/worsened] during the pandemic. Which, if any, of the following do you believe are the reasons why? Please select all that apply.

n = 556 (reported difficulties came about/worsened during pandemic)
Half of those who had difficulties themselves believe the pandemic did not impact their timeline to seek help; 30% with concerns for others report the same.

Almost a third who had difficulties themselves put off seeking help for a year or more.

Q8. How, if at all, has the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic impacted your timeline for seeking help for [your/a loved one]'s [speech/language, hearing/ringing, balance, cognition, swallowing or eating] difficulties?

Impact of Pandemic on Seeking Help for Self
- 53%: I put off seeking help for several weeks or months
- 19%: I put off seeking help for a year or more
- 29%: It has not had any impact, I sought help as soon as the difficulty became evident
- 8%: I'm not directly responsible for other people's healthcare decisions

Impact of Pandemic on Seeking Help for Loved One
- 52%: I put off seeking help for several weeks or months
- 30%: I put off seeking help for a year or more
- 10%: It has not had any impact, I sought help as soon as the difficulty became evident
- 8%: I'm not directly responsible for other people's healthcare decisions
The most common reasons for delaying treatment were not wanting to be around people they could contract COVID-19 from (40%) and the pandemic changing their perspective on what constitutes an urgent health issue (37%).

Q9. Which of the following are reasons why the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic delayed you from seeking help? Please select all that apply.

- I didn’t/don’t want to be around other people whom I could catch COVID-19 from (40%)
- The pandemic has changed my perspective on what constitutes an urgent health issue (37%)
- I couldn’t get an appointment right away (27%)
- Work demands/responsibilities got in the way (21%)
- Lack of reliable transportation (17%)
- Child or elder care issues/demands got in the way (15%)
- No longer have health insurance or have different coverage as result of job loss/change (15%)
- Lack of technology access/problems using technology (10%)
- Other (6%)
15% have personally received care from an audiologist; 9% from a speech-language pathologist. Slightly more know someone who has received care from each.

Overall, satisfaction with that care is high, with 77% of those who have personally received treatment indicating they are very or somewhat satisfied with the care received.
61% indicate they are at least somewhat open to receiving care via telehealth.