



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

# 2022

## Public Policy Agenda

Your Guide to the Top  
Public Policy Priorities for the  
Professions of Audiology and  
Speech-Language Pathology



## The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 218,000 members and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists; speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology support personnel; and students.

# Introduction

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The current public policy landscape is fragile and uncertain. Political divisions have negatively impacted public trust and the ability of government institutions to function. The ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to transform how we interact, communicate, and work—as well as how we conceptualize public health, education, and service delivery. Despite hardening political polarization and the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, the current public policy landscape is also promising. A critical opportunity exists for people across the ideological spectrum to join forces and meaningfully address the plethora of challenges facing the country.

Advocacy by and for audiologists and speech-language pathologists remains critical. The *2022 Public Policy Agenda* (hereafter, “the *Agenda*”) establishes a number of priorities aimed at ensuring that the value of the professions in school, health care, early intervention, private practice, and higher education settings is adequately reflected in rapidly evolving laws, regulations, and payment policies. The *Agenda* reflects ASHA’s ongoing commitment to patients, clients, and students; evidence-based practice and outcomes; public health; the highest standards of professional ethics; a diverse professional workforce, equitable and inclusive policies and practices, and nondiscrimination on the basis of the full range of diversity, including but not limited to ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and/or veteran status.

ASHA looks forward to working collaboratively with lawmakers, policymakers, decision makers, and allied stakeholders to advance the public policy priorities in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*.

## CONTACT

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Make an

**IMPACT**

The word "IMPACT" is rendered in a bold, white, 3D-style font with a thin white outline. The letters are arranged in three rows: "I", "M", "M" on the top row; "P", "A" on the middle row; and "C", "T" on the bottom row. The background is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes, including circles and squares, in shades of teal, purple, and pink. Some of these shapes feature a fine, diagonal hatching pattern. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

# Make an Impact



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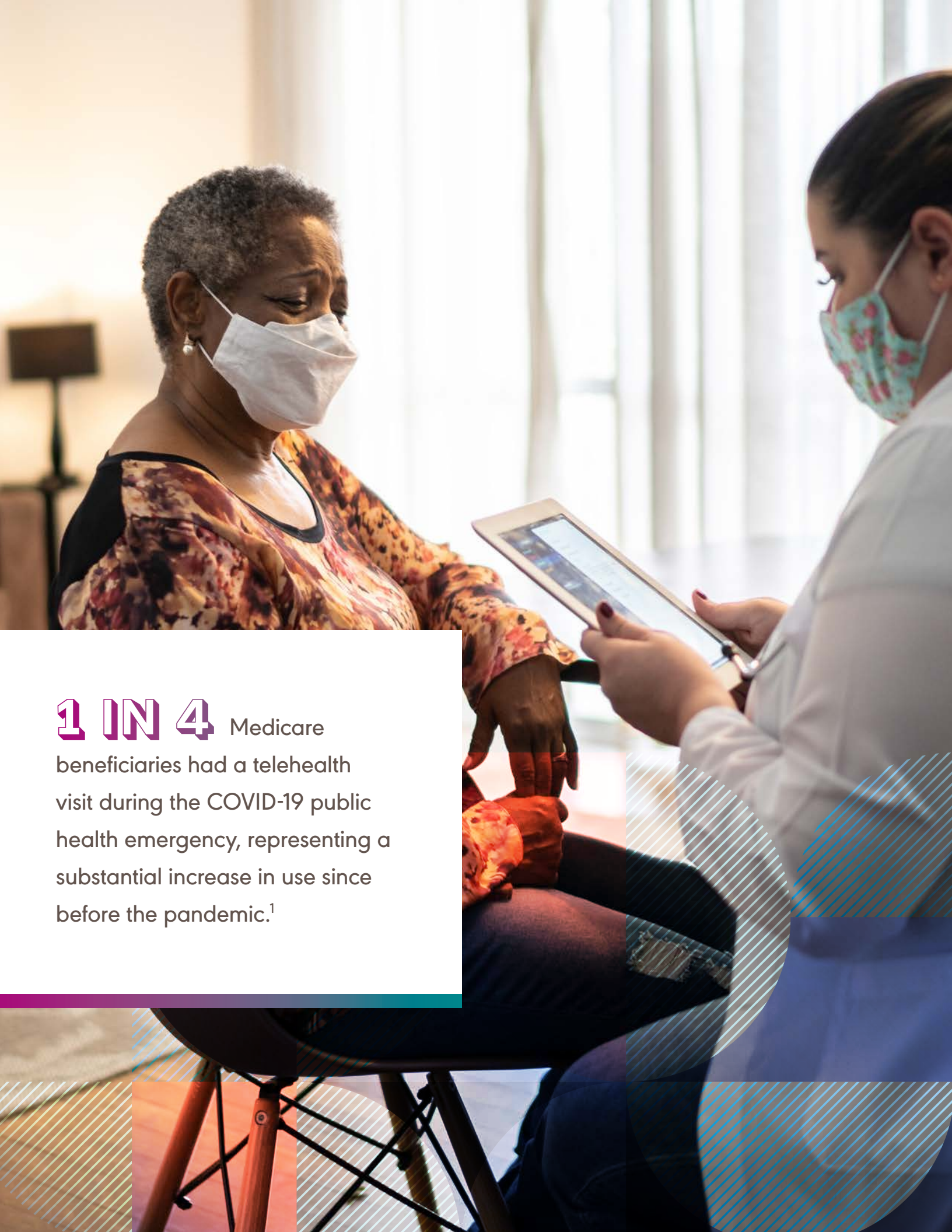
ASHA employs an unmatched cluster of 20 government affairs and public policy professionals who proactively and collaboratively partner with ASHA members to advance the priorities of the annual *Public Policy Agenda* by

- undertaking robust policy analysis and development;
- building and leveraging strategic relationships with influential lawmakers and policymakers;
- communicating regularly with lawmakers, policymakers, other decision makers, allied stakeholders, consumers, and the general public; and
- providing dynamic opportunities for ASHA members to advocate for positive public policy change.

Providing dynamic and convenient opportunities for ASHA members to advocate is critical to ASHA's overall success! As a member of ASHA, your voice is incredibly valuable. The professional perspectives and personal narratives that you bring to a public policy issue have a powerful impact. By working together, we can most effectively educate, inform, and persuade lawmakers, policymakers, and other decision makers to take actions that benefit the professions as well as the patients, clients, and students whom we serve.

You can become informed and involved in a number of ways. Becoming an effective advocate is easy and takes very little time!

- Follow ASHA Advocacy.
  -  Facebook ([@ASHAAdvocacy](https://www.facebook.com/ASHAAdvocacy))
  -  Twitter ([@ASHAAdvocacy](https://twitter.com/ASHAAdvocacy))
- Sign up for *ASHA Headlines* to receive the *60-Second Advocacy Update*.  
[asha.org/publications/enews/headlines](https://asha.org/publications/enews/headlines)
- Take action on ASHA's advocacy issues.  
[takeaction.asha.org](https://takeaction.asha.org)
- Become an ASHA Grasstops Envoy.  
[asha.org/advocacy/become-a-grasstops-envoy](https://asha.org/advocacy/become-a-grasstops-envoy)
- Learn about ASHA-PAC.  
[asha.org/advocacy/pac](https://asha.org/advocacy/pac)



**1 IN 4** Medicare beneficiaries had a telehealth visit during the COVID-19 public health emergency, representing a substantial increase in use since before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

# Health Care Priorities

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Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide medically necessary services to maximize health and functional outcomes for quality of life. It is essential that (a) all public and private payers comprehensively cover audiology and speech-language pathology services regardless of service delivery model, (b) payments fully reflect the value of the provider's extensive training, expertise, and services; and (c) emerging health care delivery systems recognize the importance of including both professions. ASHA has identified the following health care priorities in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*:

- Advocate for comprehensive coverage and equitable payment for audiology and speech-language pathology services, including early intervention services.
- Advocate for expanded and permanent coverage of audiology and speech-language pathology services provided by means of telepractice, including the permanent ability of audiologists and speech-language pathologists to provide services by means of telepractice in Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance, pay parity between telepractice and in-person services, and telepractice policies that explicitly incorporate the full scope of practice of the professions.
- Advocate for the inclusion and successful participation of audiologists and speech-language pathologists in value-based care, alternative payment models, and other emerging health care delivery systems.
- Advocate for maintaining the critical role of certified speech-language pathologists in skilled nursing facilities, especially under Medicare's Patient Driven Payment Model, as well as productivity standards that support clinical excellence, ethical practice, and high-quality service delivery.
- Advocate for federal funding to support academic and clinical research, and the assessment, treatment, and management of speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.



**55.2%** of U.S. children ages 3-17 with a voice, speech, language, or swallowing disorder received intervention services in the past year.<sup>2</sup>



# Schools Priorities

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Audiologists and speech-language pathologists provide critical evidence-based services to students with disabilities. These services directly foster effective communication skills and improve educational outcomes. It is essential that increased federal support be dedicated to addressing communication disorders and supporting ongoing challenges associated with the provision of school-based audiology and speech-language pathology services. Furthermore, school-based audiologists and speech-language pathologists must be supported to provide services that they determine are in the clinical best interests of their students. ASHA has identified the following schools priorities in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*:

- Advocate for the establishment of dedicated Technical Assistance Centers in the U.S. Department of Education, complete with content expertise as well as evidence-based tools and resources to support priorities for school-based audiologists and speech-language pathologists—including caseload and workload management, rural capacity building, and school-based telepractice.
- Advocate for new research and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education on topics impacting the ability of audiologists and speech-language pathologists to serve students—including assessment practices and service referrals, compensatory services and student regression, manageable workloads, and family education.
- Advocate for increased Medicaid funding dedicated to school-based audiology and speech-language pathology services through the development and dissemination of a national model that includes the equitable provision of consultation, assessment, and treatment services.
- Advocate for audiologists and speech-language pathologists to serve as peer reviewers for the U.S. Department of Education.
- Advocate for federal funding to support the assessment, treatment, and management of speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.



### **Audiologists:**

Employment is projected to grow **16%** from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations, with about 800 openings projected each year.<sup>3</sup>

### **Speech-Language Pathologists:**

Employment is projected to grow **29%** from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations, with about 15,200 openings projected each year.<sup>4</sup>

# Professional Practice and Workforce Priorities

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Audiologists and speech-language pathologists are the leading professionals who are academically and clinically trained to assess, treat, and manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders. It is critical that the *Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact* be successfully implemented and expanded, that licensure and certification requirements are preserved, that the professions' defined scopes of practice are protected, that working environments are appropriate and safe, and that certified assistants are recognized. ASHA has identified the following professional practice and workforce priorities in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*:

- Advocate for implementation and further adoption of the *Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Interstate Compact*.
- Advocate for licensure and certification standards that support audiologists and speech-language pathologists—and their ability to practice at the top of their license at all times.
- Advocate against infringement upon the scopes of practice of audiology and speech-language pathology by other professions that do not hold the extensive academic and clinical training as well as continuing education required to assess, treat, and manage speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.
- Advocate for appropriate and safe working environments, including workspaces that ensure access and high-quality service delivery while upholding privacy standards, ongoing provision of personal protective equipment consistent with current public health guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and continued delivery of services by means of telepractice.
- Advocate for regulations that recognize the value of ASHA-certified audiology and speech-language pathology assistants, including appropriate credentials, roles and responsibilities, and supervision standards.



About 2 to 3 out of **EVERY 1,000** children in the U.S. are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears.<sup>5</sup>

With Early Hearing Detection and Intervention programs:

- 98% of infants are screened for hearing loss<sup>6</sup>
- But only 67.3% of infants with hearing loss receive early intervention treatment<sup>7</sup>

# Patient, Client, and Student Priorities

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Each patient, client, and student has unique clinical needs. It is essential that public policies are structured to support individual needs, safe devices and proper utilization of technology, informed treatment decision making, and enforcement of existing treatment mandates. ASHA has identified the following priorities for patients, clients, and students in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*:

- Advocate for the safety, appropriate utilization, and proper marketing of devices and technology for hearing, augmentative and alternative communication, habilitation, and rehabilitation.
- Advocate for the reauthorization of the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Act.
- Advocate for the continued ability of patients, clients, students, caregivers, audiologists, and speech-language pathologists to make informed treatment decisions with equitable access to objective and evidence-based resources.
- Advocate for increased Medicaid funding for early intervention services, the preservation of Medicaid Maintenance of Effort protections, and state compliance with service mandates under Medicaid's Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment benefit.
- Advocate for international public policy initiatives designed to support individuals with speech, language, cognitive, hearing, balance, voice, and feeding/swallowing disorders.

Patients who receive care from members of their own racial and ethnic background tend to have

## **BETTER OUTCOMES**<sup>8</sup>

- 28% of the U.S. population are members of a racial or ethnic minority group <sup>9</sup>
- But only 8.5% of ASHA members and affiliates identify as members of a racial minority <sup>10</sup>



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Priorities

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ASHA holds a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that directly addresses systemic racism and institutional inequity. Ultimately, the efficacy and sustainability of audiology and speech-language pathology services rests upon an understanding of and respect for the background of each patient, client, and student—as well as that of the provider. It is essential that unacceptable disparities in care be eliminated, that a culturally responsive workforce be promoted, that a diverse body of audiology and speech-language pathology students be grown, and that discrimination against people with communication disorders be fought. ASHA has identified the following DEI priorities in the *2022 Public Policy Agenda*:

- Advocate for the reduction of disparities in health care, education, and early intervention settings on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, language, dialect, national origin, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, religion, socioeconomic status, and/or ability.
- Advocate for (1) a culturally responsive workforce of audiologists and speech-language pathologists, including the utilization of appropriate materials and resources, and (2) appropriate training and use of interpreters.
- Advocate for a diverse population of undergraduate and graduate students in audiology and speech-language pathology programs, including continued support for the Allied Healthcare Workforce Diversity Act.
- Advocate for anti-discriminatory policies and practices that support people with communication disorders, especially those from underrepresented or marginalized communities.

The 2022 Public Policy Agenda was developed by the

# 2021 Government Affairs and Public Policy Board

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- David Alexander, CCC-A, Member
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ASHA's Government Affairs and Public Policy Board is charged with (a) developing the Association's annual public policy agenda for adoption by the Board of Directors; (b) ensuring that the strategic needs and interests of ASHA members are represented in the Association's annual public policy agenda; (c) providing ongoing coordination of communication with other ASHA committees, councils, boards, members, and state speech-language-hearing associations concerning the legislative, regulatory, and other public policy activities and initiatives of the Association; and (d) making recommendations to and working with the National Office staff to develop strategies to achieve the public policy agenda of the Association.







## **AUDIOLOGY**

Audiologists specialize in preventing and assessing hearing and balance disorders as well as providing audiologic treatment, include hearing aids.



## **SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY**

Speech-language pathologists identify, assess, and treat speech and language problems, including swallowing disorders.

# Sources

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