

HEARHEAR

M A G A Z I N E

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

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FALL
2021



Entendre Québec
Hear Québec

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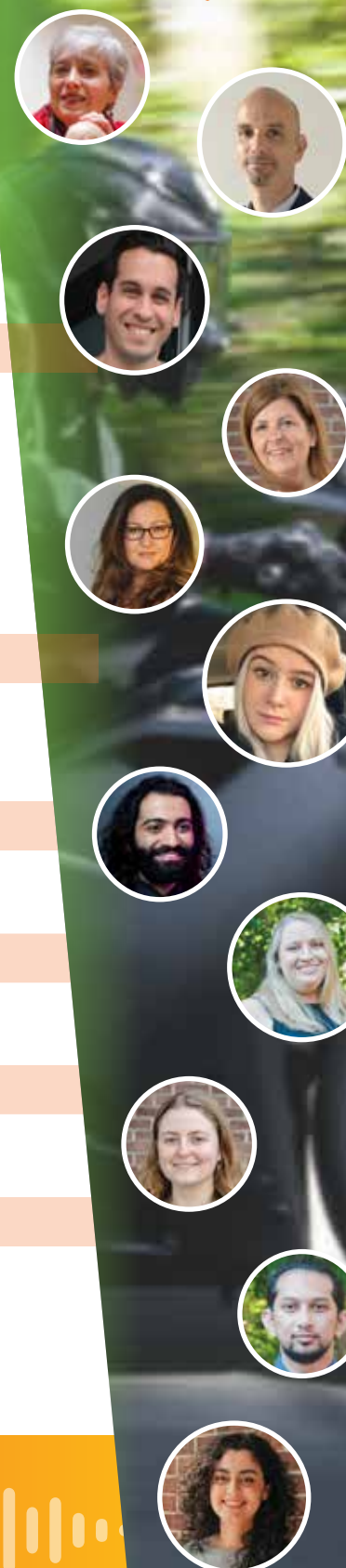
Doreen Cons, Alvin Goldman

In loving memory of

Barbara Mitis-Cwiekala, Susie O'Farrell, Albert Chee,
and Raphaela Blum

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.

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A Word From the Executive Director



Heidy Wager

In the midst of everything that has been happening around the world over the last two years (from the Covid pandemic to the Black Lives Matter Movement and the tragic discovery of unmarked mass gravesites of indigenous children at residential school sites), it is clear that we need, and are ready for, change as a society.

All over the world, people are advocating for change - both on social media and in their own communities. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines advocate as: "someone who publicly supports something". We all have the potential to be change advocates, and our whole society has been shaped by change advocates and some recent famous movements such as **#meToo**, **LGBTQ2S+**, and **Idle No More**, to name a few.

For the last seven years, the Hear Québec team has had many discussions about advocacy, and we have asked questions such as 'What does advocacy look like?' and 'Are we an organization that does advocacy?' Members, and even our partners, have described us and see us as advocates for the hard of hearing community.

According to The Centre For Excellence In Disabilities at West Virginia University, there are a few different types of advocacy:

1. **Self-advocacy** happens when someone is able to communicate and convey their own interests, desires, needs, or rights. *Being your own advocate means speaking up for yourself!*
2. **Individual advocacy** happens when a person works to advance the needs of one or two other people. There are two types of individual advocacy: informal and formal.
 - a. **Informal advocacy** happens when people such as parents, friends, family members, or agencies speak up for the needs of a vulnerable person or people.
 - b. **In formal advocacy**, more organized structures are invoked such as organizations that have paid staff dedicated to advocating for the needs of others.

3. **System Advocacy** is more about changing larger-scale policies and laws; organizations usually pay staff to do this work.

*We see our role with our members as supporting, informing, and inspiring them to be **self and informal individual advocates** for the change that they want to see. Hearing loss is considered a hidden and often misunderstood disability. We prepare and encourage all of our members to go into their communities and create change by educating others about hearing loss and advocating for change, such as pushing for the distribution of accessible face masks. Members have written letters, sent press releases, and used their voices to educate the public about their specific needs and how best to address those accessibility needs and show inclusion. Hear Québec works on a similar philosophy to that shown in the old adage, *'if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime'*. We are building lifetime advocates, and we are proud to share some of their inspiring stories in this issue of our Magazine. Happy reading!*



Ride For Change

By Kaylee Alex Irvin

My name is Kaylee, and I am hard of hearing. Although I was born with a significant hearing loss, my deafness was only discovered when I was in my early teens, and I was then fitted with 2 hearing aids. My parents told me to wear my hearing aids only when I really needed them and to be sure to wear my hair down on the days when I did wear them. Consequently, I rarely wore my hearing aids and have lived as if I were a hearing person - lipreading my way through life. In fact, most people I meet would never know that I'm deaf. Well, that used to be true anyway. When the pandemic hit and everyone started wearing masks, my ability to "hear" was cut off. I find myself staring where the mouth used to be and where masks now sit. I watch the masks move as people speak; I know they're saying something. If I concentrate really hard, I can make out enough words to understand the idea of what they're saying...sometimes.

Early in January 2021, I walked into the SAAQ confident about the test that I was about to write to obtain my motorcycle licence. Although I do not usually wear hearing aids, I did this day as I knew I would need to communicate with strangers. But even with the hearing aids, the lady behind the glass, behind her mask, speaking only French (my second language) was almost impossible to understand. I asked her to speak louder. She did very slightly but was still hard for me to understand. I told her that I do not hear well and asked her if she would lower her mask. She gave me a disgusted look and shook her



head no. She responded by telling me that deaf people cannot drive motorcycles and that I was not allowed to take the test. I was shocked to hear this. I spent the next 45 mins debating with her, her managers, their bosses, and any employee who would listen. I demanded they keep calling their supervisors to get the correct information - insisting that I had the right to take the test and get my motorcycle license.

Finally, I was told I was wasting their time. The woman said she was sorry but that she could not let me take the test - that I had to leave. I left the SAAQ feeling completely defeated. I sat in my car, called my sister, and cried. A few moments later, the very same lady came running outside; she was waving at me to come back in. She had received a call right after I left informing her that deaf people can in fact ride motorbikes! I could go take the test - which I did and passed. I felt relieved and happy.

About 2 weeks later, I got a notice in the mail saying my licence to drive a car was suspended immediately. The SAAQ was requiring me to obtain medical permission to drive a car. I was shocked as I have held this licence for over 25 years - accident free, I might add. I now needed medical permission?! I called the SAAQ, and after many hours on the phone, I finally got my licence reinstated - but only after I agreed to accept new driving conditions and had a new photo taken.

I then began motorbike school. When the program was half over, the driving school booked the next test for everyone...except me. I tried to book the test for myself, but the system was locked and would not allow me to book anything. I reached out to a motorbike group on social media to ask if anyone who was

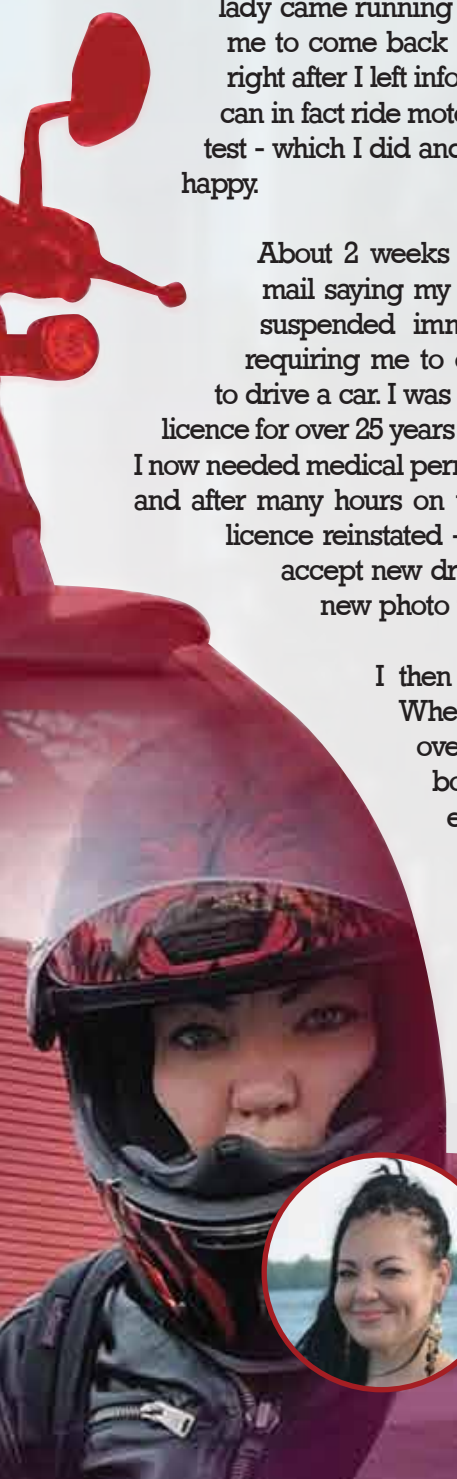
hard of hearing and had their motorbike licence could offer me some advice. A member of this group introduced me to Heidi Wager, Executive Director at Hear Québec. After connecting with Heidi and her team, Hear Québec was there to offer me information, support, and encouragement through my journey.

Learning to unlock the system was not easy, but Hear Québec was so resourceful and supportive which helped take some of the pressure out of the process. It turns out that, without sending me a letter, the SAAQ had cancelled my new 6R motorcycle licence only 21 days after I had received it. Figuring out how to fix this was not easy. It took call after call, hours on hold, days waiting for call-backs, and crying in frustration; I felt like giving up and abandoning this goal.

Days passed, and I made yet another call to the SAAQ. A representative I had never dealt with before saw that the locked licence was due to my deafness and that the situation only required a simple fix: a new request for permission. Finally, I was allowed to take the next test. I was so nervous, but I rocked that closed track test and am now happily holding a 6A motorcycle licence!

I now have an 11 month wait until my next and final test before I can hold a full licence. I am hoping the process of booking the next test will be easier. I am disappointed that SAAQ employees are not better informed about the requirements and the processes people with disabilities need to go through and that I had to fight so hard for the basic right to drive.

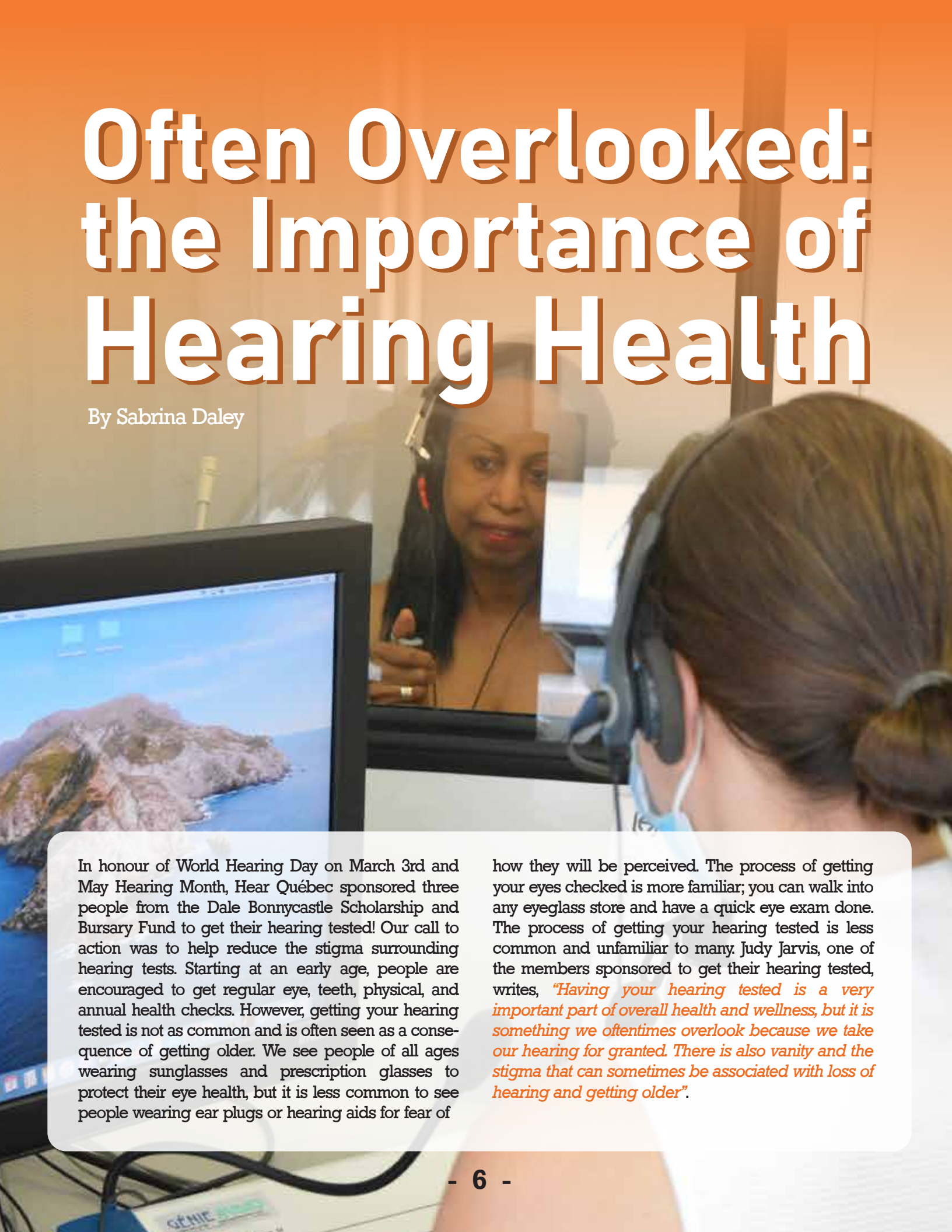
What comes easy for hearing people does not always come easy for deaf people. There are always extra hurdles in our lives, as my story demonstrates. The wearing of masks has isolated deaf and hard of hearing people as it has taken away our ability to communicate through lipreading. The lack of accessible communication strategies and public understanding certainly played a large part in all of the miscommunications in this process. I feel proud of my accomplishment and am happy to share my story with others. I want to encourage deaf and hard of hearing people to push for and not give up on their goals - even when wrongly told "no" repeatedly.



A mother, a teacher, a learner, an explorer, a business woman, a chef, a sociologist, and now a rider are just a few of the titles that describe me. I am dedicated to learning to live my best life, advocating for a more equal world for all, and teaching my children to unapologetically create their own versions of happiness.

Often Overlooked: the Importance of Hearing Health

By Sabrina Daley



In honour of World Hearing Day on March 3rd and May Hearing Month, Hear Québec sponsored three people from the Dale Bonnycastle Scholarship and Bursary Fund to get their hearing tested! Our call to action was to help reduce the stigma surrounding hearing tests. Starting at an early age, people are encouraged to get regular eye, teeth, physical, and annual health checks. However, getting your hearing tested is not as common and is often seen as a consequence of getting older. We see people of all ages wearing sunglasses and prescription glasses to protect their eye health, but it is less common to see people wearing ear plugs or hearing aids for fear of

how they will be perceived. The process of getting your eyes checked is more familiar; you can walk into any eyeglass store and have a quick eye exam done. The process of getting your hearing tested is less common and unfamiliar to many. Judy Jarvis, one of the members sponsored to get their hearing tested, writes, *"Having your hearing tested is a very important part of overall health and wellness, but it is something we oftentimes overlook because we take our hearing for granted. There is also vanity and the stigma that can sometimes be associated with loss of hearing and getting older"*.

According to HearingLife, hearing loss is the third most common health condition among adults. On average, people with hearing loss will wait seven to ten years before getting treatment. As explained by the World Health Organization, hearing loss and other ear diseases can be cared for when identified quickly and handled with appropriate resources. The consequences of not caring for your hearing can lead to social withdrawal, depression, and isolation. Losing the ability to communicate with your friends, family, and loved ones is difficult which is why we need to break down this stigma of hearing loss. Judy Jarvis writes, *"Finally, with the encouragement of Hear Québec, I made an appointment and had my examination done. My audiologist was very patient and friendly, making my experience very comfortable. When it comes to having your hearing tested, there's really no discomfort at all. If you are having any problems hearing, or if like me you simply want to pay attention to your health and wellness, make an appointment for a hearing test today. I give you my word, it is painless and worth the while. Protecting our ears and keeping track of our hearing health is very important"*.

If you want more information about the process of getting your hearing tested you can contact us at info@hearhear.org. You can also find information on support and pathways to service on our website: <https://hearhear.org/basics/>

Judy Jarvis, a hearing test sponsee, gets her hearing tested. Ask Judy, getting your hearing tested is a worthwhile experience!

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Sabrina is a recent graduate of the Human Relations program at Concordia University and has been serving as a program facilitator for the past several months. She has been enjoying getting to know the Hear Québec members! She likes learning from people's individual experiences and growing from their insight. In my spare time I like to paint, cook, and find new creative projects. I look forward to my journey working for Hear Entendre Québec

"Hearing well changes everything!"



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The Oxymoron of Being a Deaf Person in a Hearing World

Hearing Journey by Omer Othman

My Mother's Persistence

My mother loves to tell the story of how she found out I was deaf. One summer day, she called me for dinner, and I never answered. This happened after a few months of my hearing going in and out and random homemade tests of seeing what I could hear, and my mother decided to take me to the doctor for an official hearing test. I was diagnosed with severe hearing loss in one ear and mild hearing loss in the other. Naturally, I was prescribed hearing aids, but my mother explained to the doctors that I refused to wear them. Audiologists followed my hearing closely, and I started to become profoundly deaf in both ears. Thus, at three years old, a new identity was manifested: I received a cochlear implant. I underwent auditory oral therapy and did my preschool at the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf.

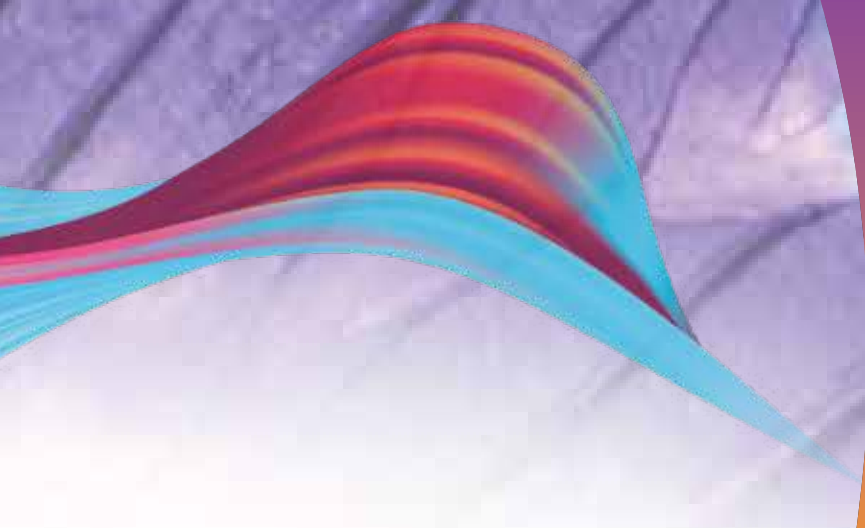


Don't Go Down the Slide!

I still remember the day my mother told me that I couldn't go down the slide at parks because the audiologists were afraid that the static from the slides might affect my cochlear implant. One day at the park, I was with my father, who had forgotten about this rule, and he let me go down the slide. *Nothing happened.* Wanting me to be able to go down the slides like all the other kids, hearing about this made my mom so happy. As a child, I was very social and energetic. I was the lead in my end-of-year preschool play, *The Rainbow Fish*. I grew up with this unique aspect that I never considered to be a disability until life became less about going down a slide and more about advocating for my rights. When I moved to the United Arab Emirates for elementary school, things changed. I became more reserved, I didn't make as many friends, and I became more and more isolated without knowing why. While moving to a new country is difficult for anyone, for someone who is a social butterfly, it didn't make sense that I would be struggling so much. Looking back at it today, it is clear that the difficulty was a result of the fact that I wasn't able to tell my new friends to sit on my right side or that I couldn't understand them if I couldn't see their lips.

Dancing My Way Through Life


Moving back to Montreal for high school, I received individualized attention from the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf while attending my neighborhood high school. I learned to become confident and social once more. I joined my high school's dance troupe and auditioned to be in the drama club. I even tutored other students after school. Having a support system outside of my family was crucial, and I would not have thrived without it. I also had the opportunity to learn about my rights and how to adapt to being a deaf person in a hearing



world. I make a point to say it in that way because having a cochlear implant positions me that way - stuck between the deaf world and the hearing world. The Deaf world shames me for seeing deafness as something that needs to be fixed, while the hearing world assumes that everyone has perfect hearing. My friends always tell me how lucky I am to be deaf (ironic huh?) because I am able to choose when I can hear. This means sleeping like a baby every night or choosing to not hear a conversation because “my battery died”. To the surprise of many people, including hearing professionals, I love doing things that some people with cochlear implants do not often get to enjoy. Implant recipients often have difficulty hearing and understanding music, and yet I love music. Watching and understanding movies in the theatres can also be difficult for implant users, and yet I can do it. Learning new languages is often hard for people, yet I speak five languages and want to learn even more. To pretend that my deafness does not affect me negatively would be unfair to say because it does. Post-secondary schools told me that I no longer required accessibility services because “my grades were too good”. My successes and capabilities are often glorified where people think my deafness should have led to failure. Some people refuse to even believe that I am deaf because I can carry on conversations and speak without a “deaf” accent. *Whatever that means.*

I Went Down the Slide Anyways

I didn't choose to become implanted, but I did choose to accept my deafness. Stuck between both worlds, I went down that slide anyway and found my world, and I wouldn't have it any other way.



Omer is a recent graduate of the Communications and Marketing program at Concordia University. He began his journey at Hear Québec in 2019 as a Canada Summer Jobs worker, continued volunteering, and served as the Young Adult Director on the Board of Directors for the past year. He spends his time listening to music, exploring the world, and learning new languages. Omer looks forward to discovering himself even more as he embarks on his future life and career.

Membership & Registration

Return all completed forms by mail, email, or in person (**by appointment only**) to the Hear Québec office with payment. You can also download these forms on our website: www.hearhear.org. For more information about membership and registration, please contact info@hearhear.org or call the office at 514-488-5552 ext 4500.

NEW Membership is valid between April 1 and March 31 of each year and must be renewed annually. Please complete both sides of the enclosed 2021-22 membership form.

New Renewal Membership Forms 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 must still be completed, signed, and returned to Hear Québec with payment.**

Registration is mandatory for all programs, events, and services. Please register prior to your activity and not on the day that it starts. Indicate your interest on the registration forms and complete the process with your payment. As space is limited due to COVID protocols, only members who complete the registration and payment will have their seat reserved. Spots will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Register early to secure your place!

COVID-19 As the restrictions are loosening, many of our upcoming programs are scheduled to be held in person. Please be assured that we will do everything in our power to make these events and activities accessible and safe for all involved. We will follow all required safety measures of the city and the buildings we use. However, in the event that stricter restrictions resurge, all of our programs will be transitioned online. Information about updated safety measures will be posted on our website and social media and will be sent out in an email to all of the registered participants prior to the start of each program.

Payment Methods You can pay online or in person (**by appointment only**). Payments can be made by cash, cheque, credit card, or debit card. Please make cheques payable to **Hear Québec**. You may also make secure payments or donations online at: <https://hearhear.nationbuilder.com/donate>

Accessibility All programs, events, and activities will be accessible for those with hearing loss. This can include sound amplification, FM systems, or Live Transcribe. If there is a virtual event, Hear Québec will use accessible platforms such as Google Meet which allows live closed captioning. If you feel that you need further accommodations, please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate your needs.

If there is a concern due to financial hardship, please email the Executive Director at heidywager@hearhear.org or call 514-488-5552 ext 4500.

Hear Québec Fall/Winter Programs

FALL Nature Walks (In-person/Daytime)



We have scheduled two socially-distanced nature walks right as the leaves are changing colours. Come get active and connect with us! All you need to do is to bring your walking shoes, water bottle, clear mask, and, most importantly, your smile. Please contact the office if you have any questions.

Lasalle date:

Wednesday, September 29, 2021
(rainy day alternative Sept. 30th)

Location: Lachine Canal FootBridge

Time: 10am **Duration:** 2 hours

Registration deadline: September 22, 2021

West Island date:

Wednesday, October 27th, 2021
(rainy day alternative Oct. 28th)

Location: Bois-de-l'Île-Bizard Nature Park

Time: 10am **Duration:** 2 hours

Registration deadline: October 20th, 2021

New Peer Mentoring

We will be starting a new peer mentoring program this year in partnership with Audition Québec. Peer mentoring aims to build and strengthen supportive relationships between two people through the exchange of knowledge and experiences and through exposure to different perspectives. If you would like to learn more about either being a peer mentor or being a mentee of the program, please let us know by indicating your interest on the registration form. For more information, please register to attend the **HEARTalk** on Nov 24th.

FALL Speechreading Classes (*In-person/Daytime*)

We have scheduled in-person speechreading classes for this fall. Starting in September, we are tentatively offering three in-person, 10-week speechreading classes.

NDG

Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre
7000 Sherbrooke St. West, Montreal
Session Fees: \$25

Speechreading - Beginners (Room C234)
Thursdays, 10am - 12pm
September 23rd - November 25th

Speechreading - PLUS (Room C234)
Tuesdays, 10am - 12pm
September 21st - November 23rd

DORVAL*

Sarto Desnoyers Community Centre
1335 Lakeshore Dr, Dorval
Session Fees: \$25

Speechreading - Beginners (Salon C)
Tuesday, 1pm - 3pm
September 21st - November 30th (No class on October 26th)
**Dorval residents will be given priority*

WINTER Speechreading Classes (*Digital*)

In the winter you can join the online Read Our Lips speechreading class designed by CHHA (the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association). We have seen success in the past with this program, and it comes with the bonus that you get to learn to lipread at your own pace from the comfort of your own home.



If you are interested in signing up for this online course, attend the online information session in order to get the *members only discount code for up to 20% off*

Information Session: Wednesday, December 1st, 2021

Time: 6pm - 7pm

WINTER Speechreading Participation Group (*Digital/Daytime*)

If you are interested in attending the "Read Our Lips" course and would like to attend weekly meetings starting on January 13th, 2022, you can be sponsored to receive the course for free!! 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 space is available.

Participation Group Winter dates: Every Thursday, from January 13th, 2022 to Thursday March 17th, 2022 (totalling ten weekly sessions). **Time:** 10am - 11am **Place:** Google Meet **Registration deadline:** January 10th, 2021

Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec

FALL Coffee Breaks *(In-person/Daytime)*

The Coffee calls have kept us close during hard times as we have shared stories and listened to each other. Join us as we continue to laugh and learn together safely in person this fall in the weekly Coffee Breaks.

Fall Date: Weekly meetings from Wednesday September 22nd, 2021 to Wednesday, December 1st, 2021

Time: 1pm - 2pm

Place: 7000 Sherbrooke West

Room: C234



WINTER Coffee Breaks *(Digital/Daytime)*

In Winter 2022, the Coffee Calls will transition back online via Google Meet. Join us as we stay connected during the cold winter months. We will catch up with members and staff after the holidays and continue to be there for each other. We will have occasional special guests and will discuss topics related to hearing loss.

Winter Dates: Weekly meetings from Wednesday, January 19th, 2022 until Wednesday, March 2nd, 2022

Time: 1pm - 2pm

Place: Google Meet



FALL Cocktail Hours *(Digital/Evening)*

You can have cocktails and still learn something, right? Come have a drink, eat some appetizers, and learn with us - all from the comfort of your couch.

Accessibility in Post Secondary with Haruniya Ariyarajah

Haruniya is happy to share all her knowledge about accessibility and how to get the most out of the Accessibility Centre at your college or university. She believes it is very important for students to know about all the help they can get from their educational institutions.



Speaker: Haruniya Ariyarajah

Date: October 7th, 2021

Time: 7pm - 8pm

Place: Google Meet



Getting a Job with Hearing Loss with Aim Croit

Aim Croit will talk about the services, grants, and other resources Aim Croit provides to help people with disabilities get into the workforce.

Date: November 4th, 2021

Time: 7pm - 8pm

Place: Google Meet

Accessibility in the Arts with Abby Stonehouse

Join comedian Abby Stonehouse as she talks about accessibility in the art world.

Speaker: Abby Stonehouse

Date: November 18th, 2021

Time: 7pm - 8pm

Place: Google Meet



WINTER Cocktail Hour *(Digital/Evening)*

A special "love month" Cocktail Evening will take place in February on Google Meet. Let's unwind, have a drink, and learn the language of love while we're cozy at home.

Dating & Intimacy with Abby Stonehouse

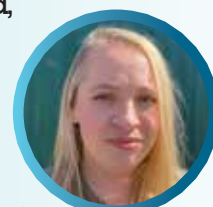
Join us as Abby dives deeper into her experience with dating with a hearing loss.

Speaker: Abby Stonehouse

Date: February 8th, 2022

Time: 7pm - 8pm

Place: Google Meet



HEARTALKS

This series is designed to empower members to take control of all aspects of their well-being. This series is scheduled to be in person in the fall and virtual in the winter. There will be two events held in the fall and three in the winter.

FALL HEARTalks *(In-person/Daytime)*

Technical Aid Service with Ian St Jean

Ian will be reviewing what services are offered and what is covered under medicare. He will explain and demonstrate a variety of assistive devices for persons with hearing loss and will talk about how to request assistive services.

Date: October 20th, 2021

Time: 10am - 12pm

Place: 7000 Sherbrooke West

Room: C234

Registration deadline: October 13th, 2021



How To Become a Peer Mentor with Hear Québec with Heidy Wager

Want to help out? Becoming a peer mentor is a great way to do so! Hear Québec's Executive Director Heidy Wagner and others will explain what it takes to become a peer mentor at Hear Québec and the satisfaction that comes with it.

Date: November 24th, 2021

Time: 10am - 12pm

Place: 7000 Sherbrooke West

Room: C234

Registration deadline: November 17th, 2021

WINTER HEARTalks *(Digital/Daytime)*

Hearing Health Care Panel

New year, new me! Join us in the new year with a panel of speakers as they discuss pathways to services. We'll talk about all the ways to improve your hearing health and inform you of all the services out there to help you thrive.

Date: January 26th, 2022

Time: 2pm - 3:30pm

Place: Google Meet

Registration deadline: January 19th, 2022



Managing Self-Care with Martha Perusse

Self love is the best love! Log on as Martha discusses the power of self care, putting yourself first, and, most importantly, loving yourself. What better time to do this than in February!

Date: February 9th, 2022

Time: 10am - 11pm

Place: Google Meet

Registration deadline: February 2nd, 2022

Protecting Your Residual Hearing with Dale Bonnycastle

In honor of World Hearing Day, sign in and join, Dale Bonnycastle, in talking about staying safe and protecting what hearing you have left, your residual hearing. Did you know that having a hearing loss does not stop you from preventing more damage to your hearing?

Date: March 3rd, 2022

Time: 2pm - 3pm

Place: Google Meet

Registration deadline: February 24th, 2022



For Your Information

COVID-19 & Hearing Loss

By Dale Bonnycastle



We can say with certainty that we have had a year and a half like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of our lives, our societies, and our world. As I write this, we are going into the Green zone, and slowly things are opening up in this province. With the availability of effective vaccines and successful vaccination programs, we are looking forward to some semblance of a return to normalcy.

We know that the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a serious and highly contagious disease, and its effects on the respiratory system are well known.

What is less well understood is the link between the virus and hearing loss. There is little research available, but a number of clinical reports and case studies link the virus to sudden sensorineural hearing loss in a small percentage of persons who contract the virus. The onset of hearing loss usually occurs a few weeks after the diagnosis. To understand the link between the virus and hearing loss we need to take a short tour of the ear and look at some facts about sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSNHL).

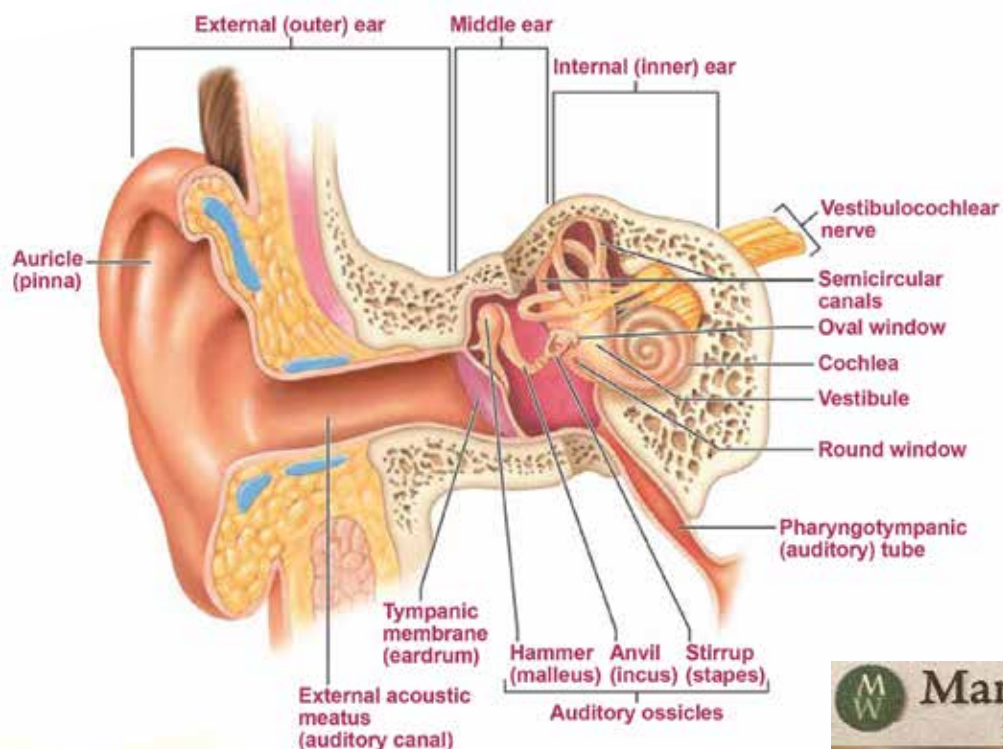
Essentially, our ears take sound waves and change them into messages that the brain understands as speech. We have three parts to our ear (see diagram). The outer ear consists of the pinna and ear canal

which work to funnel sound waves toward the middle ear. The middle ear is an air-filled space and consists of the eardrum and three tiny bones: the hammer, anvil, and stirrup. When sound waves strike the eardrum, the eardrum and the tiny ear bones vibrate and transmit these vibrations to the inner ear.

The inner ear (or cochlea) is a snail-shaped organ filled with fluid. When vibrations strike the inner ear, the fluid in the cochlea is set into motion. Microscopic hair cells in the inner ear generate nerve impulses which are carried from the cochlea to the brain via the auditory nerve.

The inner ear also contains the vestibular organ that is responsible for balance and which is composed of the semicircular canals and the vestibule.

Sensorineural hearing loss is the result of damage to the inner ear and/or auditory nerve. Sudden sensorineural hearing loss (SSNHL) occurs when there is an unexplained and rapid loss of hearing. It can appear all at once, or hearing may deteriorate over a few days. Causes may be related to viral infection, head trauma, autoimmune disease, ototoxic drugs, and vascular occlusion, among other things. In some instances, the cause of the hearing loss remains unknown. SSNHL loss occurs in 5-20 per 100,000 people. It is a medical emergency and should be treated rapidly - often with steroids. However, it is imperative that treatment be started promptly to enhance the chances of recovery.



Anecdotal case reports linking the corona virus to hearing loss were reported as early as Spring 2020. There is more data available now, but there is certainly still a need for more research in this area.

As seen in a systematic review of data up to December 2020 carried out by Almufarrij and Munro, it is estimated that of persons who fall ill with the virus,

**7.6% of people report hearing loss,
14.8 % report tinnitus, and
72% report vertigo.**

The degree of hearing loss has been reported to be from mild to profound and to be bilateral or unilateral, i.e. affecting one ear or both ears.

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Researchers have proposed some hypotheses to explain why hearing loss occurs in some COVID-19 infected patients. These hypotheses include:

1. **Low oxygen supply (ischemia) to the inner ear.** The inner ear, specifically the cochlear hair cells have high metabolic activity and adequate oxygenation is essential for the ear to function properly.
2. **Cochleitis (Inflammation of the cochlear) and neuritis (inflammation of a nerve)** can be caused by SARS-CoV-2 viral involvement in the inner ear and the vestibulocochlear nerve.
3. **Immune cells can improperly target the inner ear.** Our immune system has specialized cells, called

T-cells, that attack infectious agents (like bacteria and viruses). One hypothesis is that T-cells that are supposed to be fighting COVID-19 are mistakenly killing cells in the inner ear.

4. **Cytokine storm.** Cytokines are small proteins that are released in our bodies due to infection by COVID-19. However, the release of too many cytokines can over-activate our immune system causing our immune cells to start to kill our body's healthy cells.
5. **Ototoxicity.** We know that the antiviral medications previously used to treat the virus (quinine, chloroquine, and hydroxychloroquine) can have a toxic effect on the inner ear and auditory nerve.

What is evident is that hearing loss, tinnitus, and vertigo, while not common complications of COVID-19, certainly occur in a percentage of persons affected by the virus. Further research is needed to investigate and understand the acute and long term impact of this virus on hearing and balance. Additionally, screening for hearing loss is recommended in the hospital environment post diagnosis of COVID-19 to avoid missing the treatment window if hearing loss is detected.

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Dale Bonnycastle is one of the founding members of Hear Québec. She is a retired audiologist, and for the last 20 years of her work life Dale was employed at the Mackay Center. She is presently serving as President of Hear Québec's board of directors. Dale also volunteers, teaches speechreading, and facilitates/participates in groups and many Hear activities. In her free time, she enjoys British TV, bargain shopping, and is excited to travel again when possible.

By The Way

AUDIOGRAM or HEARING SCREENING TEST: Which is What? Is there Really a Difference?

By Sylvie Auger M.O.A. Audiologist
Owner & founder of Audiology Centre West inc.

From time to time, we see publicities offering a free hearing screening test. While a hearing screening test is usually offered free of charge and completed within less than 10 minutes, it is different from a full, comprehensive hearing evaluation.

By definition, a hearing screening test is typically designed to obtain information regarding the status of hearing in a particular group of people. A pass/fail criteria is established, for example: at 25 decibels, do you hear the sounds of different frequencies (pitches)

which are being presented? If you do, then the screening result is a “pass”; if you do not, even if it is only for one amongst the many sounds presented, the result is a “fail” and is followed by a referral to have a thorough hearing assessment.



Margaret Barkman, a Hear Québec member, was sponsored to get her hearing tested in honor of World Hearing Day and May Hearing Month



Hear Québec member Anastasia Kokinasidis showing us how fun and easy it can be to get your hearing tested!

WHO COMPLETES A HEARING SCREENING TEST?

Anybody who receives minimal training to handle the equipment can complete a hearing screening test. No specific certification is required at this level. There are even some software tools which will determine a pass/fail response when being used. Most commonly, hearing aid acousticians will offer this screening level of service, but nurses will also give this test and so will certified audiologists in some cases.

AUDIOGRAM VS. HEARING SCREENING TEST

An audiogram is much more thorough than a screening test. It will typically begin with a gathering of information regarding your complaints, relevant information about your medical history (mainly focused on any ear issues such as infections, tinnitus, blockages, vertigo, dizziness, family history of hearing loss, or other hearing problems), and some general health information about factors which can influence your hearing condition.

An assessment of your hearing is then completed through the measurement of the thresholds for pure tones (using headphones as well as bone conduction) and for speech, followed by your ability to repeat words at a comfortable loudness level in a controlled environment (a soundproof booth).

The hearing assessment will also include an otoscopic examination (looking in your ear canals) to rule out the presence of occluding cerumen (wax) as well as a

tympanometric test which allows us to measure the mobility of the eardrum and the pressure of air within the middle ear cavity.

These different tests allow health professionals to not only determine the absence or presence of a hearing loss but also the cause of the damage (if any) and what treatment may be possible to reverse a condition if present.

Once these tests are completed, custom-tailored recommendations and follow up interventions are discussed with you.

WHO COMPLETES AN AUDIOGRAM

Certified audiologists who hold a master's degree are trained in the field of hearing and balance health and therefore are the ones certified to perform this type of evaluation. They can orient the client toward the appropriate resources following the identification of a hearing loss.

The Québec RAMQ medicare program provides access to hearing aids if your hearing loss is severe enough to meet their minimal criteria: an average of 35 decibels measured at the frequencies of 500, 1000 & 2000Hz. For RAMQ coverage, the hearing assessment has to be completed by a certified audiologist, and it has to include a global evaluation of your needs. Beyond the hearing aids, you may need assistive listening devices that have to be recommended by the audiologist as well.



Margaret Barkman, a Hear Québec member

WHY TAKE THE TIME TO MEET WITH AN AUDIOLOGIST TO HAVE AN AUDIOGRAM IF I CAN GET A QUICK CHECK FASTER AND FREE OF CHARGE?

The audiologist is not interested only in the fact that you may or may not have a hearing loss. They are looking at your overall hearing health and will take into account many other factors such as:

- If you hear tinnitus (ringing), and if so how are you coping with it?
- Whether you could have Eustachian tube dysfunction? Do you need to consult an ENT specialist about it? or complete some exercises to improve the situation?
- If your vision has become blurred, could it be in relation to some vestibular dysfunction (the vestibule is the balance system located in the ear)?
- Whether you could still benefit from the use of hearing aids even if your hearing loss does not qualify you to be covered for hearing aids through the medicare program?
- If you do not have a hearing loss which could be aided with traditional hearing aids, could another technology be helpful such as a bone-anchored hearing aid (BAHA) or a cochlear implant?
- Which communication strategies can help you to better cope with your hearing loss?
- Where can you find the support and help to better function with your hearing loss?
- How can you prevent further degradation of your hearing?

Healthy hearing allows us to connect with the people around us. It deserves the best care that we can get. Therefore, the audiologist is a pivotal member of your hearing health team!



President and founder of Audiology Centre West and a graduate from the University of Montreal in 1984 with a master's degree in speech-language pathology and audiology, Ms. Auger has worked many years in the public health system in both hospital and rehabilitation centres prior to founding Audiology Centre West inc.

She is an assistant professor and guest speaker at the University of Montreal and at the University of Ottawa. She is also regularly invited to lecture on the topics of tinnitus/hyperacusis, vestibular problems, and hearing health for musicians in professional and scientific venues as well as public events.

Ms. Auger works with people with tinnitus, hyperacusis, and vestibular problems and is often called upon to act as an expert in medico-legal files (CNESST, SAAQ, DVA, and others).



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