

HEARHEAR

MAGAZINE



SPRING 2026

At the National Assembly: Where Community Meets Impact



Advocacy in Action
See p.3

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Emeritus

Alvin Goldman

Doreen Cons

In loving memory of

Carola Agnes Gielens ♥ Lorraine Boyce ♥ Doreen Hechinger ♥ Marjorie Niven

In loving memory, we honor the lives of those who have left us. Their support and presence touched our organization for years, and they will be dearly missed. We extend our deepest condolences to their families and friends. If we have inadvertently omitted a loved one's name, please let us know so we may include them in the next tribute. We deeply appreciate your understanding and support as we remember our cherished members.

Hear Québec

7000 Sherbrooke St. West • Montréal, Québec • H4B 1R3

Office: (438)-380-4327 • Fax: (514) 489-3477 attn: Hear Québec

Cell: (514) 797-2447 • www.hearhear.org ISSN: 2370-7089



Follow us on socials!

A Word from the Executive Director

Spring is a season of renewal, and for our community, it is also a time to pause, reflect, and recognize the people who make this work possible. As this issue arrives in April, we do so during National Volunteer Appreciation Week. It is a fitting moment to acknowledge the many individuals who give their time, skills, and experience to Hear Québec. Our Peer Mentors, Accessibility Ambassadors, Board members, and volunteers play an essential role in shaping our work and sustaining our community.

Peer Mentors walk alongside others navigating hearing loss, offering understanding grounded in shared experience. Accessibility Ambassadors help translate that experience into practical change in community spaces. Our Board members and volunteers provide leadership, continuity, and care, ensuring our work remains accountable, responsive, and rooted in the community it serves.

Hear Québec does not typically position itself as an advocacy organization. Our core belief is that lasting change comes from empowering individuals to self-advocate, to understand their rights, communicate their needs, and navigate systems with confidence. Education, peer support, and practical tools are central to that approach.

However, Bill 1 represented an exceptional moment. The potential impact on access to services and information for English-speaking communities affected by hearing loss was significant. When lived experience risked being absent from policy discussions, we felt it was our responsibility to ensure those voices were present. Being invited to speak at the National Assembly was not about shifting our mandate, but about standing in for community members who are too often excluded from decision-making spaces.



While progress continues, we remain clear-eyed about the work ahead. Hearing accessibility is still uneven, and many people continue to navigate systems that were not designed with them in mind. Change takes time, but it also takes persistence, collaboration, and a community willing to show up when it matters most.

“ Change comes from empowering individuals to self-advocate ”

The stories and updates in the pages that follow reflect that collective effort. They highlight connection, resilience, and the many ways people are working together to create more accessible and inclusive spaces.

To everyone who contributes to this work in ways seen and unseen: thank you for being part of this community and for continuing this journey with us.

Thank you

Perspectives

Cochlear Implant Video Project

In partnership with the Hear Entendre Québec team, Dr. Kay-Rivest -an otolaryngology surgeon specializing in cochlear implants, and McGill medical student, Audrey Pitaru are designing the Cochlear Implant Video Project. This initiative aims to create patient education videos designed to clarify the process for adults considering or undergoing cochlear implant surgery.

For many patients, cochlear implants represent a life-altering step that can be long, complex and overwhelming. Medical appointments often involve receiving a large amount of information in a short period of time, which can be difficult to absorb and understand. Patients may not recall all of the information shared with them, particularly when navigating new terminology, surgical decisions, and emotional stress.

Patient education videos are increasingly being used in medical settings, and research has shown that they can help improve understanding among cochlear implant recipients. Their value is especially evident in the context of surgery, where additional stress and uncertainty can make it harder to retain information. These videos can reduce anxiety by allowing patients to revisit the materials at their own pace, helping to address concerns about misunderstandings or forgetting essential details.

From Hear Québec's perspective, this project aligns closely with our commitment to placing lived experience at the centre of service for people with hearing loss. While clinical expertise is essential, true accessibility also requires information that is understandable, relatable, and grounded in real-world experiences. We aim to create standardized, high-quality, animated videos in both English and French, including pertinent information surrounding the cochlear



implantation process. The project will consist of three separate videos: one outlining the steps prior to implantation, one focusing on the day of surgery, and a third addressing what to expect afterward including activation, potential side effects, and rehabilitation.

“ This project aligns closely with our commitment to placing lived experience at the center of service ”

A key component of this initiative is the integration of those individuals with personal experience. Perspectives from cochlear implant users will be incorporated into each stage of the process, offering insight, reassurance, and practical

context. For individuals considering cochlear implantation, hearing directly from others who have gone through the process can help normalize common concerns, reduce fear of the unknown, and support more informed decision-making.

At Hear Québec, we consistently hear from members that they want information not only from medical professionals, but also from peers who understand the social, emotional, and practical realities of living with a cochlear implant. This project directly responds to that need by

bridging clinical knowledge with user perspective. Once completed, the Cochlear Implant Video Project will be shared with patients as part of routine surgical care prior to cochlear implantation. Following implementations, the team aims to validate the videos through research evaluating patient outcomes, understanding, and satisfaction. This is particularly significant, as no similar research has been conducted on this topic in North America to date.

This initiative also reflects Hear Québec's commitment to enhancing community-based services and supports, alongside clinical partners, for people with cochlear implants. Achieving this requires strong partnerships

across sectors, including collaboration with surgeons, educational institutions, rehabilitation services. By working together, we can help ensure that individuals receive consistent, accessible information and support at every stage of their cochlear implant journey.

Ultimately, by combining clinical expertise with lived patient experience, the Cochlear Implant Video Project seeks to provide clear, accessible, and meaningful information about cochlear implantation. Through collaboration and shared knowledge, this project represents an important step toward more inclusive, person-centered care for current and future cochlear implant users.



Audrey Pitaru

is a third-year medical student at McGill University and holds a Master of Science in Experimental Surgery. She has a strong interest in otolaryngology and patient-centred care, particularly in developing resources that promote clear and accessible medical communication.



Dr. Kay-Rivest

is an otologist and neurotologist specializing in the treatment of a wide range of ear pathologies, including cholesteatoma, tympanic membrane perforations, ossicular chain disorders and otosclerosis. She performs cochlear implantation for children and adults with hearing loss and operates on skull base tumors. Dr. Kay-Rivest completed her medical studies and residency at McGill University, followed by a two-year fellowship in otology and neurology at New York University, where she gained extensive experience in skull base surgery, complex cochlear implantation, and endoscopic ear surgery.

Hearing Journey

Hearing My Way Into Motherhood

When I found out I was pregnant, I was excited and immediately aware of a familiar set of concerns. As a deaf woman, I'm used to thinking about access and communication, but pregnancy brought those thoughts forward more often. I wondered whether I would always understand my obstetrician (OB), hear my baby's heartbeat during check-ups, or manage everything during birth. I also wondered whether I would hear my baby cry for the first time. Being deaf, I'm used to anticipating communication barriers, but pregnancy made them feel more urgent.

While pregnant, I followed many deaf parents and families on Instagram. Their experiences helped, but I still found myself worrying that I would struggle to understand my own child. My partner, who is hearing, and I also talked about whether our baby would be deaf, since I carry the deaf gene. It wasn't something we feared, but it was something we prepared for. I kept joking to myself that if it ever got overwhelming, at least I could always turn off my device.

I also knew I wasn't navigating any of this alone. Over the years, I've been surrounded by strong friends, my family, and my partner—people who have shown up for me the last few years going through surgeries. Deaf or hearing, my child would grow up with people who knew how to communicate and adapt, something I valued deeply. It was reassuring, too, to know there's a whole network of deaf parents and allies who have navigated these moments.

A few months in, I went in for a cochlear implant mapping. My audiologist mentioned that pregnancy hormones can affect sound processing and mapping. I thought it was so interesting and a small reminder that pregnancy can show up in unexpected ways.



Faith Wysote Gould

is a Resonance MTL alumna who was born deaf and has been a cochlear implant user since the age of two. She studied Social Sciences at Marianopolis and later attended Concordia, and works as a Program Coordinator at Hear Québec. Faith cares deeply about community building, and is currently on maternity leave enjoying life as a new mom. In her free time, she loves reading fiction, Indigenous non-fiction, and creating beadwork.

I didn't have a detailed birth plan.

My priorities were simple: I wanted my mom and partner present, my OB aware that I am deaf, less staff in the room, and communication kept as clear as possible. That plan changed quickly when my baby's heartbeat began to drop. More staff entered the room, and instructions sped up. My mom spoke more slowly to me, and my partner squeezed my leg to let me know when to push.

I didn't hear my baby cry right away. My mom told me he was okay and that they were clearing fluids, and my partner went over to our son. Shortly after, my mom heard a small cry and let me know. That was enough information for me at the time.

The next day, we were told he didn't pass his hearing test in one ear and would need a retest in two weeks. I wasn't anxious, just waiting. During that time, I felt a sense of familiarity and, honestly, a quiet excitement at the possibility that he might be deaf like me. My partner had his own mixed emotions and understandably, hoped



our son would pass the test next time. However, being supportive, he immediately started reading up on all the options for raising a deaf child. Research mode fully activated, he asked a million questions, clearly wanting to understand and support us both.

Two weeks later, the hearing test showed he was fully hearing, with a follow-up scheduled for eight months. It was simply information, nothing more, the kind of detail that helps you understand someone a little better.

Now, six months in, my son Lorenzo, born on July 2nd, is full of personality. He signs “milk”, answers to his name, and makes himself understood with little gestures. He moves his eyebrows like me to get his point across, randomly screams to test his voice, and has a mischievous laugh that always catches us off guard. He watches our expressions closely, copying gestures and reactions. The early worries I had about understanding him have mostly faded. We’ve found a rhythm that works, and figuring it out together has become its own kind of fun.



Join Our Community

Why Community Matters

Joining Hear Québec is about standing up for accessibility, connection, and belonging. When you become a member, you become part of a province-wide community that believes everyone deserves to be heard, supported, and included. Our members help foster peer connections and practical resources that make a real difference in the lives of people affected by hearing loss. Together, we're creating spaces and systems that work better for everyone.

Whether you live with hearing loss, support someone who does, work in hearing health, or simply believe in equity and inclusion, there's a place for you at Hear Québec. Your involvement strengthens our community and helps ensure no one has to navigate hearing loss alone.

Why Become a Member?

Membership gives you access to programs, services, and activities and means that you always have a team behind you. We're here to help you discover what's available, understand how to use it, and make the most of every benefit along the way. Many members are surprised to learn what's already within reach. As a Hear Québec member, we can help you access:

- 1. Accessibility Cell Phone Discounts:** Save up to \$20/month on phone plans with Rogers, Telus, Koodo, Bell, Virgin Plus, and Vidéotron.
- 2. Disability Travel Card:** Regular fare for you; free or discounted fare for a companion on VIA Rail and Coach Canada.
- 3. Access 2 Card:** Free or discounted admission for a companion at 500+ venues nationwide, including top Montreal attractions such as the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Montreal Science Centre, the Segal Centre for Performing Arts, and Théâtre Du Rideau Vert.
- 4. Adapted transportation services:** People with significant, ongoing disabilities may qualify. While often mobility-based, individuals whose hearing loss makes regular transit unsafe or inaccessible may also be eligible.

Member Info

- **New Members:** Valid April 1–March 31. Complete both sides of the 2026–27 form.
- **Renewals:** Use the pre-filled form, update info, sign, and return with payment.
- **Forms available at** www.hearhear.org/become-a-member, by email, or by post.

Membership Fees/ Payment Options: (2026-27):

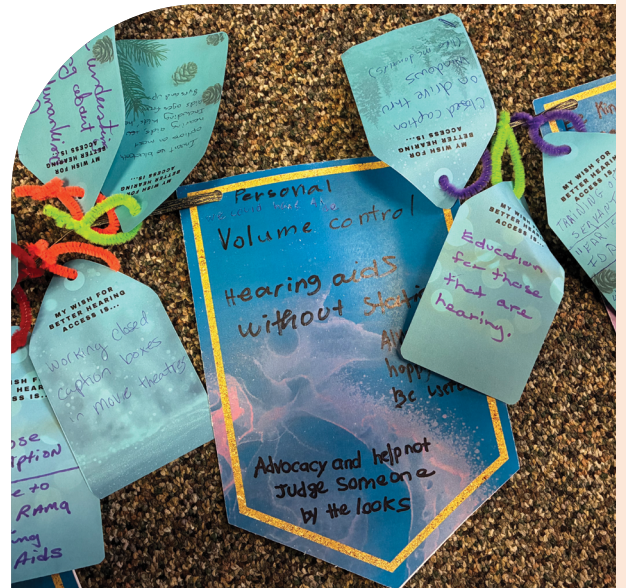
- **Students & Veterans:** Free (with ID)
- **Individual:** \$20/year
- **Professional & Organizational:** \$25/year
- **Non-Profit Organizations & Staff:** \$20/year
- **Online:** hearhear.nationbuilder.com/donate (add note: "membership fee \$20" etc.)
- **In-Person:** Cash, cheque, credit, or debit
- **Mail:** Send cheques to Hear Québec

Questions? Contact: info@hearhear.org | (438) 380-4327

We have a **NEW PHONE NUMBER!**

We've recently updated our number
to better serve you

Call us at: (438) 380-4327



Want to stay informed about hearing loss-related news and what Hear Québec is working on? Members receive our monthly newsletter with updates, resources, and community news.

In November 2025, we launched our “Dear Dale” section of your newsletter, a new advice column, featuring questions from you! Dale, Hear Québec’s President and a retired audiologist, regularly answers member questions, and now we’re sharing them with everyone. Send in your questions, and they may be featured in an upcoming newsletter.

Program Registration

Registration is required for all activities, events, and services. Please complete the registration form in advance to indicate your interest and complete payment if necessary. Forms can also be downloaded from our website at www.hearhear.org/become-a-member/ and submitted via email or by post.



Membership Structure Update (Coming Soon)

Last year, our members approved a new, tiered membership structure designed to make joining, participating, and supporting Hear Québec more accessible and meaningful. We are now in the final stages of preparing for rollout and look forward to sharing more details in our fall issue. This updated structure will offer clearer options, stronger alignment with member needs, and an enhanced overall membership experience. Thank you for your continued support and engagement as we prepare to launch!



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Programs & Services

Your Programs & Services

Everything we do starts with you, and the everyday moments when hearing loss makes things harder than they need to be. We don't believe in one-size fits-all-solutions. We listen. We adapt. And we build programs around what our community is actually living and asking for.

This year, we're strengthening how we work: sharing responsibilities and building partnerships so we can stay connected to you. Working with community partners helps us respond faster and support you better.

Our work is guided by three core areas:

Support & Community **Resources & Referrals** **Awareness & Accessibility**

Together, these shape everything we offer, from peer mentoring to real-world accessibility.

Can't always attend in person? That's okay. You can explore resources on our website, join many of our events virtually, and stay connected through email updates and social media. We're just an email or phone call away.

Support & Community

No one should have to face hearing loss alone. We believe in bringing people together; creating real connections, honest conversations, and the kind of support that makes everyday life feel a little less heavy.

Peer Mentoring

Have you ever wished you could talk to someone who just gets it, without having to explain the fatigue, the awkward misunderstandings, or why a "simple" dinner out can feel exhausting?

We connect adults who have hearing loss with one-to-one conversation grounded in lived experience. It's simply two people talking; sharing and learning from each other. It's about feeling understood, and knowing you're not the only one figuring this out.

Thinking About Becoming a Mentor?

If you've come to a place of acceptance in your own journey, you might consider becoming a mentor. You don't need to be an expert. Your real-life experience: adjusting to hearing aids or cochlear implants, navigating work conversations, or learning to advocate for yourself, is more than enough. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say to someone is, "I've been there too."

Looking for Support?

If you're newly diagnosed, adjusting to technology, or facing new challenges, you don't have to figure it out alone. This is a space to talk things through with someone who understands firsthand.

We thoughtfully match mentors and mentees based on goals and interests, but the first step is simply reaching out. If you're curious, that's enough.

**Sometimes the hardest step is the first one,
and we're here to take it with you.**



Youth Voices → What Comes Next?

Why Do We Focus on Ages 16-30?

There's a gap in hearing loss programming. Children often have structured support. Seniors often find community through later-life programming. But the years in between, when you're finishing school, starting careers, navigating relationships, moving out and making big decisions, are often overlooked.

Even if hearing loss isn't new to you, the environments around you keep changing; classrooms, workplaces, social spaces. Each new stage can bring new challenges and new questions.

We're Not Here to Decide For You

We recently held our second Youth Focus Group, and just like the first one, the goal was simple: listen.

We're not here to tell young people what they need. We're here to create space for you to tell us what would actually be helpful; and then work together to make it happen.

What Came Out of the First Focus Group

The first time we did this, youth voices led to real action:

- Youth representation at the CHHA Youth National Conference
- The creation of a dedicated young adult board seat to ensure youth perspectives are part of leadership decisions.

That seat is currently vacant, and we'd love to see it filled! When young people speak, we take it seriously.

Want to Get Involved?

There are a few ways you can step in now.

- You can volunteer with us for school credit
- You can apply for the young adult board seat and help shape decisions at the leadership level
- Or simply reach out and start a conversation about what role feels right for you

What Happens Next

Our first focus group at Resonance MTL has taken place, with updates to follow. We're also engaging older participants to gather their feedback to help shape the next phase.

HEARTalk Workshops

Give Back. Get Involved. Date & Time: April 15, 2026 | 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM

Learn how Peer Mentoring and Accessibility Ambassadors make a real impact, and how you can too!

Speaker: Keara Blair, Hear Québec Programs Coordinator

Age Well with Hearing Loss May 7, 2026 | 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM

Explore the link between hearing loss and cognitive health, and what you can do about it

Speaker: Abir Kheir audiologist from Polyclinique de l'Oreille

Real Support. Real People. Real Conversations

Sometimes you have quick questions. Sometimes you're not even sure what your question is yet.

This part of our work includes inbound requests (when you reach out to us directly), outreach in the community, HEARTalks and Clinics to Community. All of it can be offered in a hybrid format – in person or virtually – so we can meet you where you are.

Just Reach Out

If you email us, call us, or fill out a form on our website, you're not entering a system; you're starting a conversation. You'll connect with a real person who can listen and help you find the next steps.

We respond quickly, so you can feel supported while navigating appointments, services, or next steps.

Maybe you're:

- Trying to understand what service exist
- Looking for hearing health resources
- Navigating school or workplace accommodations
- Or just feeling unsure about what your next step should be.

You don't need to have everything figured out before contacting us. Starting the conversation can be the hardest part.

Outreach

Let's Bring the Conversation to You

Have you ever left a presentation, meeting, or community event feeling like hearing loss wasn't really considered?

We visit workplaces, schools, and community spaces to share practical, real-life information about hearing loss, communication strategies, and accessibility. Whether it's a formal presentation, an interactive workshop, or a kiosk event, we help start conversations that make spaces more inclusive.

We don't just talk about hearing loss, we help people understand what it means in everyday life. Interested? Email us or visit our website. Sometimes one conversation can shift understanding

Clinics to Community

Hear What Happens After the Appointment

Clinics to Community is a professional lunch-and learn series designed exclusively for hearing health professionals.

Focused on continuing professional development and sector collaboration, the program creates space for research exchange and peer learning. We are working with the Order of Acousticians to support alignment with professional development requirements.

Professionals interested in presenting research or initiatives to fellow professionals are welcome to connect.



Awareness & Accessibility

Making Everyday Spaces Work Better for Everyone

Accessibility happens in coffee shops, classrooms, workplaces, community centers: the places where life unfolds. We believe hearing accessibility should be part of everyday spaces, not an afterthought. We focus on helping environments become more inclusive in practical ways.

Consult ME

Making Spaces Hearing-Friendly, One Place at a Time

Have you ever been somewhere you love; a coffee shop, a community event, and realized it just wasn't easy to follow what was happening?

Consult ME is our hands-on accessibility service designed to make spaces more hearing friendly. Our three-step process includes evaluating the environment, introducing the right assistive technology, and training staff on both equipment and inclusive communication practices.

We don't just drop off equipment, we walk alongside teams to make changes practical and sustainable.

Know a space that could be more hearing-friendly?

Let's start a conversation.

Part of an organization looking to strengthen accessibility?

We'd love to connect.

Include ME at Home

Technology Should Make Life Easier

Ever brought home an amplified phone or adapted TV system and wondered how to make it work?

Include ME at Home offers hands-on support so your assisted hearing device actually supports you. Our trained Accessibility Ambassadors, who also live with hearing loss can help with troubleshooting, setup and everyday use.

More than 200 homes have received hands-on support to make their home more hearing accessible.

Interested in Becoming an Ambassador?

If you've learned how to navigate your own devices and want to help others do the same, we'd love to hear from you. You don't need to be an expert, just someone willing to share experiences and encouragement. We provide training and support by phone or in person.



Special Events: Save the Date

Annual General Meeting & Award Ceremony

Join us on June 11, 2026

To reflect on the year and look ahead. Registration details to come

May Hearing Month HEARTalk

May 2026

A HEARTalk on Aging Well with Hearing Loss in celebration of May Hearing Month

FYI

Discriminatory Hearing Aid Coverage: The Ordre des audioprothésistes du Québec Calls on the Government

At present in Quebec, there is a glaring lack of fairness in the eligibility criteria of the Hearing Aid Program administered by the Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec (RAMQ). At the Ordre des audioprothésistes du Québec (OAQ), we are deeply concerned by this situation, which deprives people with hearing loss of access to hearing devices that are essential to their daily lives.

Public coverage is restrictive in two ways. First, for adults who are not studying, no hearing aid is reimbursed if hearing loss affects only one ear: individuals must have hearing loss in both ears to be eligible. Second, even in cases of bilateral hearing loss, RAMQ covers only one hearing aid for retirees or people who are unemployed. For these individuals, access to the program is also conditional on having an average hearing loss of at least 35 decibels at 500, 1000, and 2000 Hz in each ear.

As a result, many people with hearing loss delay being fitted with hearing aids, despite clear evidence that early intervention improves communication, social participation, and overall well-being. These delays ultimately lead to significant social and economic costs, including increased isolation, reduced workforce participation, and greater strain on health and social services.

As President of the OAQ,

I am calling on the government to maintain the program's free coverage while modernizing its current criteria, which are discriminatory. As a society, we must choose to better support those who are most vulnerable and ensure equitable access to essential hearing health care.

An Economic Study to Support Our Advocacy

During Hearing Month, we released the results of a new independent study commissioned by the OAQ to support our recommendations to the government. The study clearly demonstrates that investing in hearing health significantly improves quality of life while also being economically sound. Every dollar invested in expanded public coverage would generate up to **\$8.90 in net benefits** for the government over a five-year period.

The urgency to act is real.

Nearly 70% of people with hearing loss are not equipped with hearing aids, even though the benefits of these devices are well established.

The hearing aid adoption rate in Quebec is 32%, far lower than in France (55%), England (51%), or Denmark (55%).





The Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre offers specialized services for people of all ages living with a hearing disability, including hearing loss and tinnitus. These services are available to anyone living in the Greater Montreal area:

- Rehabilitation
- Cochlear implant
- Technical aids services
- Employment assistance services

Our experienced team includes audiologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, social workers, psychologists, and specialized educators. All of these professionals work together to support you in achieving a better quality of life in hearing and communicating in your natural environments.

To learn more or get started, please contact our Admissions Department:

- guichet.ditsadp.ccomtl@ssss.gouv.qc.ca
- 514-488-5552, ext. 51250

Partnership with Hear Entendre

As an important partner of the LLMRC, Hear Entendre can help you with your request for services! Just ask anyone in their office.



Several scenarios for enhancing RAMQ coverage were evaluated in the Cost-Benefit Analysis of Enhancing the Hearing Aid Program conducted for the Ordre. One scenario, inspired by the French model and assuming a hearing aid adoption rate of 46%, would require an additional investment of **\$133 million** by the Quebec government over five years. This investment would generate **\$1.2 billion** in associated gains, resulting in a net benefit of **\$1.04 billion**.

The evidence is clear: improving public coverage for hearing aids is not only socially responsible, but economically advantageous.

Access to hearing aids is not a matter of comfort—it is a public health imperative. Enabling people to hear, understand, and interact with their environment benefits individuals, families, and society as a whole. At the Ordre, we firmly believe that every person who requires hearing aids should be equipped in both ears. We will not stop advocating until the government listens to reason.



David Gélinas

David Gélinas, a hearing aid specialist since 2014, is President of the Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec.

New Technologies

Rethinking Technology for Accessibility: How the Meeting Owl is Supporting Lipreading at HEARTalks

At Hear Québec, accessibility is rarely about finding a single, perfect solution. Our recent decision to purchase and test the Meeting Owl 3 for HEARTalks is one example of how this process can lead to meaningful improvements in access.

The idea emerged through conversations with one of our newer partners, Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ). SAQ had purchased a Meeting Owl for meetings and shared how the device worked. Our team began to consider whether this technology, though not designed for accessibility, might support visual access for virtual participants, particularly those who rely on lipreading. Based on these conversations, Hear Québec decided to purchase a Meeting Owl 3.

From Purchasing to Testing

Lipreading can be especially challenging in a virtual group setting. Common video platforms often rely on fixed cameras or display multiple small video tiles, making it difficult to quickly identify who is speaking. After purchasing the Meeting Owl, we tested it in a controlled setting. The goal was not to replace existing accessibility tools, but to see whether the Owl could offer an additional layer of visual access for virtual attendees.



Placed at the centre of the room, the device remained stationary while its internal 360-degree camera tracked speakers as the conversation unfolded. For virtual participants, this created a more intuitive experience: instead of searching the screen to find the speaker, the view shifted automatically, making it easier to follow expressions and mouth movements.

“ **Accessibility is not static, and neither are the needs of the people we serve** ”

While this approach has limitations, the testing showed enough potential for us to begin incorporating the Meeting Owl into HEARTalks.

How the Meeting Owl Works

The Meeting Owl 3 is an all-in-one device that combines a 360-degree camera, microphone array, and speakers in a single unit. It sits at the centre of a table and connects directly to a laptop via USB, working with most common video-conferencing platforms.

The Owl also includes a companion app that allows facilitators to control and adjust how the device behaves during a session. Through the app, users can manage camera focus and other settings, helping ensure the lens responds appropriately to the room layout and the flow of discussion.

When the device is active, a small light appears on the front, resembling owl eyes. These lights indicate that the Owl is in use, but the device itself remains still and unobtrusive on the table, without disrupting in-person conversation. For virtual attendees, the experience appears as a combination of a panoramic room view and a speaker-focused screen that shifts as different people speak.

Strengths and Limitations

As with any tool, transparency is important. The Meeting Owl introduces a slight delay when speakers



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change, particularly during fast-paced exchanges. The camera may take a moment to shift focus, which can briefly affect visual clarity. Lipreading can also be more difficult if speakers turn away, cover their mouths, or if lighting conditions are uneven.

For these reasons, the Owl is not a replacement for captioning, clear audio or other accommodations that Hear Québec already uses. Instead, it functions as a supplementary visual tool, best used alongside clear facilitation, good lighting, and intentional communication practices. When participants speak one at a time and face inward towards the device, the benefits for virtual attendees are most noticeable.

Learning Together

One of the most meaningful aspects of this story is the collaboration behind it. Seniors Action Quebec did not set out to recommend an accessibility solution for lipreading; rather, by sharing their experience using the Meeting Owl in their own meetings, they helped spark an idea that Hear Québec could explore in a different context. That kind of knowledge-sharing between community organizations strengthens all of our work. As we begin using the Meeting Owl in **HEART**Talks, we will continue listening, adjusting, and

learning. Accessibility is not static, and neither are the needs of the people we serve. Tools evolve, contexts change and sometimes progress comes from carefully testing whether a tool might offer additional support when used thoughtfully.

We are encouraged by what we have seen so far and look forward to continuing these conversations with our community. If you notice the Owl at upcoming **HEART**Talks, we'd love to hear what you think.



Keara Blair

is the Programs Coordinator at Hear Québec, a role she began in August 2025 while covering Faith's maternity leave. Faith is expected to return in May. Keara brings over six years of experience in non-profit program planning and has always been drawn to work that supports people and communities. After several years working closely with the Black community across all ages, from youth to seniors, she welcomed the opportunity to learn and grow in a new space.

Community Space

A Stronger Voice for English-Speaking Seniors in Québec

By 2031- just five years from now - one in four Quebecers will be a senior (aged 65+). Founded in 2012 by Ruth Pelletier and other dedicated community leaders, Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) was created to identify, address and champion the needs of English-speaking seniors across the province through programs, advocacy, and community-building initiatives.

SAQ envisions a Quebec where English-speaking seniors are informed and empowered, and where communities actively safeguard the social, economic, and physical well-being of older adults.

Building Capacity, Strengthening Networks

As an official language minority community organisation (OLMC), SAQ supports a growing network of organizations serving English-speaking seniors across Quebec. By strengthening collective capacity, SAQ enhances the sharing of resources, information, and direct services that enable healthy aging.

The organization advocates at municipal, provincial, and federal levels and has led the One Voice Coalition—a network of Montreal-area organizations serving English-speaking seniors, since 2019. This collaborative approach amplifies the voices of English-speaking seniors and ensures their concerns reach decision-makers.

SAQ publishes a quarterly newsletter available free on the organization’s website and maintains a telephone helpline to assist with resources and inquiries.

Resources and Education

SAQ maintains a comprehensive digital map of English-language programs and services for older adults province-wide, serving as a vital navigation tool for seniors and their families seeking support.

Through online and in-person events and conferences featuring expert speakers, the organization empowers seniors with knowledge on topics ranging from legal



Paulina Abarca-Cantin

As the eldest child of two medical doctors and granddaughter of a Super Ager who lived to 105, Paulina Abarca-Cantin grew up fascinated by conversation about health, longevity, and well-being across the lifespan.

An alumna of HEC Montreal, School of Business, the University of Toronto and the National Theatre School of Canada, Paulina was appointed Executive Director of Seniors Action Quebec in May 2025. A fluently bilingual longtime Montrealer, she brings policy expertise, operational acumen, and passion for improving the lives of older adults to the organization

Currently serving on the Board of the Table de concertation des aines de l'île de Montreal, she previously served as Director of Policy & Research at the Canadian Media Producers and as Programming & Operations Lead at the Canada Media Fund.



rights and nutrition to elder abuse prevention, health matters, and housing—equipping seniors, their families, and caregivers with practical tools and connections. These initiatives foster informed decision-making and help seniors maintain their independence and quality of life.

Accessibility as Priority

Following a successful collaboration with Hear Entendre Québec at SAQ's sold-out October 2025 in-person conference, the organization now offers open-captioned versions of all video presentations on its YouTube channel - free and accessible worldwide. This partnership highlighted both the persistent stigma surrounding hearing loss and the transformative power of cross-organization collaboration to better serve seniors.

Evidence-Based Advocacy in Action

Governed by a diverse Board of Directors, supported by dedicated staff, and connected to a vast cross-sectoral network, SAQ practices evidence-based advocacy, actively monitoring and responding to policy development at all levels of government.

In December 2025, the organization presented a brief on Bill 1 at Quebec's National Assembly, demonstrating its commitment to ensuring English-speaking seniors' voices are heard in critical public discussions. Looking ahead to 2026, SAQ has identified key priority areas: affordable housing, financial literacy, the legal framework surrounding Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), and reducing social isolation among seniors.

Preparing for Tomorrow's Challenges

Quebec's demographic shift will require innovative solutions and intergenerational collaboration as demand on available services and resources increases across the province. Canada is a diaspora country, and as neurodegenerative diseases increase, we will see more seniors reverting to their mother tongue and requiring different support than we may have seen in the past. This, along with accessibility, will be one of the many key challenges for generations. Effective communication and shared resources will be essential.

By February 2026, Seniors Action Quebec will have developed its Strategic Plan (2027-2030), examining the current external landscape, identifying organizational strengths and opportunities, and establishing priorities for how best to support Quebec's English-speaking seniors in the years ahead.

This forward-thinking approach positions SAQ as an advocate for today's seniors and their families and as a strategic partner in addressing the complex realities facing English-speaking seniors in a predominantly francophone province.

Get Involved

All Quebecers aged 50 and over may become members of Seniors Action Quebec. Members may vote at the Annual General Meeting to shape the organization's future direction and may submit their candidacy to serve on the Board of Directors. Seniors, their family members and caregivers are welcome to connect with Seniors Action Quebec.



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📍 408-5165 Sherbrooke West/Ouest

☎ (514) 481-1897

📱 @annamgainey

