

AG Brnovich Warns Consumers About Over-The-Counter Hearing Aids

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Seniors targeted by companies selling cheap, phony hearing amplifiers

PHOENIX - Attorney General Mark Brnovich is cautioning consumers to watch out for misleading sales tactics from companies selling over-the-counter hearing amplifiers. Over the past year, the Attorney General's Office (AGO) has received approximately 140 complaints about over-the-counter hearing aids.

"In this era of new technology and self-service, many innovations bring true improvement to the quality of our lives. Consumers, however, need to be careful before purchasing these products," said General Brnovich. "Arizona consumers should be wary of deals that appear too good to be true and do their research to avoid being scammed."

Since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) relaxed restrictions on the sales of hearing aids in 2017, dozens of companies have entered the over-the-counter hearing aid market. Some of these devices can be purchased for as little as \$2.50 from overseas, but many of the products are actually poor sound amplifiers — not FDA-approved medical devices.

Peddlers often lure consumers via websites touting "deals" for much less than what a consumer would pay for a traditional FDA-approved hearing aid. Misrepresentations about FDA approvals, and the promise of money-back guarantees have, instead, left consumers unable to return and receive refunds for useless or inoperable "hearing aids." Consumers should be mindful that actual hearing aids can require visits to specialists and cost thousands of dollars.

General Brnovich advises consumers to keep these five tips in mind before buying over-the-counter hearing aids:

1. The FDA has not approved any over-the-counter hearing aids. Over-the-counter hearing aids are not regulated and may simply be sound amplifiers, which may be of poor quality and not work for those with significant hearing loss.
2. Be skeptical of testimonials or good reviews on a company's website. Check out the Better Business Bureau (<https://www.bbb.org/>) and other objective consumer review sites before purchasing. If a company has an "F" rating, something is wrong, and buyers should beware.
3. Price-shop diligently. You can often find the exact same product at varying prices.
4. Scrutinize the refund/return policy carefully before you buy. Take note of the timeframes and conditions for refunds.
5. Consider getting a hearing screen and opinion from a hearing specialist who can tell you whether an over-the-counter hearing device will work for you.

The Arizona Attorney General's Office maintains a current Senior Scam Alerts webpage (</seniors/scam-alerts>) dedicated to providing seniors with the latest information on consumer scams and frauds.

If you feel that you have been the victim of consumer fraud, you can file a consumer complaint by visiting the Attorney General's website (</complaints/consumer>). For consumer inquiries, or to request a complaint form, call the Attorney General's Office in Phoenix at (602) 542-5763, in Tucson at (520) 628-6648, or toll-free outside the Phoenix and Tucson metro areas at (800) 352-8431.

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PRESS CONTACT

Katie Conner
Director of Media Relations

2005 N Central Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85004
(602) 542-8019

Katie.Conner@azag.gov (<mailto:Katie.Conner@azag.gov>)

2005 N Central Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85004 | Email: **Contact Us** (</contact-us>) | Phone:
(602) 542-5025

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