# **Dots and Dashes**

# **October 21, 2024**

# **ACB Recognizes National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

During National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), ACB celebrates the value and talent employees with disabilities, including people who are blind or have low vision, add to America’s workplaces and economy.

Observed each October, NDEAM’s purpose is to reinforce our commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities have access to rewarding, upwardly mobile career opportunities. That’s the spirit behind this year’s theme from the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): “Access to Good Jobs for All.”

ACB understands that access to quality employment helps people who are blind or have low vision live more independent lives. As we recognize NDEAM, we will highlight and share ways ACB is helping to improve employment in the blindness community, including job postings, advocacy efforts, community events, mentoring programs, and professional development resources.

Visit ODEP’s NDEAM webpage at [**https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam**](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam) for more information about NDEAM, and follow ACB on social media for NDEAM-related posts throughout the month of October:

* **Facebook:** [**https://www.facebook.com/acbnational**](https://www.facebook.com/acbnational)
* **Instagram:** [**https://www.instagram.com/acbnational**](https://www.instagram.com/acbnational)
* **LinkedIn:** [**https://www.linkedin.com/company/acbnational**](https://www.linkedin.com/company/acbnational)
* **X:** [**https://twitter.com/acbnational**](https://twitter.com/acbnational)
* **Mastodon:** [**https://mastodon.social/@ACBNational**](https://mastodon.social/%40ACBNational)

# **Mark Your Calendars!**

It’s almost time for the fourth annual Audio Description Awards Gala! On Thursday, November 14, at 7:30 p.m. Eastern, the Awards Gala will recognize outstanding achievement in a dozen media and entertainment categories, as well as announce the People’s Choice Award winners.

Hosts Marilee Talkington and Alie B. Gorrie will welcome celebrity guests like actor Kathy Bates, Paralympics Hall of Famer Trischa Zorn-Hudson, accessible gaming consultant Ross Minor, digital creator and advocate Molly Burke, and author and disability rights advocate Rebecca Alexander, and many more. The Awards Gala will air with captions, audio description, ASL interpretation, and a simultaneous full Spanish translation.

The Awards Gala will be available on multiple platforms:

* [ACB Media 1 (English)](https://www.acbmedia.org/home/streams/media1/) and [ACB Media 8 (Spanish)](https://www.acbmedia.org/home/streams/media8/)
* [ACB’s YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/%40ACBnational)
* [ACB Community](https://www.acb.org/acb-community-events) watch party on Zoom and Clubhouse
* [ADAwardsGala.org](https://adawardsgala.org/)
* [Peacock](https://www.peacocktv.com/), courtesy of NBCUniversal (subscription required)

Mark your calendar and visit [**ADAwardsGala.org**](https://adawardsgala.org/) to make a donation; your support helps ACB and the Audio Description Project keep advocating for the audio description you love. (To donate by phone, call the ACB Financial Office at (612) 332-3242.) Join us on the virtual red carpet on November 14!

# **Justice Department Sues LA Fitness for Disability Discrimination at Its Gyms**

The [**Department of Justice sued LA Fitness**](https://links-1.govdelivery.com/CL0/https%3A//www.justice.gov/crt/case-document/complaint-us-v-fitness-international-dba-la-fitness/1/010001926d8935df-0e9fba47-dfc5-47b7-b720-1fc865673480-000000/kZeX4kriNGwzmJnyYucRlV0zxVhaNGjSTmL_s_PYPzo%3D374) under the Americans with Disabilities Act for preventing members with disabilities from accessing their pools and fitness equipment by, for example, having broken pool lifts and elevators, and charging extra to people with disabilities.

If you or someone you know had trouble accessing an LA Fitness gym because of a disability or were charged an extra fee to have someone help you access the gym’s equipment, please call 1-888-392-5417 (toll-free), or email **Claims.LAFitness@usdoj.gov**.

For more information, read the press release at [**https://tinyurl.com/2s42s34d**](https://tinyurl.com/2s42s34d).

# **Casting Call: The Impossible Weight of 100kHz**

SAG/AFTRA is seeking an actor who identifies as blind or low vision and Latina for “The Impossible Weight of 100kHz.”

**DANI** is in her 20s, Latina. She is blind or low vision.Confident and self-assured, she is a lover of life. She cares deeply for her family, notably her brother, and doesn’t let her disability intrude on her outlook. She was raised Catholic by a white mother who has passed and her Latin father, who is missing. Strong willed and resilient, she carries what can be viewed as a “tough” exterior at times, leading her to asking more life questions as a young adult. Trained by her father to play the piano from an early age, she approaches challenges with enthusiastic skepticism.

A link to the breakdown and character description can be found here:

[https://bit.ly/RoleofDANI](https://bit.ly/3U8u6DA)

Link to Audition instructions:

<https://bit.ly/DANIAuditionDirections>

Submission Form:

<https://bit.ly/AUDITIONFORMforImpossibleWeightof100kHz>

# **RECOVER Research Review (R3) Seminar Series on Long COVID**

The next RECOVER Research Review Seminar will be held Tuesday, October 29th at noon Eastern time. It will be a panel discussion titled, “Patterns of PASC with Initial COVID-19 Infections and Reinfections: EHR Insights.” The speakers will present research findings about the incidence of Long COVID in adults and children between 2020 and 2023, focusing on changes over time. They will also discuss the risk of developing Long COVID following a first COVID-19 infection and reinfection.

To register for the October 29th seminar, visit <https://recovercovid.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=83b4b5eb5ee2dedf97f02d08e&id=97f6b97e4b&e=46dd19249d>.

For information about future seminars, visit <https://recovercovid.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=83b4b5eb5ee2dedf97f02d08e&id=3a1ec32130&e=46dd19249d>.

# **That All May eRead**

The topic for the October That All May *eRead* online program will be using NLS Braille eReaders to access online services.

The meeting will begin at 7 p.m. eastern time, Tuesday, October 29, 2024, and will last for one hour.

If you choose to dial in to the call, use the telephone numbers provided below. The Zoom.gov ID will not work with standard Zoom.us. To access the meeting, go to [**https://loc.zoomgov.com/j/1607707503?pwd=6Ixhox13pf3oU7bfGOcI5xgNxLB9JB.1**](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/loc.zoomgov.com/j/1607707503?pwd=6Ixhox13pf3oU7bfGOcI5xgNxLB9JB.1__;!!EDx7F7x-0XSOB8YS_BQ!fklmm26JOYxBHAsyR6eEqKxpJu3vg0kKpiCi2Il6e-QbU4ZjKH5P82tLjYgS4owsWssaZzqhO-MU_jYj20o29J9xzAJ0$). Use the following meeting ID and passcode:

Meeting ID: 160 770 7503

Passcode: 367113

Phone numbers:

+1 669 254 5252 (San Jose)

+ 1 646 828 7666 (New York)

# **Hilton Partners with Be My Eyes for Improved Accessibility**

[**Hilton**](https://www.travelpulse.com/find-a-supplier/hotels-and-resorts/hilton-worldwide)announced on October 15 that the hotel giant has entered into an exclusive partnership with Be My Eyes to improve accessibility of its properties for guests with blindness or low vision.

With the new partnership, users of Be My Eyes can be directly connected to specially trained English-speaking Hilton Reservations and Customer Care agents by navigating to the “Hotels” category under the app’s “Service Directory.”

Assistance is available across Hilton’s brands, including Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts, Conrad Hotels & Resorts, DoubleTree by Hilton, Hampton by Hilton and more.

For more information, read the press release at <https://www.bemyeyes.com/blog/be-my-eyes-and-hilton-sign-industry-first-partnership>. Or watch the audio-described video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2M7gWogzfA&t=3s>.

# **Vispero and Aira Announce Strategic Partnership**

Vispero today announced a strategic partnership with Aira, a leading technology company providing remote assistance to the blind and low vision community. The partnership aims to promote equal access to information by communicating instances when websites do not comply with accessibility standards.

Aira’s Visual Interpreters will report any website accessibility issues they encounter to TPGi, Vispero’s accessibility solutions brand, which will then share these findings with the website owner and recommend remediation. Additionally, Aira and Vispero’s technical teams will collaborate on Aira’s Verify feature, enhancing user confidence and accuracy by allowing users to confirm AI-generated responses with human visual interpreters.

For more information, read the full press release at [**https://vispero.com/vispero-and-aira-announce-strategic-partnership-to-increase-awareness-and-promote-equal-access-for-online-communities/**](https://vispero.com/vispero-and-aira-announce-strategic-partnership-to-increase-awareness-and-promote-equal-access-for-online-communities/).

# **Social Security Announces 2.5 Percent Benefit Increase for 2025**

Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for more than 72.5 million Americans will increase 2.5 percent in 2025, the Social Security Administration announced today.  On average, Social Security retirement benefits will increase by about $50 per month starting in January.

Over the last decade the COLA increase has averaged about 2.6 percent.  The COLA was 3.2 percent in 2024.

Nearly 68 million Social Security beneficiaries will see a 2.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) beginning in January 2025.  Increased payments to nearly 7.5 million people receiving SSI will begin on December 31, 2024.

Some other adjustments that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages.  Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) is slated to increase to $176,100 from $168,600.

For more information, visit [**www.ssa.gov/cola**](http://www.ssa.gov/cola).

# **DOT Appoints 17 New Members to the Air Carrier Access Act Advisory Committee**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg recently announced the appointment of 17 members to the Air Carrier Access Act Advisory Committee (ACAA Advisory Committee). They are:

* Zainab Alkebsi, National Association of the Deaf, as representative of national disability organizations
* Heather Ansley, Paralyzed Veterans of America, as co-chair and representative of national veterans organization representing disabled veterans
* Chris Brown, National Air Carrier Association, as representative of air carriers
* Amy Claire Brusch, Airports Council International - North America, as representative of airport operators
* Albert Elia, National Federation of the Blind
* Michele Erwin, All Wheels Up, as representative of national disability organizations
* Mark Greig, Sunrise Medical, as representative of wheelchair manufacturers
* Graham Keithley, Airlines for America, as representative of air carriers
* Roland Mair, Boeing Commercial Airplanes, as representative of aircraft manufacturers
* Paige Mazzoni, Canine Companions, as representative of national disability organizations
* Sheila O’Brien, Assistance Dogs International North America, as representative of national disability organizations
* Nobuyo Reinsch, Regional Airline Association, as representative of air carriers
* Linda Ristagno, International Air Transport Association, as co-chair and representative of air carriers
* Pierre-Antoine Senes, Airbus, as representative of aircraft manufacturers
* Neil Snyder, Hearing Loss Association of America, as representative of national disability organizations
* Jo Ann Storie, Prospect Airport Services, Inc., as representative of contract service providers
* Christopher Witkowski, Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, as representative of flight attendants

# **Beta Test a New Haptic Device**

The HET is a wearable assistive technology that provides people who are blind, low vision, or have autism with real-time access about others’ non-verbal communication cues (NVC) during social interactions. Through an intuitive mapping of visual information translated to a haptic (sense of touch) sensation applied to the forearm, the HET device breaks down barriers to effective and engaging conversations by raising awareness of non-verbal communication queues in real time. The technology leverages AI/computer vision to detect and recognize the emotions/facial expressions, gestures, and body language received from an embedded camera on a pair of glasses before mapping the NVC to a dynamic haptic pattern applied to the forearm of the user on a wearable sleeve.

Each pattern generates a distinct and unique sensation along the forearm corresponding to the facial expression, body language, or gesture of the person or persons they are engaged in conversation with. With the HET you can tell if someone is happy, upset, going for a handshake or waving at you in real time.

We are looking for beta testers that want to be at the forefront of technology, be part of the development process, and help the community. If you’re interested in participating, or have questions, contact Jack Walters via email, **jackwalters@mines.edu**, or by phone at (720) 280-8117. To sign up to be a tester, visit [**https://tinyurl.com/4bb4se3m**](https://tinyurl.com/4bb4se3m).

# **Soliddd to Unveil Smartglasses Shown to Improve the Sight of People with Macular Degeneration**

Soliddd Corp., an optical technology company whose mission is to restore sight for people living with low vision disorders, announced that it will be unveiling the Beta version of its forthcoming SolidddVisionTM smartglasses for people with both wet and dry macular degeneration at the annual HLTH USA health innovation conference in Las Vegas, to be held October 20-23.

SolidddVision smartglasses use unique optics and software to beam many separate, in-focus views in a parallel-ray light field to all areas of the retina. The brain’s visual cortex automatically constructs a single, stereo, full-field image with good acuity from the multiple inputs to each eye. Even if some area of the wearer’s visual field is blocked or unfocused, the redundant visual information received in other areas of the retina combines, resulting in the wearer seeing a full-field, well-focused, and bright image.

SolidddVision is intended to be complementary to medication and/or surgery and can be used by people with macular degeneration regardless of whether they’re pursuing either of those treatment paths.

For more information, visit: [**https://www.soliddd.com/**](https://www.soliddd.com/).

# **Blind Health Expo 2024**

Accessible Pharmacy Services will hold its 3rd annual Blind Health Expo on Friday, December 6th from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern. The Blind Health Expo is the world's largest virtual expo of healthcare information, products, and services for individuals, organizations, and companies in the health, blindness, and disability communities. Registration is free.

To register, visit [**https://accessiblepharmacy.com/blind-health-expo-2024/**](https://accessiblepharmacy.com/blind-health-expo-2024/). For more information, send email to **info@AccessiblePharmacy.com**.

# **NBP Seeks Runners for Boston Marathon**

National Braille Press has been selected to receive 5 invitational numbers for the 129th Boston Marathon as part of the Bank of America Boston Marathon Official Charity Program!

On April 21st, 2025 you will have the opportunity to run the world’s most famous marathon! Our team application is [**here**](https://email.nbp.org/e3t/Ctc/RE%2B113/chlLR04/MWkKG0zWtQlW7_tDms9lwWmHW2_PQhc5md0NWN2x86y83lYMRW6N1vHY6lZ3p4MwCV2TzW9p0W32phqm1G0nW_W3mTWjZ5X9tDHW5QNw_s8RKPqcW7xh7R166wmsLVQ8bBV7cNnl_W8y3Vqj7rrtMkW812QBL3hkGQkW5v4cFG8b9lXBW1sth8j97P35DW8Q-pmT8T1gwsW5SyVHl9bg0-KW6SrvvS5_6dN3W7v6qYB1wbHWKV-wjYy4HCdxpW2c7vWT2HCQMBW58mFRY1B5XqZW3g4TWN4JL6QkW4gLTxh2c0llxW2YwV7F8v9gwRW47b74k4XNQgtN4QXC_T26_-xf1sWLj404).

We are looking for individuals who will run the marathon on our behalf and raise thousands of dollars for braille literacy! Team members will receive a National Braille Press singlet, marathon coaching and guidance from our development team.

If you have any questions about the program, you can call Joe Quintanilla at (617) 425-2415 or email him at **jquintanilla@nbp.org**.