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State Health Officials Urged to Alert Consumers to the Potential Risks of Buying Hearing Aids without Being Evaluated by a Licensed Hearing Healthcare Professional

National and international professional organizations dedicated to hearing healthcare have sent letters to state health departments urging officials to alert consumers to the potential risks of purchasing hearing aids over-the-counter or through the Internet without first obtaining a comprehensive hearing evaluation by a licensed hearing healthcare professional.

"We are writing you today to ask for your assistance in advising consumers who suspect that they have hearing loss to seek a comprehensive hearing evaluation by a licensed hearing healthcare professional prior to purchasing hearing aids over-the-counter or through the Internet," the letter states.

The letter—signed by the Academy of Doctors of Audiology, the American Academy of Audiology, the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and the International Hearing Society—notes that May has been designated as Better Hearing and Speech Month, providing an excellent opportunity for communicating the information.

"The potential risks that result from the omission of a comprehensive hearing evaluation and treatment by a licensed hearing healthcare professional include failure to detect an underlying medical cause of the hearing loss, additional hearing loss as a result of improper fitting and/or programming of hearing aids, and ear trauma sustained as the result of improper fitting and/or insertion of ear molds or hearing aids."

"Hearing aid sales and delivery models that circumvent the hearing healthcare professional also pose financial risks to consumers because they are more likely to purchase unnecessary or inappropriate devices."

The goal is for all states to issue a statement similar to one released by the Minnesota Department of Health stressing the importance of seeing a hearing healthcare practitioner for hearing loss and advised that failure to do so "skirts state and federal legal protections and could result in harm."

In February, the five organizations issued a statement that highlighted both the "health and efficacy concerns about the use of consumer-administered hearing tests and the direct sale of hearing aids to the consumer without the involvement of a licensed hearing health professional — an audiologist, hearing aid

specialist, or otolaryngologist.” The statement further noted that a medical evaluation by a licensed physician is also recommended for adults prior to a hearing aid purchase.

For more information on the Minnesota Department of Health statement:

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2011/hearing102611.html>. A sample letter and the February 9, 2012, Joint Statement are included after About Us.

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About Us:

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