

Audiology

- An audiologist is a clinical professional who helps patients to preserve and enhance one of the most fragile and valuable of human senses: hearing. By detecting ear pathology and treating hearing-related disorders, audiologists help patients to succeed in school and work, as well as to get the most out of their daily interactions with others. Thanks to the intervention of audiologists, many patients living with various degrees of hearing loss are able to continue their much-loved activities, from playing music to conversing with grandchildren.
- Audiologists are clinical experts in the anatomical structures of the middle and inner ear. These spaces contain numerous essential components, including the cochlea (critical for hearing) and the vestibular system (which aids in balance and spatial orientation). Illness, injury or repeated acoustic stress due to loud noise can damage these delicate organs. When audiological pathology is suspected, audiologists can perform a variety of diagnostic tests to discover the nature and extent of the damage, in addition to pinpointing the underlying cause. Depending on the problem, they can subsequently conduct a variety of interventions, including (but not limited to):
 - Professional cleaning of the external ear canal.
 - Fitting a hearing aid and/or cochlear implant.
 - Instructing patients in compensatory strategies such as lip reading or American Sign Language.
 - Prescribing physical, occupational or speech therapy.
 - Referring patients to physicians or other providers.
- In addition to diagnosing and treating disorders of the inner and middle ear, audiologists serve an important public health function by conducting hearing screenings at schools, workplaces and community agencies. Audiologists also work to educate teachers, employers and the public on strategies to prevent and detect hearing loss.
- **Work Environment**
 - Most audiologists work in health care facilities such as hospitals, physician offices, or independent audiology clinics. Government agencies and corporations may also employ these professionals to oversee activities related to workplace safety and hearing loss prevention. Because ear disorders impact many areas of a patient's life, audiologists often work alongside other health care professionals (including physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants) as part of an interdisciplinary diagnostic and treatment team.

- **Education**

- Prior to the year 2012, audiologists possessing a master's degree were able to practice independently. However, beginning in 2012, audiologists must now earn a doctoral degree (PhD or AuD) in order to be eligible for national certification.
- For those interested in pursuing the field of audiology, the first step is to obtain a bachelor's degree. While no specific undergraduate major is required, essentially all audiology doctoral programs require undergraduate courses in physics, math, anatomy and physiology. Some colleges offer undergraduate "communication science" programs that specifically prepare students for careers in audiology or speech-language pathology.
- Formal audiology training subsequently begins at the graduate level. When enrolling in a doctoral program, it is important to choose one that is currently accredited by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), as this will ultimately affect licensing and career opportunities. Completion of a doctoral degree in audiology generally requires at least four years of full-time study beyond the bachelor's level. Given that audiologic PhD programs require a research component, these may last as long as 5-6 years.

- **Training**

- To become certified by ASHA, audiology candidates must complete a minimum of 1,820 hours of supervised clinical practice during their graduate education. The training provided by accredited doctoral programs generally fulfills this requirement, although additional training beyond the program may be required in some cases.

- **Licensing and/or Certification**

- In the United States, all audiologists must be licensed to practice independently. Certification is available at the national level through the ASHA. Requirements for certification include graduation from an approved training program, in addition to a passing score on the relevant Praxis examination.

- **Necessary Skills and Qualities**

- Because the auditory and vestibular systems are highly complex structures, audiologists should have strong spatial awareness, analytical skills, and a passion for science. Comfort with technology will help the audiologist to operate and troubleshoot the many cutting edge technologies and instruments that are used in the field. Audiologists also must rely on their strong communication and interpersonal skills to establish a rapport with patients, and to explain difficult concepts clearly.

- **Opportunities for Advancement**

- Over time, as with many healthcare related fields, licensed audiologists can expect salary increases and other enhancements to their benefits. Those who hold a PhD have the option of leaving clinical practice to conduct clinical and translational research. Opportunities for consulting with the audiology device industry serve to diversify the career options available to audiologists further.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median annual salary for audiologists is \$73,060 (or approximately \$35.13/hour).
- However, earnings vary with both education level and practice setting. One self-reported survey found that the median annual salary for audiologists holding AuD degrees was \$70,000 while those with PhDs reported median earnings of approximately \$96,097. The highest salaries went to those employed in private industry and hospitals, while those working for schools reported below-average pay. The top 10% of wage earners have a median salary of \$110,960.
- Between 2012 and 2022, employment of audiologists is expected to grow by 34%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is much faster than the overall average for all occupations. However, because the field is quite small, this increase will amount to only 4,300 new positions spread throughout the United States.