

JULY 2025

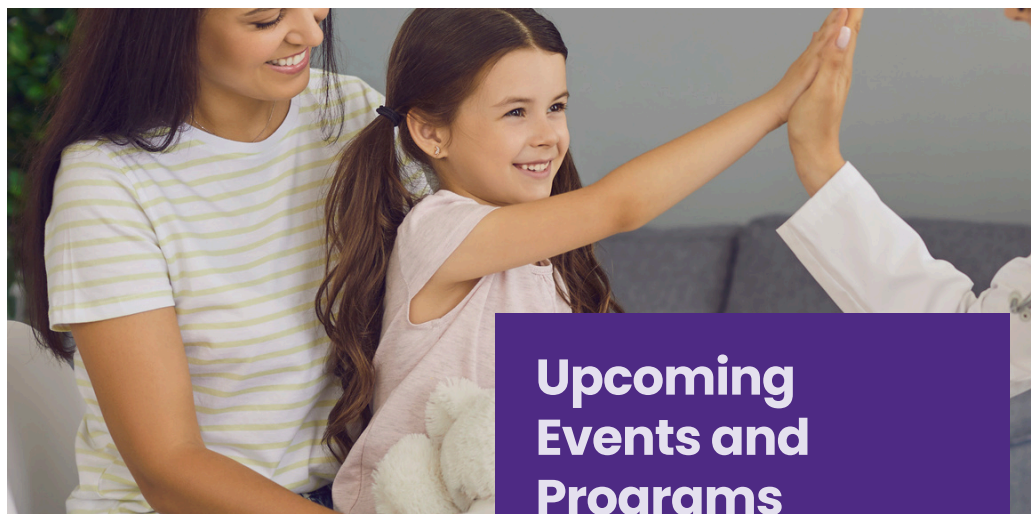
N U C A S L L

NEWS

Northwestern | COMMUNICATION

Center for Audiology, Speech,
Language, and Learning

Monthly updates from the
Northwestern University Center for
Audiology, Speech, Language, and
Learning



Welcome to our newsletter!

Each month, we share helpful articles on speech, language, and hearing, introduce members of our clinical team, offer a behind-the-scenes look at what to expect during appointments, and highlight upcoming community events and workshops.

It's All Talk: Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Augmentative and Alternative Communication, or AAC, is a compilation of all of the tools and strategies people use to communicate besides talking. We all use different ways to communicate every day (even gestures like pointing, nodding, or giving a thumbs up are technically non-technical forms of AAC), but people who are nonverbal or have limited speech (of all ages and for any number of reasons) rely on AAC as an even more central part of how they express themselves.

Continued on page 2

Upcoming Events and Programs

Cognitive Fitness: Boost Your Brain

Join us to learn evidence-based lifestyle modifications you can make for a healthy brain across your lifespan.

October 8, 15, 22, 29,
November 5, 12
via Zoom

Breaking the Blocks

Did you know that improv can help with stuttering? Tweens and teens who stutter can register for this free workshop series.

Oct 6, 20, 27, Nov 3, 10

Spots are limited!

Learn more about these events and check out our [full event calendar](#).

Who uses AAC—and when?

AAC tools are used by people of all ages for a variety of reasons. Someone recovering from surgery or a stroke might use a short-term communication board in the hospital. An autistic child might use picture cards or an app on a tablet to help express their thoughts. A person with a traumatic brain or vocal injury might rely on a voice-output device to support everyday communication.

AAC methods are often grouped into three categories:

- No-tech (like gestures, pointing, or facial expressions)
- Low-tech (such as communication boards or picture cards)
- High-tech (like apps or devices that speak messages aloud)

The right solution depends on the individual—it might change over time, or it may be used for just a short period or throughout someone's life. AAC is not one-size-fits-all, and speech-language pathologists like those at NUCASLL can help individuals and families to find the approach that fits their communication needs and goals.

Communication and connection is a human right, and AAC helps to ensure we all have access.

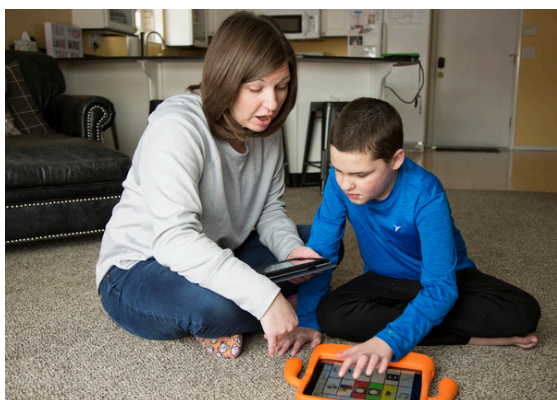


Photo by Scot Wahlquist / OpenAAC.org.
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**Bringing Hearing and Balance Screenings to the Community**

NUCASLL clinician and CSD faculty member Dr. Katherine Swem, AuD, along with Doctor of Audiology graduate students, partnered with Northwestern's Doctor of Physical Therapy program to support a free Hearing and Balance Fair hosted by the Irving Park Community Food Pantry and Irving Park Lutheran Church. The July event offered hearing screenings and fall risk assessments to older adults in the community—providing essential services to individuals who may otherwise face barriers to care. It also promoted interprofessional collaboration, as both audiology and physical therapy specialize in aspects of the vestibular system, which affects balance and hearing. This marks the second year NUCASLL has supported the pantry's outreach and community efforts.

Learn more about AAC at [ASHA](https://asha.org) and contact us to see how our speech-language pathologists can support you or your child's communication needs.

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Simulated sounds, real-world support: Inside ViSoR at NUCASLL

Treating hearing loss is not as simple as increasing the volume. For individuals with hearing loss, a gradual decline in hearing can lead to a slow, or sometimes sudden, reduction in the enjoyment of important activities. Hearing in the presence of background noise or during multi-speaker conversations can become stressful as the effort required to fill in conversational gaps increases. Music and environmental sounds may also lose their fullness and richness.

At NUCASLL we have access to a simulated environment to personalize hearing treatment and address these challenges: ViSoR.

ViSoR is a one-of-a-kind virtual sound room, donated to Northwestern by the Pepper family for research purposes. It allows us to immerse patients in the environments they find most challenging. Patients can then practice with us one-on-one or attend a seminar series ([Communication Enhancement Class](#)) to learn how to best use their hearing technology and develop coping strategies. This helps them feel more confident and prepared when navigating difficult listening situations.

The space also has many other practical applications for different types of clinicians and researchers, including treatment for tinnitus and rehabilitation for single-sided deafness.

Did You Know?

*In the past year, NUCASLL has provided free hearing screenings to over **450** people in our local community!*



Continued

“ViSoR is a noise-controlled clinical space that enables realistic simulation of daily cognitive-communication demands for clients with mild cognitive impairment and hearing loss,” says Leigh Cohen, Speech Language Pathologist and Assistant Professor. “It fosters collaborative strategy development among graduate student clinicians, supervisors, and clients to enhance independence in complex activities of daily living and maximize therapeutic outcomes.”

Dr. Pam Souza, a tenured research professor at Northwestern, uses ViSoR for her lab that focuses on understanding individual abilities, including differences in hearing sensitivity, speech sound discrimination, cognitive ability, and the greater listening difficulties that

Contact us to learn more about how we can help you navigate real-world listening challenges.

[Explore](#) research and participation opportunities:

Discover [more](#) about ViSOR

This article was written by Dr. Liz Gardner Meyer, Assistant Professor of Clinical Development at Northwestern University and practicing audiologist at NUCASLL.