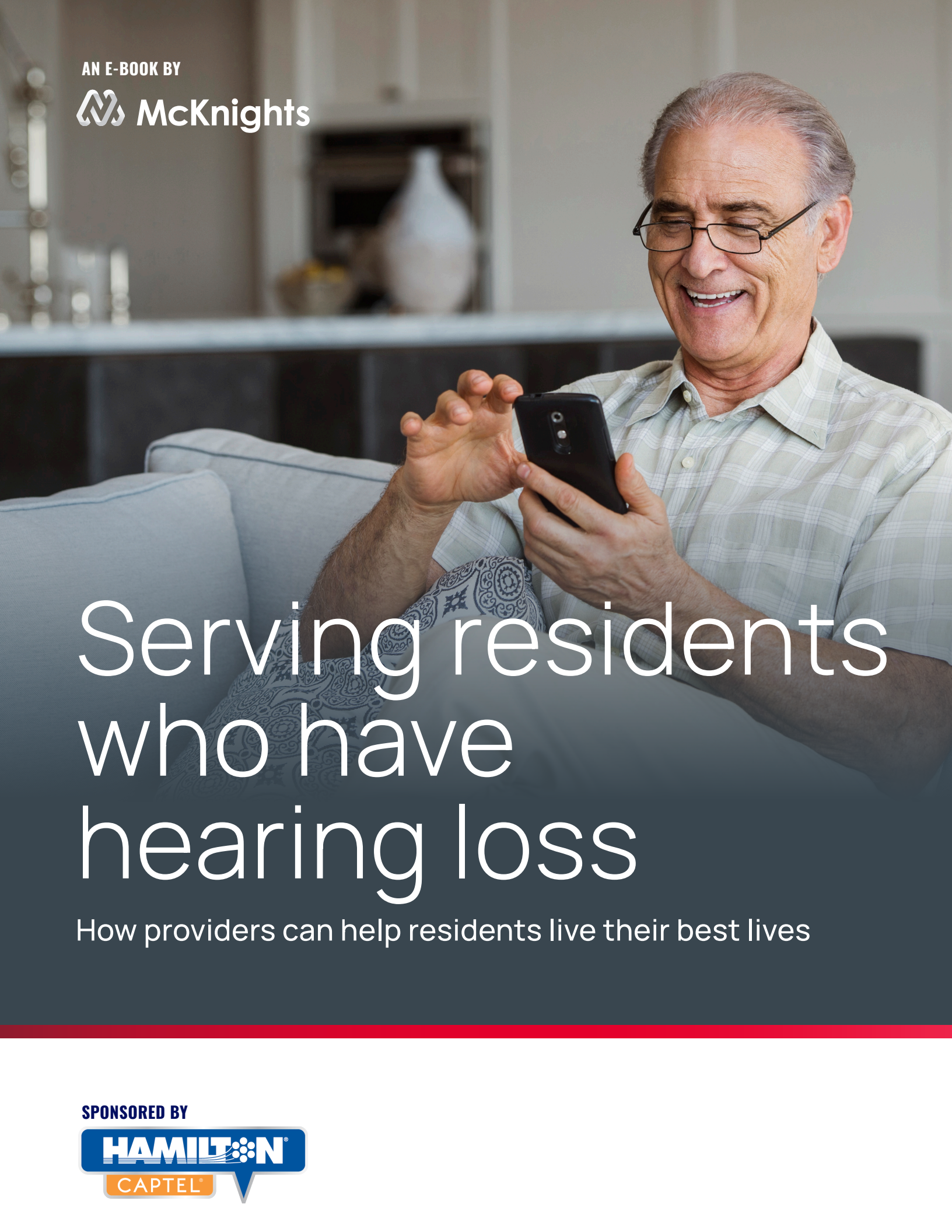


AN E-BOOK BY



Serving residents who have hearing loss

How providers can help residents live their best lives

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Age-related hearing loss is omnipresent. According to the National Institutes of Health, nearly 50% of adults aged 75 or more years have hearing loss, and untreated hearing loss has been linked to issues such as sadness, depression, anxiety, paranoia, cognitive decline and poor social relationships.

According to the American Academy of Audiology, hearing loss related to the aging process is a combination of changes to blood flow and the structures of the inner ear, changes to the nerves associated with hearing, and changes in how the brain processes speech and sounds. Other factors, such as diabetes, poor circulation, noise exposure and certain medications can exacerbate hearing loss due to aging.

Fortunately, senior living operators have several tools and resources available to them to maximize their residents' quality of life when confronted with the challenges presented by hearing loss.

"Technological assistance for older adults living with hearing loss spans a wide range, from hearing aids to live captioning on phone calls and specialized telehealth programming," said Scott Code, vice president at

the LeadingAge Center for Aging Services Technology. LeadingAge's members, Code added, are constantly exploring options to create more inclusive environments for those with auditory, visual and mobility impairments.

THE 'GOLDEN BACHELOR' EFFECT

In addition to technological assistance, healthcare professionals and senior living providers may benefit from what might be called "The Golden Bachelor" effect when it comes to helping residents who have hearing loss. In the recent reality television show, the 71-year-old man and some of the women contestants vying for his attention were shown wearing hearing aids, a sight — and message — applauded by Michael Andreozzi, who is the president-elect of the International Hearing Society.

"I hope the many viewers of 'The Golden Bachelor' will see the link between how taking care of your hearing relates to maintaining vital connections in living a fulfilled life," Andreozzi said. "The show exemplifies how acceptable and meaningful it is to address your hearing."

Dave Blanchard, strategic relations and business development manager for Hamilton® CapTel®, said he also was pleased to see hearing loss being addressed on



"The Golden Bachelor." Hearing loss, he said, long has suffered from a stigma not attached to age-related declines in vision.

"There are a lot of people who wear glasses, and there's no stigma tied to that," Blanchard said. "When people get glasses, it's looked at as, 'I need them to keep my vision sharp, and it's no big deal.' But in many cases, people perceive hearing loss as a sign of weakness, and the stigma is that 'I'm not as strong as I used to be or not as good as I used to be.'"

On the positive side, Blanchard said this attitude is changing as younger generations bring with them a new attitude of "I'm staying connected by addressing my hearing loss."

"That's a big shift," he noted.

SIMPLE, EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS

In addition to hearing aids for older adults, several simple and inexpensive interventions are available to help residents who have hearing loss live their best lives.

"Shake awake" alarm clocks that provide a physical vibration, and doorbells that incorporate a visual component such as a flashing light, are two examples that residents or senior living operators can employ. Blanchard noted that, as a provider of captioned telephones, Hamilton CapTel helps individuals with hearing loss stay in touch with family, friends and businesses over the phone. As a bonus, thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act, this assistance is available at no charge to senior living



Photo: Hamilton CapTel

Addressing hearing issues could lead to improved social relationships and other benefits.

communities and their residents, and it typically involves no infrastructure investments for communities with broadband connectivity.

"We can connect our phone via Voice Over IP connections, internet only or through a phone line," he noted. "Residents can listen while reading captions of what's said to them — and respond back like they nor-



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– DAVE BLANCHARD, HAMILTON CAPTEL



mally would on a traditional phone. It's a great option for them. It's very simple to hook up and use and a great example of what's possible when residents have hearing challenges."

Given the nature of senior living, residents may pursue assistive technology independently. Still, Blanchard has advice for operators looking to implement such technology for residents: Be in contact with family members when it comes to deciding when to implement it.

"A senior will often say, 'I don't need to address this,' but the family will say, 'Mom or Dad, I really want to stay connected with you on the phone. I think you need this today,'" Blanchard said.

Likewise, he said, staff members can be a good resource to not only help determine when this technology really could benefit a resident, but also to help in its implementation.

"There's such a closeness between staff and residents," Blanchard added. "They're really trying to improve residents' lives and help them maintain their confidence, pride and independence. When they start to notice that someone is struggling with phone calls or stops answering the phone entirely, that's a good time for them to ask, 'How about if we get you a tool that won't cost you a thing and it'll make phone calls easier?' That's a moment that can really change someone's life."

OPTIMIZING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Providers can also collaborate with interior design architects and acoustical engineers to optimize supportive hearing environments for residents.

