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Joint Position Paper on Auracast

by German Hearing Association (DHV), German Hard of Hearing Association (DSB), and German Cochlear Implant Society (DCIG).

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Auracast is a new audio transmission standard built on Bluetooth LE Audio ("Low Energy"). Unlike traditional one-to-one Bluetooth connections, Auracast can stream the same audio to any number of receiving devices at the same time ("broadcast").

Wireless audio transmission systems—also known as "assistive listening systems"—based on Auracast have the potential to replace today's inductive transmission over time. This technology isn't limited to hearing aids; it's also used in mainstream audio (for example, with headphones or earbuds). As a result, people without hearing loss help drive faster adoption, which in turn speeds up development. For many users, Auracast can make access to hearing support much easier.

In many cases, installing these systems is less expensive than installing inductive hearing loop systems, especially in existing buildings. For now, however, inductive transmission remains the established standard for people with severe hearing loss who depend on wireless hearing support. It therefore needs to remain available for the foreseeable future.

Auracast apps and devices are already being used, and many more are currently in development. For broad real-world adoption, the following challenges, among others, still need to be addressed:

- minimal delay (latency) between the original signal and what users receive,
- privacy and data security,
- ease of use when selecting the correct audio stream for hearing systems—especially if a smartphone or an additional device ("assistant") is required,
- ease of use of loaner receivers for people who (not yet) use hearing systems, or whose hearing system can't receive Auracast.

Auracast will likely become available first in hearing systems aimed at the broader market—people with milder hearing loss. However, people with significant hearing loss rely especially on wireless transmission technology. That's why power hearing aids and cochlear implants need to be equipped with Auracast reception as quickly as possible.

We therefore call for:

- rapid integration of Auracast into all hearing devices, including power hearing aids and cochlear-implant processors,
- providing these features at no additional cost, including under standard coverage (fixed-allowance devices),
- easy-to-use receiving and selection options directly on hearing systems,
- implementing the technical standard with the lowest possible latency across all hearing systems,
- clear requirements for transmission rate and other technical parameters for Auracast transmitters to ensure compatibility with hearing systems.
- Auracast receivers must work with transmitters from all manufacturers at the same level of quality—for example, with respect to latency

Because hearing devices are used over long replacement cycles, it will take many years before Auracast can be used widely by people with hearing systems. To ensure accessible participation during this transition period, inductive transmission systems must remain available and usable.

Recommended for the next few years:

- For new installations: a combination of an induction (hearing loop) system and a ready-to-add or integrated Auracast solution,
- For existing induction loop systems: add Auracast transmitters while continuing to use the current microphone equipment.
- For people (not yet) using hearing systems or without Auracast: portable receivers—either with headphones or an induction neck loop—with accessible controls and the lowest possible latency,
- Set up user-friendly options for checkout/loan and maintenance.

Auracast is a future-ready technology with strong potential to expand accessibility and participation. For that potential to truly benefit everyone with hearing loss, the requirements listed above need to be built in early. In addition, venues should clearly indicate—in prominent locations and, where applicable, on their website and in accessible announcements—that these systems are available and specify the corresponding streams.

About the German Hard of Hearing Association (registered nonprofit)

The German Hard of Hearing Association (DSB) has been advocating for the interests of people who are hard of hearing or who have become deaf in Germany for 75 years—at the local, state, and federal levels. The DSB's work is grounded in its state and local member associations and their self-help groups, which together form the national umbrella organization. The DSB helps shape policy and decision-making in areas such as social policy, disability rights, education, employment, and building regulations, and it also contributes to the development of technical hearing-assistive devices. In addition, the DSB is represented on numerous political advisory bodies. Internationally, the DSB works with European and global organizations, including the WHO. Since 2019, the DSB's President has been Dr. Matthias Müller. www.schwerhoerigen-netz.de

About the German Cochlear Implant Society (DCIG)

Founded in 1987, the German Cochlear Implant Society (DCIG) represents, as a nationwide self-help organization, the interests of people in Germany who use cochlear implants (CI). The DCIG includes eight regional associations and around 140 self-help groups. Alongside traditional self-help activities as well as peer-group and empowerment programs, the DCIG has been politically active for years and advocates for the needs and concerns of CI users. For example, the DCIG contributed to developing the AWMF guideline on CI care and, drawing on lived-experience expertise, played a key role in ensuring the guideline's high quality standards. www.dcig.de

About the German Hearing Association (DHV)

The German Hearing Association (DHV) was founded in December 2022 by the German Cochlear Implant Society (DCIG), the German Hard of Hearing Association (DSB), and numerous regional and state associations from both organizations. At present, 17 associations are full members. Its stated aim is to facilitate a gradual transition toward a merger of DCIG and DSB, while also remaining open to additional organizations of people with hearing loss and to individual members joining. The DHV represents people with hearing loss who primarily communicate through spoken language and advocates for their concerns in politics, society, and the public sphere. Some use sign language as a form of communication; however, it is not culture-defining. The DHV's core demands are self-determination, self-advocacy, inclusion, and equal participation in all areas of life. More information: www.hoerverband.de