



# East Bay Chapter Newsletter

May 2026

Chapter E-mail: [Info@HearingLossEB.org](mailto:Info@HearingLossEB.org)  
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Alameda, CA 94501

**May is Walk4Hearing month! Plan to join us 10 a.m. – 1 p.m., May 30<sup>th</sup> to support our walk and raise awareness for Hearing Loss! Our Bay Area Walk4Hearing will take place at Robert Crown Beach park in Alameda, 8<sup>th</sup> Street at Otis Drive, Alameda. There is plenty of parking. Donate and you may get a T-shirt or other item. FREE snacks, water, and drinks available and Pizza and a shaved ice truck after the event! Don't miss the fun!**

**Go to this link to join our team: [HLAA East Bay Chapter - Fundraising For Hearing Loss Association of America](#)**

**We look forward to seeing you there! Some pictures from last year...**



Questions? [Info@HearingLossEB.org](mailto:Info@HearingLossEB.org)

HCAA-EB posts our newsletters to the California State Association webpage and a link on our website. **VOLUNTEER! Contact us to let us know you are available!** Check out our website at: <http://www.HearingLossEB.org/> Contact us at: [Info@HearingLossEB.org](mailto:Info@HearingLossEB.org)

### Coming Soon:

We are lucky to have Robin Miller and Verna Dow organizing our speakers! We have speakers planned through the end of the year!!

- **June 13, 2026: Meera Kohli is a Clinical Research Coordinator, at the UCSF Voice & Swallowing Center**
- **July/August: Summer Break, No general meetings**
- **September 12, 2026: Dr. Childress, a late-deafened audiologist**
- **October 10, 2026: Ann Thomas, Assistive Listening System presentation**
- **November 14, 2026: Pamela Durkin, Canine Companions**
- **December 12, 2026: Christine Lim, Visiting an ENT.**

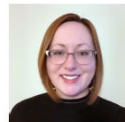
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**Skye Bernard**  
Branch Manager, Oakland  
1999 Harrison Street, Suite 100, Oakland, CA 94612  
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Skye has more than 18 years of banking and lending accomplishments in the East Bay, fostering client relationships based on trust, care, and service. Throughout her career, she has been dedicated to helping individuals, families and small businesses achieve their financial goals and to ensuring their financial needs are addressed quickly and efficiently.

Active in her community, Skye regularly engages with local nonprofits and other organizations to give back, along the way utilizing her professional skills to enhance financial empowerment and inclusion.

### ***Thank you The Ford Store San Leandro for your generous sponsorship!***



**Gus Knezevich**  
**President**  
**1111 Marina Blvd**  
**San Leandro CA 94577**  
***FordSanLeandro.com***

The Ford Store Leandro is a family-owned dealership led by President Gus Knezevich. It remains committed to transparency, exceptional service, and long-term customer relationships while continuing to grow in today's automotive landscape.

The Ford Store San Leandro is a family-owned dealership built on a legacy of trust, dedication, and customer-first values. Founded in November 1991 by Robert Knezevich, the business has grown steadily over the decades, earning the loyalty of generations of customers. In February 2008, the dealership expanded with a move to San Leandro, where it continues to serve the community with pride.

Now led by President Gus Knezevich, the dealership remains committed to the principles it was founded on—transparency, exceptional customer service, and long-term relationships. Carrying forward the original vision, the business continues to evolve within a modern automotive landscape. A hands-on approach and a strong commitment to customer satisfaction have been key to its continued growth and success.

Gus Knezevich, a Bay Area native, has spent the past 26 years working within the company, developing deep industry expertise and a genuine passion for the automotive business. A graduate of Dealer Academy, he leads with a hands-on style rooted in transparency, service, and relationship-building. He lives in the East Bay with his wife and three children and remains closely connected to the community he serves. Committed to honoring and continuing the legacy his father built, Gus is focused on guiding the dealership into the future while staying true to its family values.

***Thank you Marina Village Veterinary for your generous support!***

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At Marina Village Veterinary, it is our heartfelt mission to support and strengthen the precious bond you share with your animal companion. We do this through a unique approach to veterinary care that incorporates the benefits of both Western and Eastern medicine. The result is *happier, healthier, and more balanced* pets who enjoy longer, more fulfilling lives.



**Thank you Dr. Susanna Storm for your sponsorship!**



Dr. Susanna Storm, audiologist and owner of Blue Sky Hearing, has dedicated her career to expanding access to compassionate, evidence-based hearing care. From founding the audiology program at *Give Kids A Smile*—now serving hundreds of children each year—to working across clinical, manufacturing, and business settings, she brings a rare, comprehensive perspective to patient care. E-mail Dr. Storm at [drstorm@blueskyhearing.com](mailto:drstorm@blueskyhearing.com).

## **MEETING NOTES: “Hearing Loss Stigma: Making the Invisible Actionable”**

At our April 11, 2026 HLAA-East Bay Chapter meeting, our guest speaker was Jane Neilson, who was a recipient of a stipend in support of her attendance of the 2025 HLAA National Convention. Jane told us that her favorite research session at the Convention was on “Hearing Loss Stigma and Its Impact” and therefore chose to report to us about the research findings on this important topic. The 5 panelists who presented at this research session were each hearing loss experts or advocates from different specialties such as public health, medical school faculties, and impacted communities. Jane captured our attention immediately by sharing 3 questions that served as the basis of the panel discussion: Why do many people wait 7 years or longer to seek treatment or never get treated? What role does stigma play in this dynamic? Is the public’s perception of hearing loss improving over time?



- **Jane Neilson’s Background:** Jane initially explained her personal interest in the topic of hearing loss stigma. She was born with hearing loss and lived with hearing loss like her own mother, older sister and brother did. Jane noted that her first awareness of hearing loss and the stigma associated with it was in first grade in playing the game of “Pass the Secret” where she couldn’t hear the whispers of the other kids. Nevertheless, she didn’t get her first hearing aid until age 30, at which time she said that “my life was radically changed for the better.” Yet, she was still embarrassed when the clinic called her work place and left a message that her hearing aids were ready. Even then, her go-to-strategy was hiding her hearing loss, and remained so for the next 40 years.
- **Introduction of the Panel of Experts:** Jane provided a short introduction of each member of the impressive panel:

- ✓ **Dr. Laura Nyblade, Ph.D.**, is an expert in the science of stigma. As both a researcher and program implementer, she has studied stigma in regard to HIV and AIDS for 2 decades and 2 countries. She was recruited to co-chair a hearing loss research team so she could help apply lessons learned from HIV to hearing loss care and assist in developing criteria and ways to measure stigma and change.
  - ✓ **Dr. Jessica West, Ph.D.**, is a medical sociologist at Duke University School of Medicine who studies how hearing loss affects people's health and well-being throughout their lives. Dr. West told how she has moderately severe hearing loss and been wearing hearing aids since age 17, but it took 10 years for her to admit that to anyone. Dr. West described the many ways hearing loss stigma can be felt and affect one's life.
  - ✓ **Dr. Margaret "Meg" Wallhagen, Ph.D.**, is a professor at UCSF School of Nursing and a Gerontology Nurse Practitioner who has focused for decades on hearing loss and its impact in the healthcare context. She believes that hearing loss is often poorly understood by providers, and that stigma directly impacts hearing healthcare.
  - ✓ **Ibrahim Dabo**, is an active hearing loss advocate who spoke about ways we can lessen hearing loss stigma by advocating for ourselves and other people with hearing loss.
  - ✓ **Dr. Carrie Nieman, M.D.**, was the moderator of the panel of experts for this research session and also spoke about hearing loss in the healthcare context.
- **The Science of Stigma:** Jane said that she learned that there actually exists a science of stigma. As an expert in the science of stigma, Dr. Laura Nyblade explained that research studies have been trying to answer several questions about stigma, such as:
- ✓ What do we know about stigma?
  - ✓ How do we measure stigma?
  - ✓ Why does stigma matter?
  - ✓ What can we do about stigma?
- **What Is Stigma?** Stigma is a social process – something we as human beings do to each other, and we do it within a context of power. Here are some examples of the possible impact of stigma:
- ✓ **Distinguish and Label Differences:** Old person; person who uses substances; person with hearing difficulties.
  - ✓ **Associate Negative Attributes:** Stupid, incapable, burden, frail, slow, old, lazy.
  - ✓ **Separate Us from Them:** Physical and social isolation.
  - ✓ **Status Loss and Discrimination:** Denial of healthcare, loss of respect; verbal and physical abuse.
- **What Is Hearing Loss Stigma?** Hearing loss stigma is the negative or unfair beliefs about hearing loss (or hearing devices) that make people view it as abnormal and undesirable. As an expert in hearing loss stigma, Dr. Jessica West described the different ways hearing loss stigma may be felt:

- ✓ **Anticipated:** You may have a fear of stigma, whether or not it is actually experienced.
  - ✓ **Internalized:** The stigma may be self-directed.
  - ✓ **Perceived:** You may witness stigmatizing attitudes in the community or among groups.
  - ✓ **Experienced:** You may have had real-life events of stigmatizing behavior.
- **How Can Stigma Affect Someone's Healthcare?** Dr. Meg Wallhagen was the local expert panelist who provided her perspective on hearing loss stigma in the healthcare context. She has focused on hearing loss and its impact in healthcare for decades. She has noticed that stigma can affect whether or not someone:
- ✓ *Perceives the need for healthcare;*
  - ✓ *Desires healthcare;*
  - ✓ *Actively searches for healthcare services;*
  - ✓ *Has access to appropriate and thorough health assessments;*
  - ✓ *Is included in healthcare decision-making;*
  - ✓ *Experiences inappropriate and incorrect assumptions about one's cognitive status.*
- **Who Is Involved with Hearing in the Healthcare Context?** Many players are involved in the healthcare context, including the person/patient with the hearing loss, the patient's partner and family, the patient's social contacts, the patient's healthcare provider, and the healthcare system. Hearing loss is all too often poorly understood by many healthcare providers. Despite multiple efforts and the application of new technologies, efforts to obtain broad sustainable approaches to promoting communication access in the healthcare setting have been mainly unsuccessful.
- ✓ **The Impact of Hearing Loss Stigma from the Healthcare Provider's Perspective:**
    - Symptom assessment can be limited or not completed accurately when the patient has a hearing loss.
    - A provider may misinterpret a patient's cognitive status when a patient can't hear or understand a question.
    - A provider may leave a patient out of setting goals of care and decision-making about the patient's care.
  - ✓ **The Impact of Hearing Loss Stigma from the Patient's Perspective:**
    - A patient may never be asked by the healthcare provider if they can't hear questions asked.
    - There's often little or no accommodation offered by the provider even when hearing issues are disclosed.
    - A patient may miss out or misunderstand information provided by the healthcare provider.
- **The Institutional Awareness Gap:** The failure to be inclusive regarding hearing loss means that healthcare providers, administrators and policy-makers tend to ignore hearing loss issues. Not that they don't care, but it seems that they are simply unaware of the magnitude of the hearing loss issue, as well as potential implications in the healthcare system.

- ✓ For example, 50 million Americans have hearing loss; 50% of people over age 60 have hearing loss; 1 in 5 teens have hearing loss.
  - ✓ Hearing loss is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most common physical health issue after arthritis and heart disease.
  - ✓ Hearing issues are the most common military service-connected disability among veterans.
  - ✓ Perhaps hearing loss isn't given more notice because it's not fatal and it's largely invisible.
  - ✓ According to studies, factors that leave hearing loss invisible include cost, perceived lack of benefit, and denial of hearing loss, but the most difficult disincentive to overcome is the perceived stigma associated with hearing loss and the use of hearing aids.
- **Constraints on Healthcare Systems:** Every healthcare system has several constraints which may limit any interventions that could improve on hearing problems.
- ✓ Each healthcare system has to deal with multiple problems, trainings, and assessments.
  - ✓ Each healthcare system has to focus on preventing falls and infections within the hospital facility.
  - ✓ Tight time pressures are placed on primary care providers who are asked to conduct all kinds of screenings from depression to falls to social determinants, but not hearing.
- **The Self-Advocacy Effort: Benefit vs. Burden.** In research studies of patients with hearing loss, the results of surveys conducted indicated that patients recognize both the benefit and the burden of speaking up and advocating for themselves about their hearing loss with their healthcare providers. Patients commented:
- ✓ **Benefit:** They needed to hear and know the information shared by their healthcare provider.
  - ✓ **Burden:** The constant need for self-advocacy to get hearing clarification often led to exhaustion and burn-out.
- **A Way Forward in an Age-Friendly Health System:** A recent initiative by the John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and 2 hospital associations addressed healthcare needs of older adults, calling them "the 4 M's":
- ✓ **What Matters:** Each individual's goals of care and their personal values are what matters. What does the individual want to keep doing? What does the individual not want to lose? Hearing is essential to the age-friendly healthcare system.
  - ✓ **Medication:** Each individual wants and needs age-friendly meds that don't interfere with what matters, mentation, or mobility. Hearing is necessary to understand the correct regimen.
  - ✓ **Mind (Mentation):** Hearing loss is known to affect one's cognition over time and is recognized as a risk factor, for dementia, depression, and delirium.
  - ✓ **Mobility:** Hearing loss is a risk factor for falls.

- **The CMC (Medicare) 2025 Initiative:** Another recent initiative pays hospitals a benefit if they report they did certain things toward quality healthcare. For example:
  - ✓ Elicit patient goals of care.
  - ✓ Responsibly manage the patient's medications.
  - ✓ Implement frailty screening as an intervention.
  - ✓ Assess social vulnerability.
  - ✓ Establish age-friendly leadership.
  
- **The Optimal Time for Integration of Hearing Assessment into the Work Flow:**
  - ✓ You have to know the patient can hear in order to do anything in healthcare.
  - ✓ Hearing assessment needs to be made part of the normal work flow.
  - ✓ More research is needed to determine the best strategies for doing this.
  - ✓ Integration of hearing assessment can mitigate the stigma of hearing loss.
  - ✓ Making hearing loss screening routine lessens the patient's burden of self-advocacy.
  
- **Making the Invisible Actionable:** Jane offered 5 personal action steps to accomplish this!
  - ✓ Accept your hearing loss as a part of who you are.
  - ✓ Share your hearing loss experiences with someone you trust.
  - ✓ Connect with a hearing loss organization/community and join support activities.
  - ✓ Become a self-advocate and share your hearing loss story with others.
  - ✓ Use the strength & insight gained to educate others how they too can live positive, productive lives with hearing loss.
  
- **Wrap-Up:** In wrapping up her excellent presentation, our speaker Jane Neilson did a quick recap of a few key takeaways from the HLAA 2025 Convention panel research symposium on "Hearing Loss Stigma: Making the Invisible Actionable". Hearing loss stigma is a real phenomenon that is experienced by individuals in many different forms. It can hurt our physical, mental and social lives. Hearing screening and hearing care need to be better integrated into primary healthcare. Many resources are available to help meet the challenge of hearing loss stigma, especially through national, state, and local chapters of HLAA.

In the time remaining, Jane opened up the discussion for comments and questions from the audience. She also encouraged audience members to contact any the panelists directly if they have questions or want more information about any of the topics discussed today.

Finally, our HLAA-EB Chapter leadership reminded everyone that the policy of the Chapter is to not endorse any service, product or person that may have been mentioned or discussed during the current presentation, discussion or follow-up Q & A session.

**For More Information or Questions: Contact Our Panelists: Dr. Laura Nyblade, Ph.D.; Dr. Jessica West, Ph.D.; Dr. Margaret "Meg" Wallhagen, Ph.D.; Hearing Loss Advocate Ibrahim Dabo; Panel Moderator Dr. Carrie Nieman, M.D.**

**~ Kathy Fairbanks**

**Time to renew your membership to our chapter! Only \$25.**

**Bring a check to the next meeting or go to**

**[hearinglosseb.org/join](http://hearinglosseb.org/join)**

**What does HLAA and HLAA-East Bay Chapter do for you?**

HLAA – website: [hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org) provides advocacy on a national level. Information and resources on their website can give you the information you are looking for to solve your hearing loss problems.

HLAA-East Bay Chapter provides information about our monthly innovative and informative meetings with doctors, audiologists and researchers providing cutting edge information about what is new in the hearing loss field. Now we have a new meeting room, courtesy of Kaiser in Oakland with state-of-the-art technology resources! We look forward to seeing you each month. Our leadership team spends many hours preparing for you! Our website: [hearinglosseb.org](http://hearinglosseb.org)

**We need your help! Can you volunteer? Contact us at:**

**[info@hearinglosseb.org](mailto:info@hearinglosseb.org).** All of our committees need helpers! All volunteers are welcome!

Contact us and we'll help you figure out what would be a good fit for you.

### ***HLAA SF/East Bay Leaders***

#### **The Board of Directors:**

Contact us at: [info@hearinglosseb.org](mailto:info@hearinglosseb.org)

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#### ***JOIN HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (HLAA) – THEY ADVOCATE FOR YOU!***

**[hearingloss.org](http://hearingloss.org)** Membership is now open to all of our valued supporters who help fuel our mission and change the lives of people with hearing loss. **Everyone who gives is now an HLAA member, helping to amplify our HLAA voice, and fulfill our important mission— together!**

**COST OF MEMBERSHIP:** The HLAA national office had consolidated the donation and membership processes. Presently, anyone who donates as little as \$1 would become a member of the national HLAA. Additionally, with a donation of \$45 annually, individuals have the option to receive a hard copy of the Hearing Life magazine from the national office.