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Northwest Lions Foundation for Sight & Hearing.

Seattle, Washington

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Announcement of formation of AUDIENT, an Alliance for Access to Hearing Care

The Northwest Lions Foundation for Sight & Hearing (NLFSH) in Seattle, Washington has announced that it has formed AUDIENT, a non-profit alliance for access to hearing care for low income populations who are challenged by the current cost of hearing care.

Today in the United States approximately 28 million children and adults alike, experience the isolating effects of hearing loss. And of that number, 22 million do not use hearing aids. Many are financially challenged and unable to pay for the hearing care their families need.

The hearing care professional who desires to serve this low income population generally encounters barriers in providing much needed hearing care services to persons who are income challenged because the costs of administration are high, and recovery of those costs to serve the appropriate people within their own communities is low.

The challenge of this problem is cited in the national U.S. Public Health Services' Healthy People 2010 initiative, which sets hearing care goals for the country. HP 2010 identifies significant disparities for low income populations in accessing hearing care services. AUDIENT is offering hearing health care professionals a process that begins to bridge this gap. Through the collaborative efforts of hearing instrument and earmold manufacturers, and licensed hearing health care providers, AUDIENT will bring hope to these millions of children and adults who lack access to communication, the essence of human existence.

The mission of the AUDIENT hearing health care alliance in the U.S. is to meet the needs of licensed hearing health care providers who want to give access to high quality hearing health care to low income patients around the United States who are income qualified. NLFSH also has a broad global vision, with the intent of expanding the AUDIENT process into developing countries, so that accessible, quality hearing health care can be introduced to benefit individuals in need of hearing care around the world. NLFSH is a not for profit 501 (C) 3, and all revenues from the AUDIENT Alliance will be directed back into developing its charitable global mission.

By introducing the AUDIENT Alliance in the U.S., NLFSH is encouraging the accessibility of hearing care through a network of hearing health care providers. NLFSH will manage the AUDIENT Alliance process as a third party administrator, by performing the income qualification, collecting the funds from the patient, managing the database of outcome measures from each patient, and obtaining high quality digital hearing aids. Costs and pricing are designed to be reasonable for both patients and providers of care.

Providers in the AUDIENT Alliance network will agree to provide comprehensive hearing health care, including an audiological diagnostic examination, treatment planning, and determination of clinical candidacy for the digital BTE hearing aids, fitting and dispensing ear molds, providing the hearing aid fitting service and two follow up aural rehabilitation visits to patients. The first hearing aid to be provided through the AUDIENT Alliance will be a fully digital state-of-the-art BTE hearing aid from a major manufacturer, with NOAH-compatible advanced fitting software and program features. The costs for products and services will be the same for all patients, and all providers. The provider will be reimbursed a maximum flat fee of \$280 for monaural, and \$350 for binaural fittings for these services. The total cost to the patient for the hearing aids, ear molds, shipping and handling, will be \$319 for digital BTE devices with volume control, and \$345 for the upgraded power or directional microphone version. Financing will be available at a small fee to the consumer.

The AUDIENT process, products and services are only available to low income patients who qualify. “We don’t intend to take any business away from existing markets, but instead grow the market incrementally, in the areas of most need,” according to Mike Langhout, President of the Hearing Services Division of NLFSH. “It is important to understand that the AUDIENT process was founded, funded, and is managed by NLFSH to serve exclusively low income qualified individuals,” stated Langhout. NLFSH will require the patient to verify his or her income. In the U.S., the income level needs are tied to the federal poverty guidelines set by the government, which can be found at (<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04poverty.shtml>). Income qualification for participation in the AUDIENT process will be set at 250% of that federal guideline. If the guideline changes, the income needed for qualification will change. Today, for a family of one, the household income maximum would calculate at \$23,500 annually.

NLFSH has a successful history in social entrepreneurship. It has the largest corneal tissue bank and distribution network in the world. “For over 35 years, NLFSH has collaborated with health care professionals to meet the needs of those with sight and hearing loss. We understand the frustration of the thousands of hearing care professionals across the country in trying to reach out to those who are income challenged within their communities. We are committed to ensuring that the AUDIENT Alliance is a professionally managed, scalable and effective vehicle to assist those professionals in meeting the community need,” stated Langhout

You may learn more about the AUDIENT process, an Alliance for Accessible Hearing Care by requesting a brochure at info@audientalliance.org, or simply log on to www.audientalliance.org. You may also call 1-877-AUDIANT, (1-877-283-4368). You may access NLFSH at www.nlfoundation.org.