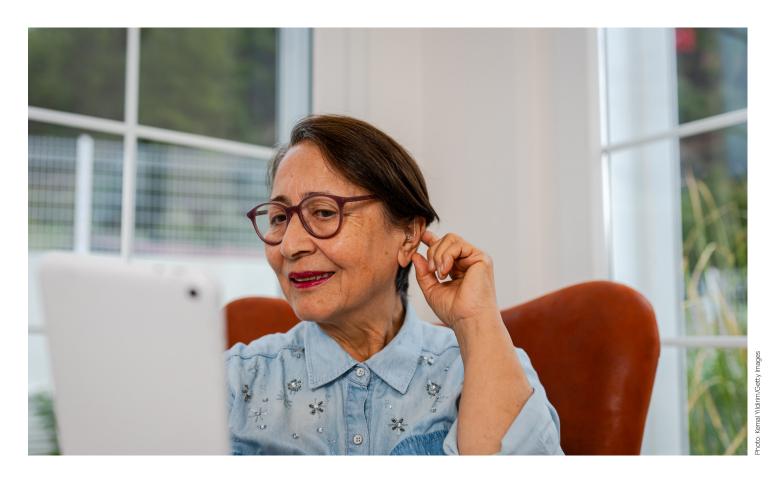


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SERVING RESIDENTS WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS



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.

ge-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 '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

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"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

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-

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.'

- 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.



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

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Tools are available that can change the life of someone living with hearing loss.

Jami Mohlenkamp, a principal with Denver-based OZ Architecture, an architectural and interior design firm, said that interior designs for older adult communities continue to evolve — and not always for the better, from an acoustical standpoint.

"We're seeing different finish expectations within senior living communities," Mohlenkamp said. "Twenty years ago, there was a lot of carpet throughout the communities and the common areas, but today, there's more tile and more resilient flooring. That can provide a more upscale look and also help with maintenance because some of those surfaces are easier to clean. But those harder surfaces can cause more reverberation of sound, which can create hearing challenges."

OZ Architecture, Mohlenkamp added, is an advocate of bringing in an acoustical engineer on senior living projects. "They can really help make a meaningful difference for residents," he said.

According to one such firm, Wave Engineering, addressing the comfort aspects of acoustics is particularly important in senior living communities. Doing so is typi-

cally done through the use of acoustical panels, which are primarily absorptive wall and ceiling treatments.

Andrew Kowalyshyn, an acoustical consultant for Wave Engineering, said that the acoustical engineering industry has come a long way in the past 10 to 12 years, moving away from square, fiberglass-wrapped wall panels to something else.

"There are now acoustic felts that give the architects and owners much more flexibility with their designs to incorporate colors, shapes and patterns. They're also now printed in full floor-to-ceiling graphics, which allow interior designers to incorporate a cityscape or a landscape photo of the surrounding region to provide a sense of place," he said.

Areas in a senior living community that see the most activity — such as multipurpose arts and crafts rooms, activity rooms and dining areas, where people are trying to communicate with each other — can particularly benefit from acoustical analysis and intervention, Kowalyshyn added.

He suggested that senior living operators interested in taking steps to ensure comfortable acoustic environments for residents, staff members and visitors contact the National Council of Acoustical Consultants to locate an acoustical consultant in their area.



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- ANDREW KOWALYSHYN, WAVE ENGINEERING



By providing assistance to residents considering technology options and making informed infrastructure and interior design choices, senior living communities can support residents living with hearing challenges to maximize their quality of life. And by meeting that goal, providers accomplish the very important mission of senior living.