

HEARHEAR

M A G A Z I N E

ACCESSIBILITY DURING THE PANDEMIC



**SPRING
2021**



Entendre Québec
Hear Québec



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In loving memory of

Goldie Cooper, Mary Arroyave, George Vogen, Douglas McKinnon, Margaret McKee, Judy Patton Hamilton, Anita David, Mas Tsunokawa, Father John Walsh, and Reginald Weiswall

We would like to send our deepest condolences to their families and friends. These members have touched us and supported the organization for years. We will miss them dearly.

HEAR QUÉBEC

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ISSN: 2370-7089



A Word From the Executive Director

Staying the course together

Way before the pandemic hit in March 2020, Hear Québec was already preparing for its maiden voyage to strategic planning. The teams were formed and the Captain was ready and excited for the journey. Then suddenly, just as we sailed off into a beautiful sunrise, dark skies rolled in with a huge storm. It was nothing we have ever seen before. They called this storm ... COVID-19.

I am really happy to report that despite the weather, our team has been hard at work for our members and community. These are the three main areas where we have focused most of our time and resources:

1. **Our members' and community's fundamental basic needs**, through our COVID Community Food Program and special website page, "COVID-19".
2. **Accessibility awareness**, especially when the safety protocols came into action, by removing barriers and raising awareness with the Safe & Clear Campaign.
3. **Connecting and supporting** our members and finding ways to assist them with coping through this storm while still supporting each other. We checked in with members over several months via pilot projects such as porch visits and Connection Calls.

Despite everything, there have also been some very good things to come out of this storm. With our successful first-ever digital Annual General Meeting and Special General Meeting, we demonstrated that we can provide accessible services and programs online. We are all looking forward to when we will be able to meet in person again, but in the meantime, we will be able to offer some great online programs this spring (see pages 7-11 for details).

Furthermore, some interesting ideas have come up. For instance, a member suggested forming a **Membership Development Committee**. This is something we would like to get started in the spring and we are currently looking to recruit members who would like to join this committee. If you have ideas to share, want to participate in the discussion, or would like more information, please contact info@hearhear.org (subject: Membership Development Committee.) As I write this, our team is looking at ways to simplify the process of renewing your memberships. Please refer to page 6 and the enclosed forms for more information.

As we wait out the storm, our team will be restart the process of strategic planning. This is a great



Heidi Wager

opportunity to start this reflection, as we have been pondering and redefining new ways to fulfill our goals while we stay connected with our members and community. We have had to overcome certain challenges, remove barriers, and be creative, which has led us to be primed and ready for this strategic exercise.

You might be wondering why I used the metaphor of a ship off at sea during a storm. No, it has nothing to do with the cover, though that is a bonus! I see it like this: the pandemic is a storm because when a bad storm is going to hit, what do we do? We strap in for a bumpy ride, we focus on our safety, wellbeing and getting through the storm together. But, when it clears (**and it will clear**) we come out ready to rebuild together. Our ship is strong and built to withstand these rough waters. We will see brighter days soon and we will be ready to set our course when the sun shines again. We are all very proud of the work we have been doing as an organization and we are overwhelmed with all the support from our members, volunteers, donors, and partners. As always, THANK YOU...and be safe and stay healthy!

Coffee & Cocktails with **Hear Québec**

Staying connected during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on many different aspects of our lives. One of the most challenging parts was adapting to our new way of socializing – or rather, a lack thereof.

In the spring of 2020, we took an active role in checking in on our members and making sure they had all the support they needed. In those calls, there were two themes that came up: 1) Due to my hearing loss, I am used to being isolated and not being social, and 2) I am struggling to maintain contact with my loved ones; the phone is challenging and I miss meeting in person so I can lipread and use my other communication strategies.

The members value coming to the office and classes in person. So often, Hear Québec has been referred to as a home in which they can talk to and learn from people who understand them. Members in our speechreading classes, especially in the Plus class, benefit from these friendly connections. They exchange advice and help each other get through the challenges they face due to their hearing loss. They valued this social aspect so much that a small group started meeting on their own for coffee once a month. COVID-19 took all of that away.

This past fall we knew we had to find alternative ways to bring our community together. Luckily, by that time we had discovered Google Meet with captioning. This video conferencing service allows us to meet in a safe, virtual and accessible way. Currently, it is the only video conferencing service that offers free closed captioning. Other platforms offer captioning, but it is very costly and provided by a third party.

With the new fall sessions looming and COVID-19 restrictions in place, we knew we had to take a more digital approach to programming. In our fall programming, we initiated digital **HEARTalks** (workshops) and we highlighted the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) Read Our Lips online speechreading class as a tool. However, something was missing, and this is when the idea for social video calls sparked. We wanted to provide a safe and accessible way for the members to socialize, learn, and support each other, as they have always done.

In mid-October, we had our first “Connection Call”, a pilot project, initially with a small group of five members. Since then, the group has been slowly increasing. During the first call, we spent time getting to know each other and sharing our hearing journeys. Throughout the fall, we met biweekly.



Every call had a topic and the structure allowed the members to converse and share openly. We have discussed advocating, tricks for communicating in public with a hearing loss and so much more.

The positive response from the members who are attending is overwhelming. They LOVE it. And so do we.

After the holidays, we picked up these calls again. Unanimously, everyone in the call wished to make the call a weekly occurrence and for it to be short and sweet (under an hour). Missing this social connection and eager to fill their schedule with plans to look forward to, these Connection Calls evolved to Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec.

These calls are quickly taking on a life of their own. More and more people are joining, and we are excited to announce that we are starting a monthly evening session. For this evening session, with a 5 à 7 vibe, we are planning to have guest hosts as well as fun games and activities, all from the comfort of your couch. Great food and drinks will be provided by you!

Our first evening call is on March 30th, 2021, with the cutest, funnest, and most amazing host ever – none other than... Abby Stonehouse, Montréal stand-up comedian. Join us as we bid a final farewell to Abby's amazing experience with Hear Québec (see page 11). She has some really big surprises, giveaways, and local talents to entertain you that night! We are excited to kick off our first evening session Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec with a bang. Do not miss it!

Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec is sure to have something for everyone. This spring, these calls continue and we want to invite you to join the fun. We will be having new topics, special guest speakers, games and, of course, a lot of laughs.

How do you join? Easy! Mark your interest on the Spring 2021 registration form. You will get an email a few days before the video call with the link to the Google Meet event. When it is time for the meeting, just click the link in your email and it will bring you to the video call.

If you feel a bit intimidated by the process of joining an online video conference, we will go through this one-on-one so you can get a taste of what it is like beforehand. We have helped many members over the last few months try Google Meet for the first time and little by little it gets easier.



Membership & Registration

Given that COVID-19 is still ongoing and in light of our concern for the safety of our members and staff, our upcoming programming events will be held virtually. We absolutely miss visiting and seeing you all in the office. However, please ensure that you call and make an appointment before coming into the office. Please be assured that we will do everything in our power to make these events and activities accessible and safe for all involved.

New Membership Renewal Form: At Hear Québec we deeply value the opinions of our members. We've listened to their feedback and have worked hard this past year to help streamline the membership renewal process. For the 2021-2022 membership year, we are debuting our new renewal form! Past members will receive a simplified membership form in the mail. For the renewal to be successfully processed, the form still must be completed, signed, and returned to Hear Québec with payment. Please note: we understand that the font size and the layout of the form is much different than usual. This is due to software limitations. Thank you for your understanding!

Membership is valid between April 1 and March 31 of each year and must be renewed for \$15 annually. Membership is extended to people affected by hearing loss, hearing health professionals and anyone who supports our mission. **For veterans actively serving or retired, and students age 16 to 18, membership is free!** *If there is a concern due to financial hardship, please contact the Executive Director at heidywager@hearhear.org or call (514) 488-5552 ext. 4500.*

Registration: Please note that registration is mandatory and forms must be completed and returned prior to your participation in any programs. For **digital registration**, please indicate your interest on the registration form for the activity. You will be emailed the details about the event and the login information. If you need further information on how to use Google Meet, contact the office for a one-on-one tutorial and support.

Payment: Payments must be made prior to the start of the activity and will be processed only by the office staff. Cash, cheque, credit card and debit card are all accepted. Please make cheques payable to **Hear Québec**. You may also make secure payments or donations online at: <https://hearhear.nationbuilder.com/donate>. **To make payment in person, please call ahead to arrange an appointment time.**

Accessibility: All programs, events, and activities will be accessible for those with hearing loss. This may include sound amplification, FM systems, or Live Transcribe.

If you have questions or concerns regarding any of the above information, please contact the Hear Québec office by emailing info@hearhear.org or call (514) 488-5552 ext. 4500. We would love to hear your thoughts on our membership renewal form, registration for events, accessibility accommodations or even joining the organization for the first time! If you did not receive a membership form with this magazine, for your convenience it can always be found on our website at <https://hearhear.org/become-a-member>. If you need a form mailed directly to you, please contact the office – we would be happy to help!

Annual General Meeting



We invite you to save the date on your calendars: Hear Québec's **Annual General Meeting** will be held on **June 2, 2021** in the evening. Please RSVP your attendance on the registration form. You will then be contacted about the specific details surrounding the event in May 2021.

Spring Programs

Tutorials for Google Meet & Zoom:

Google Meet and Zoom are great ways to stay connected with family and friends. The Google Meet video conference platform has free closed captioning for your accessibility. We give one-on-one tutorials and support upon request to people interested in learning how to use it. People who attended these tutorials were more likely to attend the other activities. Please contact info@hearhear.org if you are interested in scheduling a tutorial.



Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Daytime):

Are you missing chatting and catching up with your friends over coffee? Are you missing members and staff? Join us on Google Meet for a break! These calls keep us close in times where being social is limited. Let's share stories, laugh and learn together. On occasion, we will have special guests and discuss topics related to hearing loss. Don't be shy if you are not sure whether these are for you: join us once and see! (See page 4 for more information).

First Spring Date: March 31, 2021 **Time:** 1 pm - 2 pm **Place:** Google Meet

These video calls continue weekly. As the groups grow in numbers, new ones are formed on different days and times. Please contact the office if this scheduled date does not work for you.



Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Evening):

Are you missing your 5 à 7 vibes? Join us once a month on Google Meet for a Cocktail Hour! You will have fun, unwind, laugh your a\$\$ off, and just relax. Come have a drink and some amazing appetizers – all supplied by YOU from the comfort of your couch. No need to dress up, do your hair, or wear makeup – BUT please come with pants on! 🤪

Each hour will be hosted by a special guest and we will have something exceptional planned for you! Great for those who can't join our daytime activities or just want to have a little fun.

Free for members and \$5 for non-members so feel free to invite friends and family!

Host: Comedy Hour with Abby Stonehouse
Host: Katrina Tarondo
Host: Omer Othman
Host: TBD

Date: March 30, 2021
Date: April 29, 2021
Date: May 26, 2021
Date: June 23, 2021

Time: 7 pm - 8:30 pm
Time: 7 pm - 8 pm
Time: 7 pm - 8 pm
Time: 7 pm - 8 pm



HEARTalk E-learning Wellness Series

Hear Québec has gathered a stellar line up of guest speakers to inform you about hearing health and beyond.

Accessibility: The Art of Self-Advocacy with Eva Basch

Come join us as Eva shares her experiences and personal stories about the importance of self-advocacy. Ask questions, tell your own stories if you wish, meet people who share and understand the challenges you face, learn something new, and have fun.

Date: April 22, 2021

Time: 2 pm - 3 pm

Place: Google Meet

Speaker: Eva Basch

Registration deadline: April 15, 2021



Disability Tax Credit Explained with Omer Othman

What is the disability tax credit and are you eligible? Omer Othman is here to give you all the information about this program for those with hearing loss. Omer is a Communications Studies undergraduate and specializes in digital and social media marketing. He is passionate about promoting self-advocacy and ensuring accessibility for all. He has been volunteering at Hear Québec since June 2019, and also serves on the Board of Directors.

Date: May 11, 2021

Time: 7 pm - 8 pm

Place: Google Meet

Speaker: Omer Othman

Registration deadline: May 4, 2021



Q & A with an Audioprosthétiste, Joel Morin from Les Centres Masliah Audioprothésistes

As we know, hearing loss technology can be overwhelming at times. Come speak to Joel Morin, an expert in hearing aid technology and ask him all your hearing aid questions. Joel Morin is an audioprosthétiste with Les Centres Masliah, a longtime supporter and donor.

Date: May 27, 2021

Time: 7 pm - 8 pm

Place: Google Meet

Speaker: Joel Morin

Registration deadline: May 20, 2021



Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) with Dany Lasablonnière from Oreille Bionique

Are you looking to get the most out of the hearing you have? Learn about the ALDs that are available to you. Join us as we speak to Dany Lasablonnière, Vice-President of Oreille Bionique. A specialist in the field and longtime partner of Hear Québec, Dany has assisted us in making our programs and activities as accessible as possible.

Date: June 15, 2021

Time: 1 pm - 2 pm

Place: Google Meet

Speaker: Dany Lasablonnière

Registration deadline: June 8, 2021



Speechreading:

New

In partnership with CHHA Read Our Lips Online Speechreading Self-paced E-Learning

"Everyone should be empowered to partake in the stories that weave the fabric of our lives. Lipreading, an important part of speechreading, is life-changing. That's why we made a safe, accessible, online space to learn how to speechread at your own pace. We're not just teaching; we're opening doors to a more confident life. We built this course for people experiencing hearing challenges. To make it as easy as possible to learn, you can access this course online from the comfort of your own home. The course is also completely self-paced, so you can learn at the speed that's best for you!"

- Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA)

If you are interested in signing up for this online course, **contact Hear Québec for a members-only discount code for up to 20% off**

SPECIAL PARTICIPATION GROUP:

If you wish to be more involved in a special Read Our Lips participation group and receive a **free sponsored course** and even more support, we've got you covered!!! We have very limited space available for a very limited time! To find out how you can sign up and become a participant in this group, please mark your interest on the registration form and we will contact you if spaces are still available.



Starting Date: April 8 - May 27, 2021, from 10 am - 11 am. Eight weekly sessions.

Registration deadline: March 31, 2021

In-person – Spring Speechreading Classes

Due to the ongoing risk of COVID-19, we will not be holding our in-person activities. We encourage you to join us in the activities listed above. If you do not have access to a computer and would like to attend an activity, please contact the office. We may be able to find a way for you to participate.

Outreach:

New

Resources for businesses and professionals

Please visit our NEW section on our website for more information about how to make your workplace or business more accessible to those with hearing loss.

An estimated 19% of adults between 19 and 79 have some form of hearing loss. We see the challenges that many of our members face every day, due to a lack of knowledge about the needs of the hearing loss population. This is why our outreach work is so vital to the hearing loss community.

Presentations Available: We would love to talk to you and your team!

Our tailored presentations will provide tips on communication strategies, accessibility and a greater understanding of hearing loss in general. Book your free in-person or digital presentation today.

How to book a presentation: Call the office at (514) 488-5552 ext. 4500 or email info@hearhear.org
Presentations are free with membership



New Spring Nature Walks:



Our contact has to be limited at this time, but why not catch up while doing something healthy for our bodies? We have scheduled two dates this spring for you to join us on a safe and social distancing walk. There will be masks with transparent windows available and assistive listening technology if needed. The length of the walks will be tailored to your comfort level! Please let us know if you have any mobility concerns. We will work with you to find a solution. Come get active and connect with us. All you need is to bring are your walking shoes, water bottle and, most importantly, your smile.

Lasalle date: May 19th, 2021

(Rainy day alternative May 20th)

Location: René Lévesque Park

Address: 398 Chemin du Canal, Lachine, QC, H8S 4G2

Meeting point: Entrance near the parking lot

Time: 10 am

Duration: 1 hour

Registration deadline: May 12, 2021

West Island date: June 9th, 2021

(Rainy day alternative June 10th)

Location: Dorval Pine Beach Park

Address: 1335 Lakeshore Dr, Dorval, QC, H9S 2E5

Meeting point: Sarto-Desnoyers Community Centre's parking lot

Time: 1 pm

Duration: 1 hour

Registration deadline: June 2, 2021

Each location above has parking. Please be at the meeting point on time. We will have two routes planned, a shorter and a longer route. Please contact the office if you have any questions.

pooling
our strengths

AT THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Office offers its assistance to people with disabilities and to their family and friends.

The Office...

- **listens** and **helps** you identify your needs;
- **informs** you about existing resources programs and services;
- **advises** you about how to apply for services;
- **refers** you to the organization most likely to meet your needs;
- **supports** you in the steps you take.

For more information

Phone: 1-800-567-1465



TTY:
1-800-567-1477

aide@ophq.gouv.qc.ca

www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca



Important Dates

March

WORLD HEARING DAY

- World Hearing Day March 3
- Registration Opens for Spring Activities March 15
- Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Evening) - Abby Stonehouse March 30
- Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Daytime)- First spring date (weekly) March 31

April

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION WEEK

- Read Our Lips Participation Group - Starts (weekly) April 8
- Volunteer Appreciation Week April 18 - 24
- **HEARTalk** with Eva Basch April 22
- Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Evening) - Katrina Tarondo April 29

May

SPEECH & HEARING MONTH

- **HEARTalk** with Omer Othman May 11
- Spring Nature Walk (René Lévesque Park) May 19
- Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Evening) - Omer Othman May 26
- **HEARTalk** with Joel Morin May 27

June

NATIONAL ACCESSABILITY WEEK

- National AccessAbility Week May 30 - June 5
- Annual General Meeting June 2
- Spring Nature Walk (Dorval Pine Beach Park) June 9
- **HEARTalk** with Dany Lasablonnière June 15
- Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec (Evening) June 23

Abby says "see you later, not goodbye"

After three years with Hear Québec, I am saying farewell to my Program Coordinator position. As most of you know, I am a writer and comedian outside of Hear Québec. After a lot of thought (A LOT!), I have decided to pursue these full time. I cherish getting to know each and every member who has crossed my path. You all have taught me so much about the hearing loss community that I am part of. I am confident that the person who takes my place will be treated with the same love and support. I have grown so much through my contacts with the staff and board members I work with everyday. If it wasn't for the confidence they instilled in me, I would not have the courage to take these next steps. Thank you, and wish me luck!



FYI: For Your Information...

Working *with a* HEARING LOSS during a Pandemic

Being in the workforce and having hearing loss is an important topic, especially during the pandemic, when the work environments are changing – not to mention the use of paper/cloth masks. Adapting to working with a hearing loss, like hearing loss itself, comes in different forms, and we all have to find new ways to adapt based on our particular needs. You are not alone in this: so many of our members and friends are facing the same challenges you are. As we have highlighted, hearing loss is an invisible disability. Therefore, the related challenges one faces in the workplace may not be very evident. The person with hearing loss may be compensating in a variety of ways, such as using communication strategies and additional technology. You can find tools on our website that you can share with the people around you. Here are some tips and reminders that will help you in the workplace.

One thing we know for sure is that the more you advocate, practice, educate and share with your team and communities about the tips, the smoother communication can be.

Tips for Speaking on the Phone with Hearing Loss:

1. Ask the speaker to speak in a deeper tone and at a slower pace.
2. Eliminate background noise. Make sure you are in a quiet place and ask the speaker to move to a quiet room and avoid having extra noise.
3. Make sure one person is speaking at a time.
4. Ask the speaker not to speak rapidly or shout.
5. Ask the speaker to rephrase rather than repeat. Some sounds are easier to hear so switching up their sentences can lead to more understanding.
6. Ask questions such as, "Did I hear this correctly?" and repeat what you heard.
7. Be patient and kind to yourself. Hearing loss is not easy and the challenges you are facing are not your fault.
8. Ask for an alternative form of communication (eg. video chat) OR a summary of what was discussed via email (or even text message).

"One of the challenges I face at work during the pandemic is having video calls. It is difficult for me to understand what people are saying in Zoom meetings. Their webcam is not always clear so I cannot read their lips and their microphone sometimes makes an echo or glitch. I can hear them fine 80% of the time, but I fear I might miss out on something important. I have tried to use live captioning on Zoom but it does not work well. So my team has been kind enough to provide, in writing, all of the important points from meetings so I don't miss out on anything important."

- Hanu Ariyarajah



Tips for Speaking on a Video Conference Call with Hearing Loss:

1. Keep in mind that usually Internet/Wi-Fi is more consistent than using cellular data. Having a clear connection can help with sound quality and the ability to speechread during video calls.
2. Ask your coworkers to use an external microphone. This helps with the sound clarity.
3. Ask your coworkers to be mindful of the lighting. Position themselves near a good source of light so you can clearly see their face and speechread.
4. Ask your coworkers to make sure their device/webcam is not facing a window. This avoids backlighting and helps you when speechreading.
5. Use a platform like Google Meet that has free computer generated live captioning.
6. The same tips apply to video conferencing as with phone calls (see page 12).

"I wear a hearing aid in my left ear and I have a cochlear implant in my right ear. I work full time as a social worker at a special needs facility. In this new world of wearing masks, it was a real struggle for me at first, as everyone's face was covered, their voices were muffled and I could no longer rely upon my lip-reading skills, which I had done all my life. For the first two weeks, I was frustrated and wondered how I was going to cope. At times, I have had to ask staff or students to remove their masks briefly when I cannot catch something. On Zoom meetings, which are more and more frequent, I will increase the volume as needed, and I switch to the speaker-view rather than gallery view, so the person speaking is the only person I am seeing. This enables me to use my lipreading skills, if needed. However, I have not found a method to manage larger meetings where people are farther apart. This means I am having to rely on my hearing, and it is challenging for me to hear people the farther they are from me."

- Annette Perry



"The pandemic has changed everything as we know it. This is no different for a deaf person like myself. Understanding that masks are more important than lip-reading was frustrating at the beginning, because my accessibility became a second thought. While the development of safe, clear masks was optimistic, there still remained a lack of awareness and distribution, which only further proves that accessibility is not emphasized. In terms of school, we use the videoconferencing platform Zoom. It is appropriate for online learning, but it does not come with closed-captioning features. Recorded lectures come with automated captioning, which is often inaccurate. I get by just fine because that's what I have to do, but I do feel isolated when communicating with non-transparent masks on, because it significantly diminishes my ability to understand. People also often get frustrated when I ask them to repeat themselves or write what they are saying, and I can only self-advocate for so long... In the end, it is temporary - but for any upcoming pandemics, we should be better prepared and try to include those with disabilities as best we can!"

- Omer Othman



Inform *and* Raise Awareness

by Jeanne Choquette (Président, Audition Québec)



For nearly 40 years, Audition Québec has been providing services to the hard of hearing or deafened francophone community in Québec. Initially known as ADSMQ (Association des malentendants et devenus sourds du Québec), Audition Québec revised its identity and brand in 2016 with the aim of further clarifying its mission and vision.

Audition Québec's mission is to promote the autonomy and inclusion of people with hearing problems in Québec. To achieve this mission, the organization provides information and referral services to adults affected by hearing loss, as well as their families, friends and work colleagues. It educates and informs the general population and public authorities and, through its services, helps people who are hard of hearing or deafened to increase their autonomy and communication skills in order to remain integrated into society.

Audition Québec's focus is on information-sharing and awareness-raising rather than in the defense of rights, which is more the responsibility of ReQIS (the Québec Network for the Social Inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People).

TRANSPARENT WINDOW MEDICAL MASKS AND OTHER TOOLS

Audition Québec has established a partnership with Entreprise Prémont, in Louiseville, which manufactures medical masks and has just unveiled the Humask-Pro Vision, a windowed mask that complies with Health Canada's requirements (ASTM F2100-19 standard). It will be available to the general public at the end of January. In the meantime, Audition Québec has set-up a pre-order form (in French, but easily understandable) at www.auditionquebec.org/humask. It will certainly allow healthcare professionals who have patients with hearing loss to better serve us! Audition Québec will also reach out to merchants to provide salespeople with this type of mask.

Among the other products available through Audition Québec (see the site www.auditionquebec.org/covid19):

- Badges and stickers *I read on the lips*
- Awareness kit for the general public and healthcare staff related to wearing opaque masks
- 18 strategies for communicating with people who are hard of hearing

*Their resources
are available in
French only.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it so that we, the hard of hearing, are now forced to face the fact that we have hearing loss. Audition Québec receives frequent calls/emails from people who have great difficulty functioning at work. That's why the most recent issue of our Sourdine magazine focuses on the world of employment for people with hearing loss. To access this specific issue, please visit our website at www.auditionquebec.org/sourdine.



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info@audiologie-centre-ouest.com

www.audiologie-centre-west.com



Safe & Clear Campaign

Hear Québec provides two new clear mask options removing barriers and making our world more accessible, one clear mask at a time...

As you know, Hear Québec has made it a priority to improve accessibility in our communities. This is even more crucial during these pandemic times, with all of the safety protocols in place to protect us. These same protocols also create more barriers for those of us with hearing loss.

We have distributed over 1500 ClearMasks and shields in order to help tear down some of the barriers this pandemic has presented. Now we are excited to provide two new types of clear face masks. These masks will allow those who are hard of hearing/deaf to speechread and feel included in their own communities.

With so many varieties of masks on the market, we made it a priority to test as many designs as we could to offer you what we thought was the best value and price. We are happy to be able to offer a total of four different products to our members and the general public.

M Smiley:

A reusable mask called the M Smiley is washable, comfortable and doesn't fog! This mask comes in adult and child sizes and its comfort level is superior to other reusable brands.

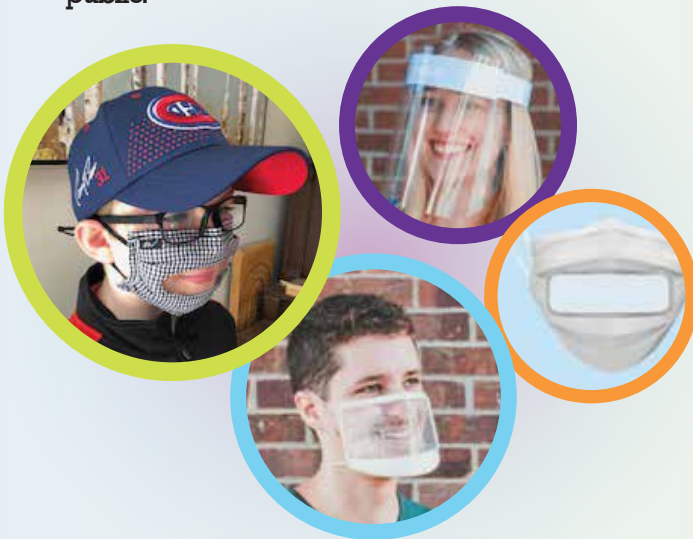
We are excited to be able to offer child size masks. These masks can facilitate conversations with children and an older family member or a young friend who has hearing loss. We truly want to eliminate barriers for everyone. Having a child size will allow us to do just that!



Humask Pro Vision:

The Humask Pro Vision is a new disposable mask that is coming to the market. This mask, with a transparent window, is the first to pass the required ASTM F2100 certification. **According to Health Canada, this is the highest quality standard used in healthcare settings (in accordance to the CNESST).** Its unique design has been created to provide space between the mouth and the transparent window for comfort and optimal breathability. Made from hypoallergenic and microporous membranes, this mask is distinguished by its anti-fog and anti-reflective properties.

Of course we also have the ClearMask and face shields available. To request your accessible masks, email mask@hearhear.org or visit the Safe & Clear section of our website.



"Going into a store with people wearing cloth masks makes things very difficult. It is even more challenging when it's a noisy environment. The use of masks with transparent windows is simple and helps me lipread. Very accessible for the hard of hearing."

*- Tahsin S. Mohammad,
a cochlear implant user*

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Beyond the Audiogram: Hidden Hearing Loss 101

By: Jessy Burdman-Villa

"I can hear you, but I can't make out what you're saying"

"I have difficulty following conversations in loud restaurants"

"I can't seem to focus in noisy settings"

Once coming to their senses (pun intended), those experiencing these challenges will consult an audiologist, who will administer, among other tests, a pure-tone audiometry test, the standard measure for assessing hearing ability. Feeling hopeful that their hearing test will help identify the problem, they may be surprised when the audiologist informs them that their audiogram indicates normal hearing.

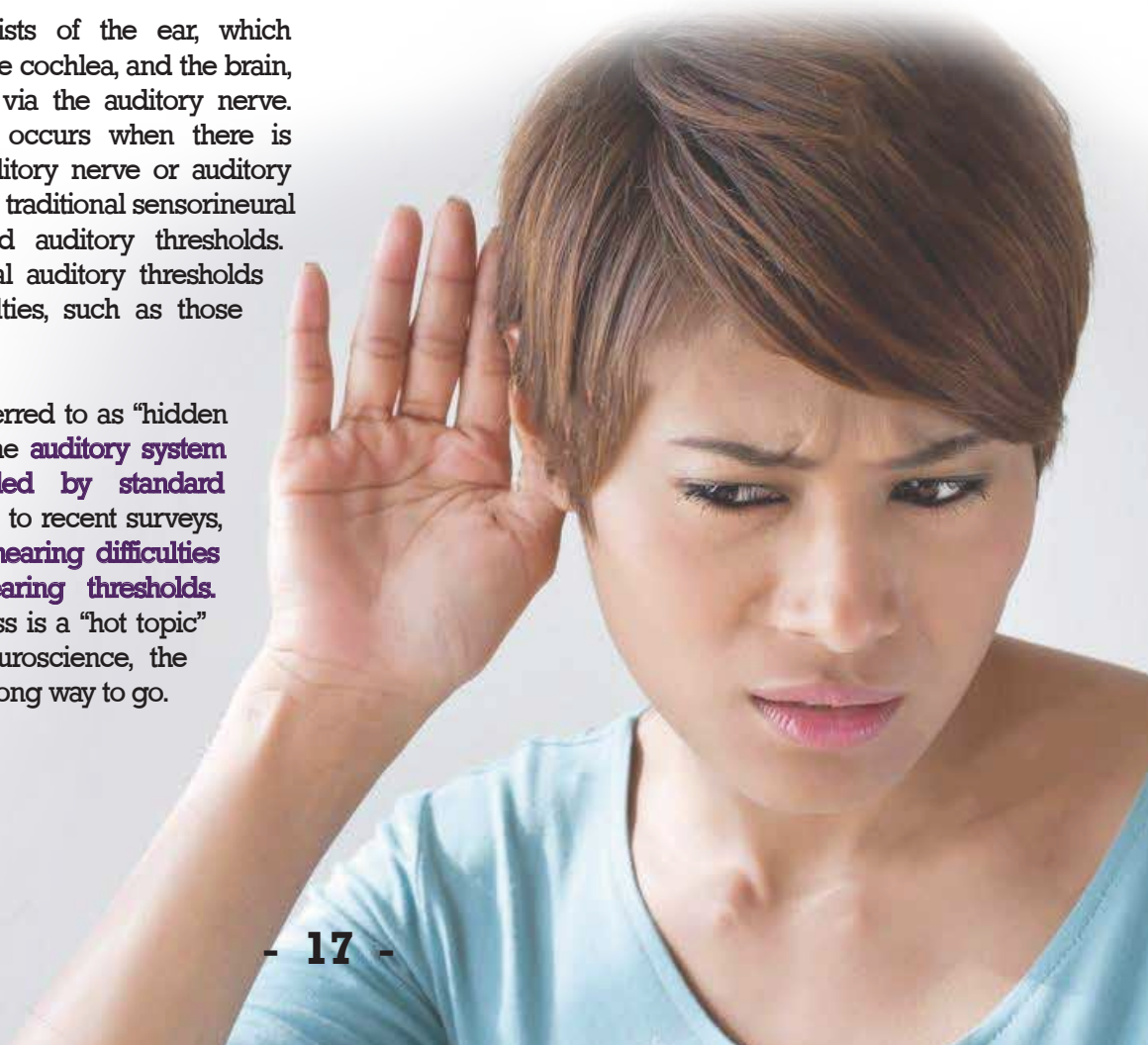
"I passed a hearing test, but I still feel like I have hearing loss"— alas, the final symptom to solidify the shared experience of those with hidden hearing loss.

The auditory system consists of the ear, which includes a structure called the cochlea, and the brain, which connects to the ear via the auditory nerve. Sensorineural hearing loss occurs when there is damage to the cochlea, auditory nerve or auditory areas in the brain. Those with traditional sensorineural hearing loss show elevated auditory thresholds. However, some show normal auditory thresholds but have perceptual difficulties, such as those identified in our example.

This novel phenomenon, referred to as "hidden hearing loss", reflects that the **auditory system dysfunction is not revealed by standard audiometric tests**. According to recent surveys, **12%–15% of subjects report hearing difficulties despite having normal hearing thresholds**. Although hidden hearing loss is a "hot topic" in the field of auditory neuroscience, the research is mixed and has a long way to go.

There are still ambiguities about the nature of this condition, which has implications for hearing health professionals and, in turn, for those affected by it. However, it is still important to understand the current state of the literature in order to accommodate those affected.

Although most of the research on the condition's causes and underlying mechanisms is based on animal models, inferences can be made about humans. So, let's take a look beyond the audiogram for some insight into Hidden Hearing Loss 101...



Causes

Popular opinion suggests that **noise exposure** is the primary cause of hidden hearing loss. Repeated noise exposure, or even a single exposure to loud noise, can result in permanent damage to the auditory system. Today, noise pollution is pervasive, particularly among young adults, putting them at risk for not only developing this condition, but for also having more severe hearing loss as they get older. Another recognized cause of hidden hearing loss is **natural aging**, which is difficult to disentangle from noise exposure, as it might actually just be reflective of accumulated noise exposure. Some other causes include the side effects of **ototoxic medications**, such as high dose aminoglycoside antibiotics, like gentamicin. Altogether, these causes are consistently linked to impaired auditory functioning.



Mechanisms

Some researchers believe that the mechanism underlying hidden hearing loss is **cochlear synaptopathy**. The cochlea houses the inner hair cells that are connected to auditory nerve fibers. According to this perspective, those with hidden hearing loss have a loss of connections between inner hair cells and auditory nerve fibers. Other researchers suggest **cochlear demyelination** as an underlying mechanism. The auditory nerve fibers are myelinated, which ensures the quick and effective transmission of electrical signals to the brain. According to this perspective, those with hidden hearing loss have damaged auditory nerve myelin. There are also researchers who suggest **hair cell dysfunction** as an alternate mechanism. The inner hair cells transform vibrations into electrical signals. There are also outer hair cells in the cochlea that amplify the inner hair cell response. According to this perspective, those with this condition have a problem with their cochlea's hair cell functioning.

Although each of these perspectives revolve around a different mechanism, they all impact the process whereby electrical signals are sent to the brain. This results in the brain having difficulty blocking out competing background noise and making sense of the auditory information that it receives.

Diagnosis

We are currently lacking tests that can be used to identify hidden hearing loss in humans. There are tools available to assess hearing difficulty in complex listening conditions, such as **speech-in-noise tests** and **self-report surveys**, but they are not sufficient to make a clinical diagnosis. They can, however, be used to identify at-risk individuals before symptoms become increasingly apparent. Alternate assessment tools, such as **electrophysiological tests**, wherein electrodes are placed on the scalp or in the ear canal, are currently being studied.



Treatment

The saying “prevention is better than cure” holds true for hidden hearing loss, as **limiting noise exposure** and advocating for quieter environments in public spaces might help limit the prevalence of this condition. Treatments for those who have hidden hearing loss include **hearing aids** with directional microphones that improve speech discrimination in noise, and devices that use **signal-processing strategies** to amplify speech in noisy environments. Alternate treatments, wherein inner hair cells and auditory nerve fibers can be reconnected, and damaged auditory nerves repaired, are currently being investigated. And lastly, to those with hidden hearing loss: **disclosure** can go a long way! Communicating your hearing needs to those in your circle can make for more inclusive and enjoyable social experiences.



With the quick advancement of research and technology, it won't be long before the term “hidden hearing loss” becomes obsolete. But in the meantime, it is an apt descriptor of a condition for which there is currently no diagnostic tool. And for this, the experience for those affected can feel particularly frustrating. That being said, let's continue to search beyond the audiogram to best cater to those affected by hidden hearing loss – hear hear!

If you would like more information about hidden hearing loss, please feel free to consult Hear Québec's library or your health care professionals.



Jessy received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at Concordia University in 2020. In the final year of her undergraduate degree, she worked in the Adult Development and Cognitive Aging Lab on her Honours Thesis and developed a fascination with the auditory system. This led to her working at Hear Québec as the Database Analyst before beginning her master's degree in a related healthcare field in 2021.

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My Hearing Journey through the Corporate World

By: Dale Webber

Looking back

There were so many indications I wasn't hearing as well as others. Knowing more now, I likely have noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) from rock concerts and dances in my teenage years with my ears ringing for a couple of days after each. In my early 20s, my friends seemed to be able to have conversations in loud environments, but I was always bending my head so they could talk directly into my ear. I would get restaurant anxiety if the chosen one had a ceramic floor and high ceilings. Of course, there were the typical spousal complaints of "Do you really need the TV to be so loud?" And, at work, I was always the one who would reach across the conference table to increase the volume on the speaker phone. I knew I wasn't hearing as well as others and, like many with hearing loss, I ignored it, denied it, faked it and lost a bit of my self-worth with every conversation I got lost in. It didn't register in my mind as a hearing issue. It registered as silent shame, thinking I was in cognitive decline despite a good friend referring to me as "the smart one".

Many will say I am extroverted, the type who gets their energy from being around others, joking, playing and socializing rather than being quiet and reading. Just recently, my husband described one of my redeeming qualities as being like a snowplow (bless him, romance is not his forte). But he clarified to say I seem to have this ability to deal with obstacles by just plowing through with passion, focus and emotional strength, regardless of what comes along. Not the best personality type to be denying hearing loss.

The Big Reveal

When a close friend delicately suggested I get my hearing tested after shushing me for speaking too loudly one too many times, I learned I have mild to moderate high frequency hearing loss in both ears. My ski slope audiogram revealed I was unable to hear birds, rustling leaves, as well as certain consonants resulting in words or sentences not making sense. Since background noise would make it worse, I was likely overcompensating by increasing the sound of my own voice. "High frequency hearing loss is very common as you age" I was told. "Hearing aids will help but your condition is not severe enough for RAMQ to cover the cost" ... "It is recommended you get hearing aids.... Oh and yes, that ringing in your ears, it's called tinnitus. Nothing can be done for that." **What???? I'm only 53!!!!**





Denial and the Downward Spiral

I tell myself my hearing loss can't be that bad if it's not at the threshold covered by Medicare. But I start to pay more attention to what others hear. "Can you make sense of that announcement? Don't you have trouble hearing out of that speaker phone? Can you hear in this restaurant? What I didn't realize was my hearing loss was also working against me at work. I was trying to swim while wearing cement shoes! I loved my job and I was passionate about what I was doing. It was my time. I wanted to prove what I could do. Leave my legacy! My son was about to finish high school and my husband was able to pick up the slack at home. I was involved in leading change and I was so energized. I loved that my project was so progressive. It allowed me to research, analyze, leverage my past experience, business sense and contacts, and be creative all at the same time. But just when those young whipper-snapper MBA's are coming in and licking their chops with career goals of their own, challenging everything their more senior colleagues say and do (just like me more than 20 years ago), I'm denying I have a hearing problem.

The corporate world isn't very kind to those who can't keep up with the conversation. Talk is fast. You are to hear things the first time they are said, whispered or nuanced. And you are expected to remember. If not, you are not paying attention. There is little patience for people saying 'What?' 'Pardon?' or 'Can you repeat that please?' Meetings are often in dim light with the speaker behind you as the PowerPoint is projected in the front of the room. Best practice presentations no longer put all the information on the slide, you are expected to listen. Things have gone global and support departments have been offshored. The squelchy voices over the speaker phones all have

different accents. What a nightmare! It was exhausting. But despite never having anything but a stellar performance review, sometimes senior management would lose their patience:


- "Why are you taking notes? Just listen. You are expected to remember!
- "Why can't you understand French? Here's a tape.... Practice!
- "For God sake! Why are you asking those questions now? The meeting is over!
- What kind of question is that? Were you not even paying attention?
- "So Dale, what is your position on this? 'Pardon, can you repeat the specific issue?... ' "Oh, never mind." (eye roll).

A year went by before I saw a hearing aid acoustician. I'd waited so long I needed to get another hearing test. Same result, but the delay to get hearing aids and support has taken a toll on my self-worth. There were times I wanted to crawl into the carpet. Each time was more self-shame, a knife in my gut. But, being the snowplow that I am, I just worked harder. I was becoming irritable at work. "Why are you taking my constructive criticism so personally?" said my new young, whipper-snapper, soft-spoken boss who would now lead my project. What's next? Burn-out, sick-leave, early retirement. Very common next steps for those who don't know better. This snowplow, who was in denial for so long needed to heal and forgive herself to repair her battered ego.

To Acceptance and Beyond!

In all, retirement has been quite good to me. I've been able to sail, golf, play pickleball, play on three ringette teams, herd cattle in Wyoming, take mogul lessons and ski in Switzerland, be present for family, manage my son's hockey team and volunteer. All which make me very happy. But I would not wish a burnout on anyone. There should be no shame in having a physical disability. When I retired, I didn't even know what communication accessibility was. I didn't even know there were organizations like Hear Québec dedicated to improving the well-being of those affected by hearing loss. I didn't know a community existed to learn from others dealing with the same issues. And I didn't know I would find a new passion in being part of an organization that helps people who have hearing loss. I look forward to the next stretch of my journey, now having passed through denial, anger and acceptance. There is lots to learn about the not-for-profit world and lots can be done to improve awareness of communication accessibility and eradicating the stigma and shame. Hmmm. Time for this snowplow to restart her engine!

“ ... at work, I was always the one who would reach across the conference table to increase the volume on the speaker phone. ”



Dale is now enjoying retirement and the ability to focus on volunteer work after 31 years in the corporate world. Having mild to moderate hearing loss, she has enthusiastically embraced Hear Québec's mission serving as both a board member on the governance committee and a volunteer on the fundraising committee. Sailing, golfing and skiing locally are just some of her many favourite things with dreams of travel and getting together with friends and family once the pandemic is over.



#TogetherWeDidIt

With your donation, you help ensure that everyone living with hearing loss in Greater Montréal has the accessibility tools they need so that they feel included within their environments. ***When you transform one life, you transform a community. You're giving the gift of accessibility. Thank you!***

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