ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN HEARING LOSS AND HEALTH UTILIZATION AMONG OLDER ADULTS

INTRODUCTION
Hearing loss is a common condition among older adults, with prevalence rates ranging from 25% to 50% among those aged 70 and older (Hehir et al., 2010). This condition can lead to social isolation, cognitive decline, and increased healthcare utilization (Silverstein et al., 2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate the association between hearing loss and healthcare utilization and expenditures among older adults.

METHODS
This study used data from the National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS), a longitudinal cohort study of older Medicare beneficiaries in the United States. Participants were enrolled in the 2011 cycle of the NHATS and followed for up to 6 years. Hearing loss was ascertained using Medicare claims data, and healthcare utilization and expenditures were calculated based on self-reported data and claims data.

Results
The analysis included 22,940 participants with complete data for each variable. Participants with hearing loss had higher rates of emergency department visits (IRR = 1.48; 95% CI: 1.20, 1.82) and hospitalizations (IRR = 1.37; 95% CI: 1.06, 1.72) compared to those without hearing loss. The number of days spent in a hospital over the 6-year period was also higher among those with hearing loss (IRR = 1.36; 95% CI: 1.12, 1.65).

CONCLUSIONS
These findings suggest that hearing loss is associated with increased healthcare utilization and expenditures among older adults. Interventions to improve hearing health and access to hearing aids may help reduce healthcare utilization and costs in this population.