

Hearing Loss Prevalence in the US: Increasing, Undiagnosed, Undertreated

Key Points:

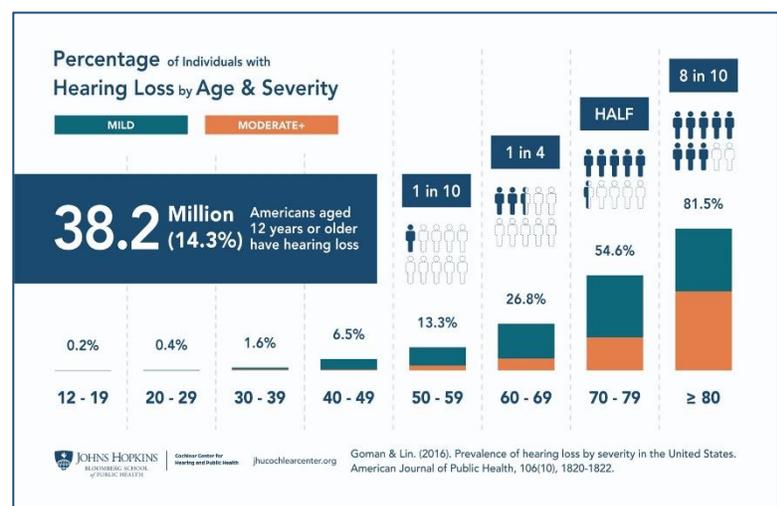
- Hearing loss is common and affects 1 in 8 of all Americans.
- The number of older adults with hearing loss is increasing.
- Rates differ among socioeconomic groups.
- Hearing loss is strongly linked to an increased risk of developing dementia, and other health issues.
- Hearing loss is treatable, and there are significant barriers to accessing care.

Hearing loss is very common and increases with age.

14% of all individuals in the United States have a clinically-relevant hearing loss¹. Hearing loss becomes more common with age, affecting 1/4 of adults in their sixties and nearly 2/3 of Americans aged seventy and older¹. This is because cells in the inner ear that transmit sounds to the brain can be damaged and lost over time from aging, noise exposure, and other causes.

The number of people with hearing loss is increasing over time.

The number of people with hearing loss in the United States is anticipated to rise from 44 million in 2020 to over 73 million by 2060. The vast majority of these individuals in 2060, 62.4 million, will be adults aged sixty and older².



Hearing loss is more common in some sociodemographic groups than others.

Hearing loss is more common in men than women but is less common in Black adults compared to white or Hispanic adults¹. Hearing loss is more common in individuals with lower education or with lower economic means².

Hearing loss is linked with an increased risk of dementia and poor health outcomes. Hearing loss prevents sounds from clearly reaching the brain, forcing the brain to work harder and impairing communication. Studies demonstrate that hearing loss is the single greatest risk factor for dementia and is also strongly linked with other adverse outcomes including depression, falls, and higher healthcare spending³.

Hearing loss treatment remains vastly underutilized. Addressing this gap will require tackling multiple barriers and new federal policies. Less than 20% of Americans with hearing loss use a hearing aid⁴ due to barriers including limited access to hearing care services and technology, poor affordability, and lack of awareness of their condition. In 2016, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine published consensus recommendations on how to address these barriers in the U.S. One recommendation to create a category of over-the-counter hearing aids to spur innovation and increase affordability was passed into law in 2017 and will go into effect in 2020-2021⁵.

References

1. Goman A, Lin F. Prevalence of Hearing Loss by Severity in the United States. *Am J Public Health*. 2016;106(10):1820-1822. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303299. Epub 2016 Aug 23. PMID: 27552261; PMCID: PMC5024365.
2. Goman AM, Reed NS, Lin FR. Addressing Estimated Hearing Loss in Adults in 2060. *JAMA Otolaryngol Neck Surg*. 2017;143(7):733-734. doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2016.4642
3. Livingston G, Huntley J, Sommerlad A, et al. Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2020 report of the Lancet Commission. *Lancet*. 2020 Aug 8;396(10248):413-446. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30367-6. Epub 2020 Jul 30. PMID: 32738937; PMCID: PMC7392084.
4. Chien W, Lin FR. Prevalence of Hearing Aid Use Among Older Adults in the United States. *Arch Intern Med*. 2012;172(3):292–293. doi:10.1097/IPC.0b013e31822e9bba.l
5. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2016. *Hearing Health Care for Adults: Priorities for Improving Access and Affordability*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23446>.

About Us

At the Johns Hopkins Cochlear Center for Hearing and Public Health, we are training a generation of clinicians and researchers to study the impact that hearing loss in older adults has on public health, and to develop and implement public health strategies and solutions for hearing loss in the US and globally.

We approach our work with the foundational understanding that strategies and solutions that allow older adults with hearing loss to communicate and effectively engage with their environment are fundamental to optimizing human health and aging.

For more information on hearing loss, hearing device legislation, and hearing care and Medicare

Cochlear Center Fact sheets:

- Hearing Loss in the US: Increasing, Undiagnosed, Undertreated
- Hearing Loss and Dementia: How Are They Related?

Cochlear Center Policy briefs:

- The Over-The-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017: Increasing the Accessibility and Affordability of Hearing Aids in the U.S.
- Overview of Medicare Coverage for Hearing Treatment: Inadequate and Ready for Improvement
- Proposals for Medicare hearing care coverage: To be effective, They Must Distinguish Between - and Cover - Both Hearing Care Services and Hearing Aids

Available at www.jhucochlearcenter.org

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