**Statement on Occupational Hearing Conservation Regulation and Innovation**

Occupational hearing loss is preventable. Yet, working populations remain affected by hearing loss and tinnitus despite enforceable regulations, industry mitigating policies, and occupational disease prevention measures. Occupational hearing loss impacts workers representing many industries, including agriculture, forestry, construction, mining, oil, gas, public safety, transportation, retail, wholesale, and the military. Approximately 12% of all workers have hearing difficulty1 and 1.4 cases per 10,000 full-time workers experience work-related hearing loss2. As of 2020, 1.3 million U.S. Veterans received disability compensation for hearing loss, and more than 2.3 million received compensation for tinnitus3. In fact, tinnitus is the most prevalent service-connected disability of new compensation recipients, and hearing loss is the sixth top-rated condition behind musculoskeletal conditions and scars and second-degree burns4.

Multiple factors impact the success of hearing conservation programs. Some of these include limitations in controlling for noise exposure, failure to recognize and identify ototoxic agents, and misuse, irregular use, or improper selection of hearing protection devices. Alarming is recent evidence concluding that 53% of noise-exposed workers reported not having worn hearing protection devices1. Hearing conservation services in the U.S. are based on enforceable regulations such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Standard, CFR 1910.95, "Occupational Noise Exposure5" which is an aged regulation and inadequate to protect hearing health. For example, the OSHA standard does not incorporate current scientific evidence concerning the impact of lower noise exposure levels on hearing health, such as those within the range of 80 dBA - 85 dBA TWA, the use of age correction in older working populations, exposure to ototoxicants and requirements for employers to conduct surveillance on workers with potential exposure to ototoxicants independent of noise, lowered exchange rates, and the impact on delivering hearing conservation programs through novel technologies. The time is now for regulators to revise enforceable requirements incorporating contemporaneous scientific evidence about noise exposure and provisions that compel employers to offer hearing conservation services to employees following exposure to potentially ototoxic materials and chemicals.

CAOHC urges researchers, developers, and standards establishing entities to assess emerging audiometric technologies' performance, reliability, and practical use, and incorporate them as permissible products to guide, deliver, or augment hearing conservation services. CAOHC advocates for continued innovation to improve workplace controls and personal protective equipment, facilitating improved compliance, ease of application, and economic feasibility for employers and employees. While CAOHC does not endorse private enterprises developing hearing conservation products, we encourage innovation that aligns with the CAOHC mission to promote the quality of hearing conservation programs worldwide. Furthermore, CAOHC is committed to continuing advocacy and education for improving regulations, policies, guidance, and the practice of hearing loss prevention.

1. Occupational Hearing Loss Surveillance. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,. Accessed August 5, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/ohl/overall.html>

2. Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Private industry workers suffered 14,500 hearing loss cases in 2019. Accessed August 5, 2022. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2021/private-industry-workers-suffered-14500-hearing-loss-cases-in-2019.htm>

3. Office of Research & Development. Accessed August 5, 2022. <https://www.research.va.gov/topics/hearing.cfm>

4. Department of Veterans Affairs. *Compensation*. Fiscal Year 2020. September 30, 2020. Accessed August 5, 2022. <https://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/docs/2020_compensation.pdf>

5. Occupational Health and Safety Administration. 1910.95 CFR Occupational Noise Exposure: Hearing Conservation Amendment (Final Rule). *Federal Register*. 1983;48:9738-9785.