

HEAR OREGON

IT IS!



AUTUMN 2021

ISSUE 87

PUC Seeks Advisory Members

— by Kevin Roebke

The Oregon Public Utility Commission is recruiting Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP)* advisory committee members. We have three vacant seats for —

- A person who is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind;
- A person representing the homeless population, and;
- An OTAP customer.

The OTAP Advisory Committee, made up of nine members, advises us on outreach and marketing strategies to increase program participation. The committee meets quarterly via Zoom in January, April, July, and October.

If you are interested in serving a four-year term on this governor-appointed committee, apply online at <https://oregon.wd5.myworkdayjobs.com/Boards>. Search and click on the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program Advisory Committee.

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WWW.HLAA-OR.ORG/

Noise exposure and hearing loss: Gene expression. Could it help heal?

A growing number of people are suffering from hearing loss due to exposure to loud noises from heavy machinery, concerts, or explosions. As a result, scientists have been working to understand the mechanism behind how the damage to hearing actually occurs.

Now, a team led by researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) has published an online interactive atlas representing the changes in the levels of RNA made in the different cell types of ears of mice, after damage due to loud noise. These changes in RNA levels are known as changes in “gene expression.”

Once they determined the larger trends in gene expression following the damage, the UMSOM scientists then searched a database of FDA-approved drugs to find those that are known to produce opposite patterns of those caused by the noise.

From this analysis, the research teams identified a handful of drug candidates that may be able to prevent or treat the damage, and ultimately preserve hearing.

Their analysis was published in *Cell Reports* on Sept. 28.

“As an otolaryngologist surgeon-scientist, I see patients

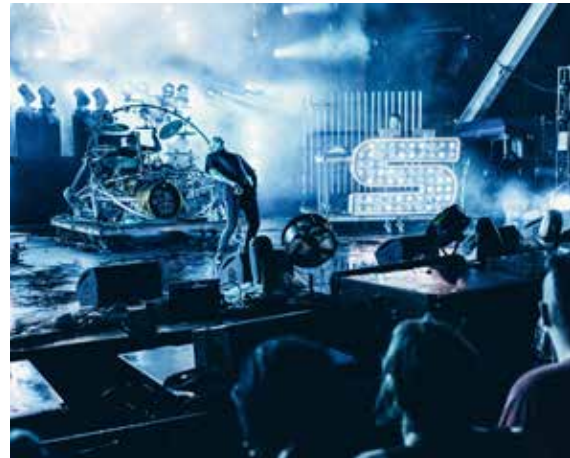


Photo by Nicholas Green on Unsplash

with hearing loss due to age or noise damage, and I want to be able to help prevent or even reverse the damage to their hearing,” said study leader Ronna Hertzano, Professor of Otorhinolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery, Anatomy and Neurobiology at UMSOM.

“Our extended analysis gives us very specific avenues to follow up on in future studies, as well as provides an encyclopedia that other researchers can use as a resource to study hearing loss.”

The team added their newest data on noise-induced hearing loss to gEAR — Gene Expression Analysis Resource — a tool developed by her laboratory that allows researchers not trained in informatics* to browse gene expression data (published earlier this summer).

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I'M ALL EARS ...

Editorial by Jeanne Fenimore Levy



Jeanne is a Hillsboro, Ore., resident who lost a significant portion of her hearing in the 1970s and despaired for her future. Hearing aids helped, though, and eventually she realized that coping with hearing loss was possible and, in fact, the only way to go.

These beautiful autumn days — the warm ones, and now the rainy ones — offer us a much needed chance to slow down, settle in, and read a book or watch a movie.

Hearing the words of that movie may test us, though. Closed captions are my friend and the garbled words of the actors my enemy. A recent visit to the audiologist found my hearing hadn't changed very much at all, which was a surprise to me since my rate of saying "huh?" had increased a great deal.

I was not doing well at all even though I was wearing both hearing aids regularly. When I talked to others, even hearing my own voice was difficult. I kept trying to talk louder and louder. My audiologist listened to my complaints and then took another look at my aid. She said, "Let's replace this tube and see what happens."

Lo and behold, when I put the aid back in my ear I heard everything so much

better! I had really been worried my hearing was getting worse. What a relief.

She and I did talk about new hearing aids, however. I really like her and the quick and thorough service they provide, and it's close to my home. The aids will be around \$4,500 for both.

My Medicare health plan now covers a new pair of hearing aids **each year** for a much lower cost. The provider is a little further away (I haven't met them yet) and there are a variety of aids to choose from, with a variety of prices, I suppose. I would want to know more about how they test your hearing and calibrate the aids to correct it. I don't want a bargain that won't allow me to hear well.

Over the counter (OTC) hearing aids are available, too. Currently, hearing devices that you can buy directly (without seeing a health care professional first) are intended for people with "perceived" mild to moderate hearing loss. (Perceived means they think they can't hear well but they haven't been tested by a professional.) These devices, known as personal sound amplification products (PSAPs), are for people without verified hearing loss to boost their ability to hear certain sounds in certain situations, and reduce the risk of isolation for folks with hearing loss.

I'll let you know what I decide after I've looked at all the options.

Stay healthy!

Contact me by emailing femminismo@gmail.com. Let me know what sort of articles you would like to see in our newsletter.

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HEAR IT IS! #87

Published quarterly by the HAAA, Oregon State Association, Inc., P.O. Box 22501, Eugene, OR 97402.

Jeanne Levy, editor; and Eileen Marma, business editor.

Hear It Is! will regularly print your hearing loss-

related stories — personal experiences, coping strategies, and evaluations of technology are welcomed. Maximum word count is 500 words.

Article contributions should be made to the editor at info@hearinglossOR.org.

For advertising information and rates, contact Eileen Marma at info@hearinglossOR.org. Deadline for Winter 2021, Nov. 8; Spring 2022, March 8.

Website: <https://www.hlaa-or.org/>.

Gene expression, cont. from page 1

* Informatics, also known as biomedical, clinical, or health care informatics, is a relatively new discipline that has been spurred by the rapid growth of health care technology. In its broadest sense, informatics improves human health, health care, and biomedical research by making health data accessible to researchers and clinicians and using that data to benefit patients. From: U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs.

Dr. Hertzano explained that the inner ear resembles the shell of a snail, with separate fluid compartments and sensory cells along its entire length.

The ear functions like a battery with a gradient of ions between the fluid compartments that is generated by the side wall of the shell by adding in potassium.

The sensory cells detect sound and then communicate with the neurons that interact with the brain to interpret the signal. The sensory cells are surrounded by support cells. The inner ear also has resident immune cells to protect it from infection.

Research supervisor Beatrice Milon, PhD, in Dr. Hertzano's laboratory, initially did an analysis on the sensory cells and the support cells of the ear in mice. She collected data on the changes in gene expression from before and after noise damage.

After making their study known to other researchers in their field, the team heard from scientists at Decibel Therapeutics (led by Joe Burns, PhD) and the Karolinska Institute (led by Barbara Canlon, PhD), who had the gene expression data from the inner ear's neurons, side wall and immune cells from before and after noise damage.

Photo by Maxime on Unsplash



2022 HCAA board meetings

You are invited to attend and participate in the quarterly meetings of the Hearing Loss Association of Oregon

board: Jan. 8, 2022; April 2, 2022; July 9, 2022; and Oct. 1, 2022. Meetings are held on Zoom. (No need for a mask.)

To confirm meeting dates and times, please contact John Hood-Fysh, jhoodfysh@gmail.com or send email to info@hearinglossOR.org. You can also telephone 1-800-413-0691. Please leave a message.

The teams then combined the datasets and performed their analysis. The bioinformatic analyses were led by Eldad Shulman, MA, MS, from the lab of Ran Elkon, PhD, Tel Aviv University, a bioinformatics expert that has been working collaboratively with Dr. Hertzano now for over 20 years. Together, they leverage advanced computational techniques and combine them with biological insights to analyze and interpret data, providing impactful insights to the hearing research field.

Dr. Hertzano says it was so important that they looked at a cell specific level, rather than looking at the entire ear, because they found that most of the gene expression changes were specific to only one or two cell types.

"We expected the subset of neurons typically sensitive to noise and aging, to have 'bad' changes in genes, so that we could counter them with drugs, but there was no such thing," said Dr. Hertzano.

"On the contrary, we found that the subset of neurons that are resistant to noise trauma,

turn on a program that protects them while the very sensitive neurons had little change in gene expression.

"We are currently looking into approaches to induce the protective changes in the noise-sensitive neurons to prevent their loss from noise and aging."

In another example, the researchers found that only one out of the four types of immune cells detected showed major differences in gene expression.

Additionally, immune-related genes were turned up in all cell types of the inner ear after noise damage with many of them controlled by two key regulators.

The research team took the overall gene expression trends and plugged them into DrugCentral, a database of known molecular responses to FDA-approved drugs, specifically searching for changes that would be opposite of those happening in the noise-damaged cells.

Continued on page 4



HLAA is one organization – national office, state offices and associations, and HLAA chapters – all working to open the world of communication to people with hearing loss through information, education, support and advocacy.

Membership dues are: individual, \$45 per year; and a couple/family is \$55. Professionals and nonprofits pay \$80. Membership includes the award-winning bimonthly magazine, *Hearing Life*.

Write to HLAA, 7910 Woodmont Ave., Ste. 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814. Or you may call 301/657-2248 (voice), 301/913-9413 (fax) or online at www.hearingloss.org.

Join and become a hearing advocate.

“Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.”
– *Anonymous*

Gene expression, cont. from page 3

They identified the diabetes drug metformin as a potential candidate, as well as some inhaled anesthetic medications used in surgeries ...

“Hearing aids and cochlear implants are used to alleviate hearing loss; however, there are no therapies available to prevent or treat hearing loss,” said E. Albert Reece, MD, PhD, MBA, Exec. Vice President for Medical Affairs, UM Baltimore, and

the John Z. and Akiko K. Bowers Distinguished Professor, and Dean, UMSOM. “The studies that follow up on these findings may eventually lead to medications to prevent occupational noise-induced hearing loss, for example in factory workers, and to changes in standardizing anesthesia protocols for ear surgery, particularly in hearing preservation procedures.” ■

From - <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/09/210929124349.htm>

AMERICAN MASTERS: HELEN KELLER

Read the article by Beth Haller, Ph.D., at: <https://to.pbs.org/3Gdk1fP>

Beth Haller says “in today’s vernacular, Helen Keller would be called a social justice warrior, but too often people only see her as a 7-year-old who learned to communicate at a water pump.”

However, there was more to Keller. Possibly the most famous DeafBlind person in the world, she was a writer who traveled the world and advocated for marginalized people worldwide. She was accompanied on these travels by her teacher of 50 years, Anne Sullivan.

The play and film “The Miracle Worker” told the story of her early life and her discovery that she could understand and, eventually, speak the words that she couldn’t hear. But she even had a vaudeville act and starred in a silent film about her life. In the early days of the NAACP, Keller, a native of Alabama, lent her support to African American rights. Keller died in 1968.

You are sure to find out more about her life in the PBS show “Helen Keller.” Oregon members of OPB can create an account online and stream the film. Others may be able to request an On Demand performance of the show from their cable TV provider.

The show is signed and available with closed captions. ■



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- 866-931-9027 (Voice Carry-Over)
- 800-676-4290 (español)



Oregon Lifeline Program updates

– by Kevin Roebke, Outreach coordinator, PUC

It has been a while since I sent out updates on the Oregon Lifeline Program. And there has been a lot going on over the last year or so with the pandemic. We have gotten extra funding and there are many changes to the discount amounts.

(Oregon Lifeline is a federal and state government program that provides a monthly discount on phone or broadband service for qualifying low-income Oregon households.)

Instead of going over what has come and gone, I will update you with the current information for the program.

Currently for the discounted voice only phone service, customers that have service with a participating provider, and

qualify for the program, are receiving \$5.25 from the federal government, and \$10.00 from the state of Oregon for a total discount of \$15.25. The Oregon subsidy was increased from \$3.50 to \$7 earlier this year; then on September 1st, a temporary order raised it to \$10 per month until January 31, 2022. There is currently a permanent rule making under review to try to make the \$10 per month discount from the state permanent. If this is adopted, it will go in effect Feb. 1, 2022. The reason we have pushed for this increase is due to the fact that the federal subsidy for voice only customers is set to end on December 1, 2021. Raising the state subsidy will allow voice customers

to still be able to receive some support for their voice service from Oregon Lifeline.

For the discounted broadband service, the federal subsidy remains \$9.25 per month, and the state subsidy for this is at \$10 per month, for a total discount of \$19.25 for broadband service. In order to receive the full \$19.25 per month, the customer must have speeds of at least 25 mbps download and 3 mbps upload on their broadband internet service.

If the customer has cellular service with a participating provider that offers the discount, they will receive the full discount if they are on a plan that includes at least 4.5 MB of

continued on page 7

DID YOU KNOW?

1 in 3 people over the age of 60 have hearing loss.

HEARING LOSS IS ABOUT **2X** AS COMMON IN ADULTS with diabetes.

20% A recent study suggests that for every 10 DB LOSS in your hearing, your risk of Alzheimer's increases by 20%.



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Hillsboro, OR 97123
PacificEarClinic.org
<https://bit.ly/3jTkj1O>

Lifeline Program, cont. from p. 6

data each month. If they have service that does not meet these standards they can still receive the state subsidy of \$10 per month.

For the free wireless service option, we still have three providers: Assurance Wireless, Access Wireless, and enTouch Wireless.

If you would like to receive physical copies of the OTAP brochure, please email me your name and the address you would like them sent to. All of these items can also be printed from the web page, www.lifeline.oregon.gov.

Applications are also available in Spanish, Russian,

Vietnamese, and Somali on the web page.

As always, if you would like to have an outreach session with me to go over changes in the program and take questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

We can set up an in-person meeting, or if you are more comfortable with a virtual session, we can set that up through Zoom, or any other video conferencing option.

Kevin Roebke,
Outreach coordinator:
kevin.roebke@puc.oregon.gov

Advisory, cont. from page 1

Click “Apply” on the next page, then sign in or create an account.

For more information about the OTAP Advisory Committee (also known as the Oregon Lifeline Advisory Committee), please visit <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/Pages/Lifeline-Advisory-Committee.aspx>.

**The Oregon Telephone Assistance Program is a federal and state program that provides a monthly discount on phone or broadband internet access service for qualifying low-income households.*

Your opportunity to become a vital part of HLAA-OR

Do you have these skills? Can you help?

Business Editor Job Description

Primary Responsibilities:

I. Recruit sponsors for the newsletter.

II. Maintain two bulk mailing lists and email distribution list for newsletter distribution using Excel.

III. Communicate all correspondence, updates with the editor.

- Recruit sponsors for the newsletter: There is both an annual recruitment for renewal of ads with current sponsors every spring and ongoing recruitment during the year.

- After each quarterly newsletter has been printed and mailed, the printer sends to the business editor an updated list,

called NCOA, regarding bad addresses (cannot be forwarded) and change of addresses. Two bulk mailing lists are updated and saved for the next newsletter printing. Updating can be ongoing as these sources are received.

At the time of a new printing for the newsletter edition, all three bulk mailing lists must be sent to the printer.

- Communicate all correspondence and updates with the editor. Business Editor will forward all ad changes/updates from the sponsors to Editor.

Both Business Editor and Editor will build a file to store these ad changes for easy access at time of newsletter development. Any other cor-

respondence from sponsors or readers will also be stored, as needed.

Follow the HLAA account with the Eugene post office to ensure adequate funds for the next mailing.

Keep Lane Cty. Board member updated to send the Lane County bulk mailing list, on same date that the newsletter will be sent to the printer.

Assist in locating potential articles for the newsletter. Write draft articles as needed.

If you can help, send an email to info@hearinglossOR.org.

Hearing our heroes

— by Tom Jenkins

Tinnitus and hearing loss are among the most common service-connected disabilities suffered by veterans. While there is no cure or perfect solution, there are proven methods of treatment that help patients manage the persisting symptoms of tinnitus.

At the Department of Veterans Affairs - Portland Health Care System, they are trying Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM). This format proves evidence-based care to those suffering from tinnitus.

The process begins with an in-person meeting and physician's referral. Patients undergo audiological evaluation to determine their needs for further assistance in taming their symptoms. Doctors begin teaching coping strategies to improve quality of life with tinnitus. That's done collaboratively between an audiologist and behavioral health, in person or via telehealth.

Most veterans with tinnitus do well with a basic level of care and counseling. There are others, however, who will continue to experience ongoing sleep disruptions, difficulty relaxing or concentrating in quiet places, and intense emotional reactions to their tinnitus that reduces the quality of life.

In 2009, the VA endorsed the use of PTM for patients continually suffering from tinnitus. Since then, research has shown the coping strategies improve the quality of life for veterans with tinnitus who need assistance.

"Before PTM, I felt there was no medical solution to my problem," said a patient. "I spent a lot more time stressing over it. The sessions helped me understand the condition better and ways of how to cope with it."

The tele-PTM program allows for a highly trained workforce to reach out to patients over a

broader geographic area.

Leveraging remote health capabilities can help serve veterans and allow them to manage their conditions in ways that are convenient and aligned with their needs. ■

HLAA 2022 convention

The HLAA 2022 Convention will be in Tampa, Fla., June 23-25, 2022.

HLAA is very excited to be hosting an in-person convention again. This coming year the exhibit hall, workshops, demo presentations, plenary sessions, social events, and Research Symposium will all be held under one roof at the brand new JW Marriott Tampa Water Street.

When you aren't learning and networking at the "most communication accessible convention for people with hearing loss," you can explore Tampa's new Sparkman Wharf area or cruise down the local Riverwalk.

Begin to book your trip now. Registration opens Nov. 29, 2021.

Visit the convention page — <https://bit.ly/3os8LMo> — for more information.

Be sure to register by March 4, 2022, to receive early-bird rates! ■

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual author and are not necessarily those of HLAA-OR. Mention of products and services does not mean endorsement, nor should any exclusion actually indicate disapproval.

Personal experiences and diverse opinions related to hearing loss are welcome for publication and should be mailed to HLAA Oregon at the address listed below.

Unless otherwise noted, readers interested in duplicating or distributing any or all material found in Hear It Is! have our permission to do so. Please credit the source when using such material. HLAA, Oregon State Association, P.O. Box 22501, Eugene, OR 97402; email: info@hearinglossOR.org.

Do you qualify for a discount?

Oregon Lifeline is a federal and state government program that provides a discount of up to \$12.75 on phone or high-speed internet service with participating companies for qualifying low-income households.

Apply if you receive:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Veterans or Survivors Pension
- Federal Public Housing Assistance, or
- Your total household income is at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines

Proof of eligibility:

You may be required to provide proof that you qualify. Apply online, or print the application at:

www.lifeline.oregon.gov/discount

<https://bit.ly/3xNbA5v>

email: puc.rspf@state.or.us

Call (800) 848-4442

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Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Lifeline is non-transferable.

The Lifeline discount is limited to one per household, consisting of either phone (landline or wireless) or high-speed internet service.



Having trouble hearing on the phone?

Specialized telephone equipment or tablets are available at no cost to Oregon residents who have a loss in:

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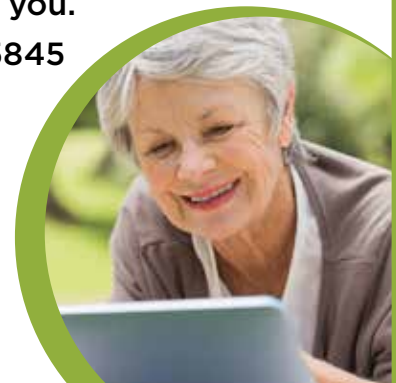
Monday – Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Info/application:

<https://bit.ly/3EjBhhL>

email: puc.rspf@state.or.us



Chapters in Oregon

Local chapter meetings are open to all. Check ahead of time, due to Covid 19. Family, friends, and professionals are encouraged to attend and become involved.

Through chapter meetings and newsletters you'll find:

- Insights into effectively living with hearing loss
- Support/Referrals/Information
- Information about the latest technology
- Coping strategies & tips
- An opportunity to make a difference
- Diminished feelings of isolation and aloneness
- Opportunities to share concerns; hear from others

We believe in education — for those who hear well and those who cannot — so that both may understand the causes, challenges, and possible remedies for hearing loss. At our meetings, you'll find a comfortable place where hearing loss is accepted and not a problem. Many people report that being a part of a Hearing Loss Assoc. group has made a major difference in their lives.

Your participation benefits not only you, but others who attend as well.

Below are some of the current chapters and contact people in Oregon. ■

HLAA of Portland meets the third Saturday each month (except June, July, and August) 10 am, in the Wistar Morris Conference Room in the Main Hospital Building on the Legacy Good Samaritan Campus, 1015 NW 22nd Ave. (at Marshall), Portland 97210. Contact Mark Foster, President; email: hlaportland@gmail.com. Write P.O. Box 2112, Portland, OR 97208-2112; www.hlaa-or.org/portland-chapter.html.

HLAA of Lane County meets quarterly: second Thursday in March, June, Sept., and Dec., at 7 p.m. at the Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Hilyard St., Eugene. Please check to see if Covid 19 infections mandate otherwise. Contact Clark Anderson — clarkoa@msn.com Mail: P.O. Box 22501, Eugene, OR 97402.

HLAA of Linn and Benton counties meets the last Wednesday each month (except June, July, & Dec.) at 6:30 p.m. at the Reimar Building, next to Albany General Hospital, 1085 6th Ave. SW, Albany, OR 97321. Contact: John Hood-Fysh, email: jhoodfysh@gmail.com; 541/220-8541 (cell – call or text), 818 Broadalbin St. SW, Albany, OR 97321.

Note: HLAA of Douglas County no longer meets the requirements for a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Reinstatement may occur, but right now this group meets as a support group. Contacts: Vincent Portulano, president, email: HLAADC@outlook.com; or Ann Havens, secretary, 541/673-3119. Check with them for location for meetings and time.

VOLUME CONTROL

HEARING IN A DEAFENING WORLD



DAVID OWEN

A good read and warning by David Owen

“Our sense of hearing makes it easy to connect with the world and the people around us. The human system for processing sound is a biological marvel, an intricate assembly of delicate membranes, bones, receptor cells, and neurons. Yet many people take their ears for granted, abusing them And then, eventually, most of us start to go deaf.”

David Owen educates and, at the same time, entertains. This book is filled with information. If you suffer from hearing loss or if you want to keep from losing your hearing, you might want to read what he has to say. Order from your book store or search online for “Volume Control.”



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Thank you to our September/October HLAA Donors (as of Oct. 21)

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See bottom of page 12 on how to
make donations. Thank you.



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[] Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____ to support the Hearing Loss Association outreach programs in Oregon. Contributions will be acknowledged in the next issue.

[] I wish to remain anonymous.

[] I cannot contribute but would like to receive the newsletter.

[] I want to join **Hearing Loss Association of America**, the National Organization. Please enroll me as a member. I'm including my membership fee (see page 4 for fee schedule).

Or you can sign up online at www.hlaa-or.org. Click "membership," then "application."

Hearing Loss Association of America, Oregon State Association, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charity and depends on donations and grants. All personnel are volunteers. Please send your donation to support our efforts to HLAA, Oregon State Association, P.O. Box 22501, Eugene, OR 97402.