Assistive Technology in Hearing Instruments:

Personal hearing instruments, such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, or bone conduction devices, come in many models with many features and newer technologies. It is important to understand which features increase the usefulness and value of the hearing instrument.

On their own, hearing instruments work best in quiet surroundings and close to the sound people want to hear. There is less sound clarity at greater distances or with competing noise; assistive technologies can improve the function of your personal hearing instrument in those settings.

Assistive technologies like telecoil and Bluetooth can dramatically improve the ability to hear and understand auditory communication through conversation, music, theater, presentations, media and more.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) acknowledges the difficulty that people with hearing loss may have understanding sound in places where audible communication is needed.

The ADA requires public venues to provide assistive listening systems where there is audio amplification and requires assistive listening systems to be hearing instrument compatible. These accommodations are free and, although required, often need to be requested.

Assistive listening systems are used in venues like theaters, lecture halls, conference rooms and information counters. But to take full advantage of assistive listening systems, you must have the assistive technology (e.g., a telecoil) in your hearing device, and you must learn how to use the technology.

The telecoil or Bluetooth setting is usually a simple switch on your personal hearing device to T (for telecoil program) or a dedicated Bluetooth switch.

Consumer Rights:

You have a legal right to receive consultation from your hearing health care provider about current hearing assistive technologies, including telecoils and Bluetooth, that can expand the usefulness of your personal hearing instruments.

You have 30 days from purchase to return your hearing aid for reasonable cause, provided you meet provisions of Washington State law, and your hearing aids are in their original condition. Ask your hearing health care provider about their own return policy, which may give you additional protection.

This trial period is an excellent opportunity to try the hearing aids in different environments and ask questions of your provider.

For Hearing Instrument Dispensers:

SB5210 LINK

(1) Any person who engages in fitting and dispensing of hearing instruments shall:

(a) Prior to initial fitting and purchase, notify a person seeking to purchase a hearing instrument, both orally and in writing, about the uses, benefits, and limitations of current hearing assistive technologies, as defined by the department of health in rule.

(b) Provide to each person who enters into an agreement to purchase a hearing instrument a receipt, which must be signed by the purchaser at the time of the purchase, containing language that verifies that prior to initial fitting and purchase the consumer was informed, both orally and in writing, about the uses, benefits, and limitations of current hearing assistive technologies, as defined by the department of health in rule.

(2) The department may adopt rules to create a standard receipt form that persons required to provide notice under this section may provide to purchasers, as required .

(3) A person required to provide written notice may produce written materials, use materials produced by hearing instrument manufacturers or others, or use the materials created by the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.