



ASHA
American
Speech-Language-Hearing
Association

2020

Public Policy

Agenda

Your Guide to the Top Public Policy Priorities
for the Professions of Audiology and
Speech-Language Pathology

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 204,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.





THE VISION

of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is “making effective communication, a human right, accessible and achievable for all.” ASHA works in part to achieve this vision by empowering and supporting our members to advocate for the professions and the patients, clients, and students we serve.

ASHA’s Government Affairs and Public Policy Board is pleased to present the *2020 Public Policy Agenda*. **Developed for ASHA members, lawmakers, policy-makers, decision makers, and consumers, this resource identifies the top public policy priorities for the professions** of audiology and speech-language pathology, and guides ASHA’s advocacy efforts in the year to come.

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists are the leading professionals distinctively trained to assess, treat, and manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders, which collectively impact more than 40 million Americans. Thus, it is of utmost importance that the value of our members—and the services provided in all settings—is properly understood and is reflected in relevant laws and regulations.

The *2020 Public Policy Agenda* reflects ASHA’s ongoing commitment to patients, clients, and students; evidence-based practice and outcomes; the highest standards of professional ethics; a diverse professional workforce; and nondiscrimination across the full range of dimensions of diversity, including but not limited to age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, military service, and veteran status.

ASHA looks forward to working collaboratively with lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and allied stakeholders to advance the public policy priorities in the *2020 Public Policy Agenda*.

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YOU



MAKE A

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YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE

ASHA supports a robust infrastructure of 20 government affairs and public policy professionals who collaboratively undertake initiatives each year that effectively advance the priorities of the annual Public Policy Agenda. With that said, the ultimate success of ASHA's advocacy efforts rests upon our 204,000 members each taking action as advocates!

As a member of ASHA, you have a very important voice. The professional perspectives and personal stories you bring to public policy issues have a proven and powerful impact on our ability to advance the professions.

The Government Affairs and Public Policy Board is pleased to promote a **new comprehensive toolkit** for advocates. We encourage you to become acquainted with this resource and identify ways in which you can participate. **Learn more at asha.org/advocacy/asha-member-advocacy.**

Also, please consider:

- Following **ASHA Advocacy** on social media:
 -  facebook.com/ashaadvocacy
 -  twitter.com/ashaadvocacy
 -  pinterest.com/ashaweb/asha-advocacy
- Signing up for **ASHA Headlines** at asha.org/publications/asha-headlines
- **Taking action** on ASHA's advocacy issues at takeaction.asha.org
- Learning about **ASHA-PAC** at asha.org/advocacy/pac

Only by working together can we most effectively educate, inform, and persuade lawmakers, policymakers, and other decision makers to take action that benefits not only our professions but the patient, clients, and students we serve.



A photograph of a classroom with rows of desks and chairs. The desks are light-colored with wooden tops. The chairs are white with black seats. In the background, there is a green chalkboard and a whiteboard. A white ceiling fan is visible on the wall. The floor is made of light-colored tiles.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's *2018 Annual Report to Congress*, speech or language impairments (42.6%) represent the most prevalent disability category of children ages 3 through 5 served under IDEA Part B.¹

SCHOOLS PRIORITIES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide critical evidence-based services to students with disabilities. These services foster effective communication skills and enhance educational performance. It is essential to ensure that all students have access to appropriately resourced audiology and speech-language pathology services, and that all parents and caregivers have the ability to make informed decisions about the education of their children.

- Advocate for public policies that promote **manageable workload, reduce excessive caseload, and streamline documentation** to ensure clinical excellence, ethical practice, and positive student outcomes.
- Advocate that school-based audiologists and speech-language pathologists receive **fair and equitable wages** that align with other professionals who have comparable academic preparation, clinical training, and/or certification.
- Advocate for **increased access to and funding for school-based audiology and speech-language pathology services**—including, but not limited to, early intervention and telepractice—under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Medicaid, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and other statutes as applicable.



ASHA member **Rachel Powell, CCC-SLP**, invited U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith to Brookhaven Elementary in Brookhaven, Mississippi to discuss the importance of special education funding. Rachel gave Senator Hyde-Smith a tour and shared her experiences as a school-based SLP.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services reported a total of \$17.6 million in Medicare (Part B) payments to providers for 192,692 telehealth visits in 2015.²



HEALTH CARE PRIORITIES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide medically necessary services to maximize health and functional outcomes and to enhance quality of life. It is essential that public and private payers comprehensively cover, and equitably reimburse, audiology and speech-language pathology services.

- Advocate for **comprehensive coverage and equitable reimbursement** of audiology and speech-language pathology services—including, but not limited to, early intervention and telepractice.
- Advocate for **productivity and documentation standards** that ensure clinical excellence, ethical practice, patient access, and high-quality service delivery.
- Advocate for the **inclusion and appropriate valuation** of audiology and speech-language pathology services in alternative payment models, coverage policies, and other emerging health care delivery systems.
- Advocate **against public policies that reduce or eliminate coverage of habilitation and rehabilitation services** and devices as essential health benefits.
- Advocate for **appropriate levels of funding** for initiatives that support the assessment, treatment, and management of speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.

ASHA Member **Nathan Cornish, CCC-SLP**, (SIG 18, Telepractice) met with U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth and Dick Durbin in Washington, DC to discuss expanding access to telehealth services under Medicare.



Nationwide, for every 100,000 residents, there are 4 audiologists and 51 speech-language pathologists.⁸



ASHA members **Margaret McRedmond, CCC-AUD**, and **Mary Dale Fitzgerald, CCC-SLP**, promoted the professions at the National Conference of State Legislatures 2019 Legislative Summit in Nashville, TN. They shared information with state legislators on the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC) and the benefits for the professions and consumers.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE/ WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

Audiologists and speech-language pathologists are the leading professionals distinctively trained to assess, treat, and manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders. It is essential that licensure and certification requirements for the professions are preserved, that the professions' defined scopes of practice are protected, that workforce shortages are mitigated, and that a robust, diverse graduate and undergraduate student populations are supported.

- Advocate for public policies that **support the licensure and certification standards** of audiologists and speech-language pathologists, and their ability to practice at the top of their license.
- Address **infringement upon the scopes of practice of audiology and speech-language pathology** by other professions that lack the necessary academic and clinical preparation to assess, treat, and manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.
- Advocate for **adoption of the Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact (ASLP-IC)**.
- Advocate for public policies that **ensure a robust, diverse workforce** of audiologists and speech-language pathologists.
- Advocate for public policies that **promote appropriate regulation of audiology and speech-language pathology assistants**.
- Advocate for public policies that **support a robust, diverse population of graduate and undergraduate students** in communication sciences and disorders programs from enrollment through matriculation.



Before the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program, only 46.5% of infants were screened for hearing loss.⁴

In 2016, more than 98% of newborns were screened as a result of EHDI.⁵

PATIENT, CLIENT, AND STUDENT PRIORITIES

Each patient, client, and student has unique clinical needs. It is essential that public policies are structured to support individual needs and that public policies ensure equitable and timely access to evidence-based services.

- Advocate against **public policies that would limit eligibility or access to Medicaid services.**
- Advocate for public policies ensuring that audiologists, speech-language pathologists, patients, clients, students, and caregivers have **access to objective, evidence-based resources** to support collaborative, informed decision making.
- Advocate for states to **comply with service mandates under Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit.**
- Ensure that **devices and technologies** for hearing, augmentative and alternative communication, habilitation, and rehabilitation are safe, appropriately utilized, and properly marketed to consumers.
- Participate in **international public policy initiatives** designed to support individuals with speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.



During ASHA's 2019 Congressional Briefing on Capitol Hill, **Regan Brady**, Harvard University student, audiology patient, advocate for people with hearing loss, and author of *Listening to Waves*, a book about her experience with hearing loss, shared her story about being diagnosed with hearing loss as a child and how early intervention and audiology services positively affected her life.

ASHA'S GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC POLICY BOARD

The 2020 Public Policy Agenda was developed by the 2019 Government Affairs and Public Policy Board.

- Ingrid Blood, Member
- Katheryn L. Boada, Vice President for Government Relations and Public Policy
- Michelle D'Mello, NSSLHA Member (July 1, 2017-June 30, 2019)
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[L-R] Laurel Stine, Katheryn L. Boada, Kathy Wheat, Doanne Ward-Williams, Monica C. Hudnall, Deborah Ross Swain, Martha Van Dam, Michelle D'Mello, Daniel Williams, Ingrid Blood, Jeffrey P. Regan, Michelle Mannebach

[Not Pictured] Ellen Estomin, Nancy McMahon, Natalie Sfeir



Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, including hearing aids.

AUDIOLOGY



Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems, including swallowing disorders.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

SOURCES

- 1 **The U.S. Department of Education.** (2018). *40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2018/parts-b-c/40th-arc-for-idea.pdf>.
- 2 **Congressional Research Service.** (2016). *Telehealth and Telemedicine: Description and Issues*. Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/r/r44437>.
- 3 **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.** (n.d.). *ASHA-Certified Personnel-to-Population Ratios*. Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/research/memberdata/asha-certified-personnel-to-population-ratios>.
- 4 **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** (2010). Identifying infants with hearing loss - United States, 1999-2007. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 59(8): 220-223. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5908a2.htm>.
- 5 **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** (2018). *Summary of 2016 National CDC EHDI Data*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/hearingloss/2016-data/01-2016-HSFS-Data-Summary-h.pdf>.



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