



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HEARING
CENTER OF
EXCELLENCE

Hearing is an important sense in our daily lives. For Service members, the ability to hear and communicate is especially critical to the safety of their unit and themselves, and is central to effective command and control, as well as mission effectiveness and accomplishment. Yet, in spite of current hearing conservation efforts to prevent noise-induced hearing loss, military hearing loss and auditory system injuries continue. According to the Veterans Benefits Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), tinnitus and hearing loss are the top two service-connected disabilities for U.S. military Veterans.



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The Department of Defense (DoD) Hearing Center of Excellence (HCE) was legislated by Congress in the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act to focus on the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of hearing loss and auditory system injuries. With strong and sustained advocacy and leadership, HCE is the only collaborative effort among DoD, VA, institutions of higher education, and other global public and private entities aimed at providing better hearing and balance health outcomes. The HCE is a platform enabling the necessary coordination and collaboration to provide solutions focused on the continuum of auditory-vestibular system care from prevention through rehabilitation in Service members and their families and Veterans. Key responsibilities are to develop and disseminate best practices; conduct vital clinical education throughout DoD, VA, and beyond to enhance implementation of best practices; facilitate hearing and balance research; develop and sustain the Joint Hearing Loss and Auditory System Injury Registry (JHASIR); and assist with coordination of rehabilitation benefits and services offered by the VA to former Service members.

WHO WE SERVE

To achieve its objectives, HCE works closely with DoD and VA customers and stakeholders to include Service members and Veterans, military and VA leaders, health care providers, hearing conservation program and hearing readiness leaders and managers, researchers, industry, academia, and international organizations. The HCE also communicates with various organizations within the legislative and executive branches of government using a variety of communication channels.

BRANCHES & MISSIONS

The HCE’s mission is to optimize operational performance, heighten medical readiness, and enhance quality of life through collaborative leadership and advocacy for hearing and balance health initiatives. In support of its mission, the HCE established five organizational branches to address the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, research, and rehabilitation of hearing loss and auditory impairment, including audio-vestibular dysfunction often related to traumatic brain injury.

PREVENTION & SURVEILLANCE

The Prevention and Surveillance Branch is the pillar of HCE’s core objective to prevent hearing loss among Service members and their families and Veterans. The HCE works with hearing conservation program and hearing readiness leaders and clinicians, and develops and disseminates best practices with its military Service and VA partners to enhance the effectiveness of prevention and treatment measures across DoD and during the Veteran clinical encounter.

CLINICAL CARE, REHABILITATION, & RESTORATION

The Clinical Care, Rehabilitation, and Restoration Branch supports HCE’s second key pillar ensuring all members of the Armed Forces and Veterans suffering from hearing loss and auditory-vestibular injuries receive comprehensive, coordinated, high-quality treatment. The HCE works to establish and promote evidence-based clinical standards of care and provides clinical-skills training and education across DoD and VA.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

The Information Management (IM) Branch’s primary objective is to deliver support across the HCE enterprise for all HCE’s DoD and VA initiatives with IM/Information Technology requirements. These responsibilities include establishing an information management system to capture and centralize data about hearing health, hearing impairment, and the auditory-vestibular system; assuring quality data regarding the outcome of hearing loss and auditory-vestibular injury intervention are captured in the Joint Hearing Auditory System Injury Registry (JHASIR); and developing educational tools and guidelines using the data collected through the JHASIR.

RESEARCH COORDINATION

The Research Coordination Branch seeks to unify DoD, VA, academic and industry, and international research initiatives and to achieve common clinical, operational medicine, and prevention research objectives. It also has an important role to identify military-relevant gaps between function and performance of auditory-vestibular health and injury, and unify goals and objectives with other research organizations, industry, and international groups. In addition, the branch oversees HCE’s knowledge product translation and technology transfer requirements.

FRONT OFFICE

The HCE Front Office provides the vision and advocacy, and oversees all aspects of HCE’s congressionally-directed mission. It also executes support for the HCE’s daily operations, and facilitates outreach to forge collaborations with military, other federal agency, academic, and industry leaders to work in partnership and maintain clinical readiness, enhance education, promote hearing loss prevention and mitigation, and develop strategic research relationships.



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