

# Rethinking Tinnitus

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THE DOORWAY INTO BROADER AUDITORY HEALTH.

akoio®

# Introduction

To truly make an impact on auditory health, we need to flip the script. Akoio introduces a new modern auditory health framework that engages individuals earlier, by understanding their unique generational needs.

Hearing aids and cognitive decline currently dominate the auditory health conversation, however, these approaches neither tell the whole story nor resonate with younger generations. This leaves the vast majority of the population left with unmet services and proper auditory solutions, *including tinnitus*.

Akoio changes that, by offering a fresh approach to auditory health that prioritizes *generational distinction*, moving beyond the ineffective strategies of the past.

This report establishes the groundwork for understanding tinnitus and the unique needs of each generation, highlighting the importance of auditory wellbeing with a concept Akoio calls *Lifelong Sound Health*.

**Bill Schiffmiller** is founder of Akoio, a consultancy on Accessibility and Auditory matters. An Accessibility thought leader and business innovator, advocating innovative individual approaches that opposes demeaning conventional models of patient care and “disabilities.”

A former leader of Accessibility Initiatives at Apple and co-inventor of the Akoio hearing aid battery dispenser, Bill brings years of unique perspectives on design and accessibility.

**Michael Piskosz** is Akoio Director of Research and Client Relations. Michael is a global thought leader on auditory health, tinnitus innovation, and individual behavior in the hearing health space and beyond. He is well-connected with leaders in the industry, contributing to the advancement of auditory health through his extensive network.

Together, Bill and Michael, created Akoio Consulting to focus on noise mitigation, accessibility and auditory matters. Leverage from their expertise and network to help your business's goals and objectives.



Bill Schiffmiller  
Founder



Michael Piskosz  
Director, Research

# What is Tinnitus?

Tinnitus is an internal sound that typically presents as a ringing, buzzing, or hissing without an external source.

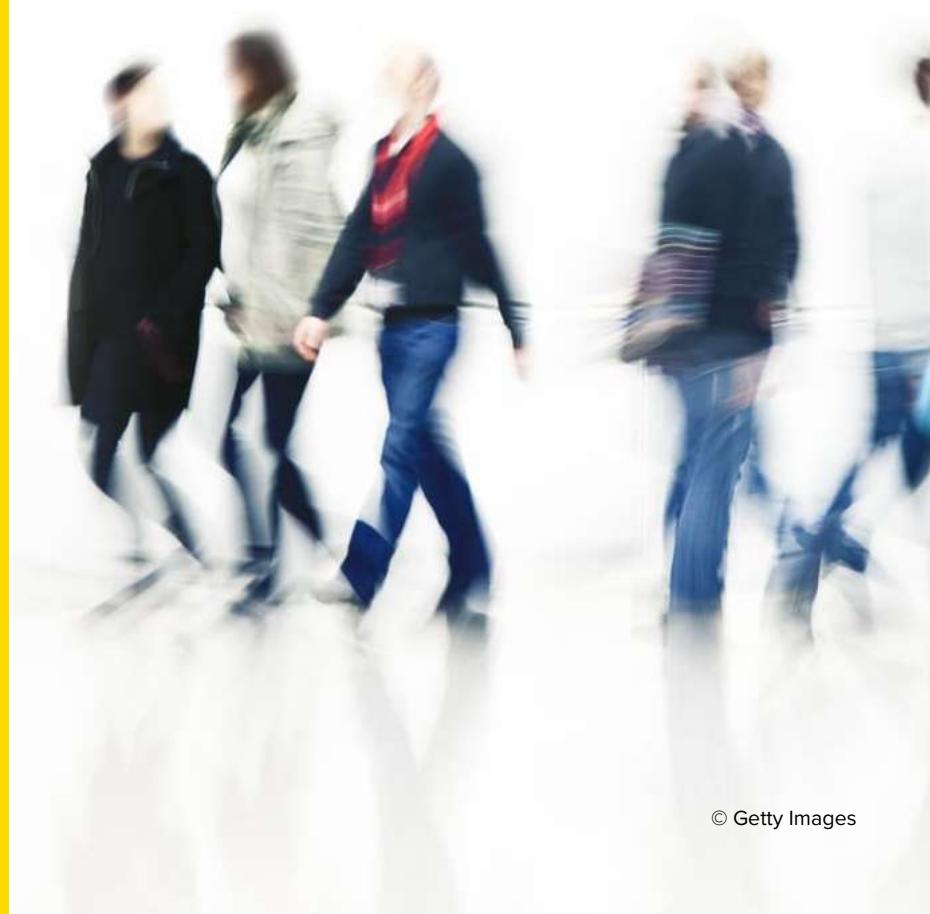
It can affect anyone.

Approximately **25% of the population experiences tinnitus** to varying degrees at any moment.\*

**80% of the total population** has experienced it in their life.\*\*  
It is a global challenge with untapped potential.

\* [Tinnitus Prevalence in the Adult Population](#)

\*\* [Apple Hearing Study](#)



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## Why this report is Important.

Current auditory health models primarily focus on late-life hearing loss, **addressing only 20 percent of the world's population**. This approach leaves many without adequate support, particularly those who experience earlier changes in auditory health, such as tinnitus.

For many people, tinnitus is the first step in their lifelong sound health journey. It is often one of the earliest signals that auditory health is changing, long before hearing loss is measured or

acknowledged. When these early experiences are overlooked, opportunities for awareness and proactive care are missed.

Younger individuals face a significant gap in auditory awareness and available services. Many encounter tinnitus through noise exposure, overstimulation, and stress, yet lack clear pathways for understanding or support.



**47%**

Report experiences tinnitus with headaches.\*

**17%**

Report depression due to tinnitus \*\*

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## Reframing the tinnitus story

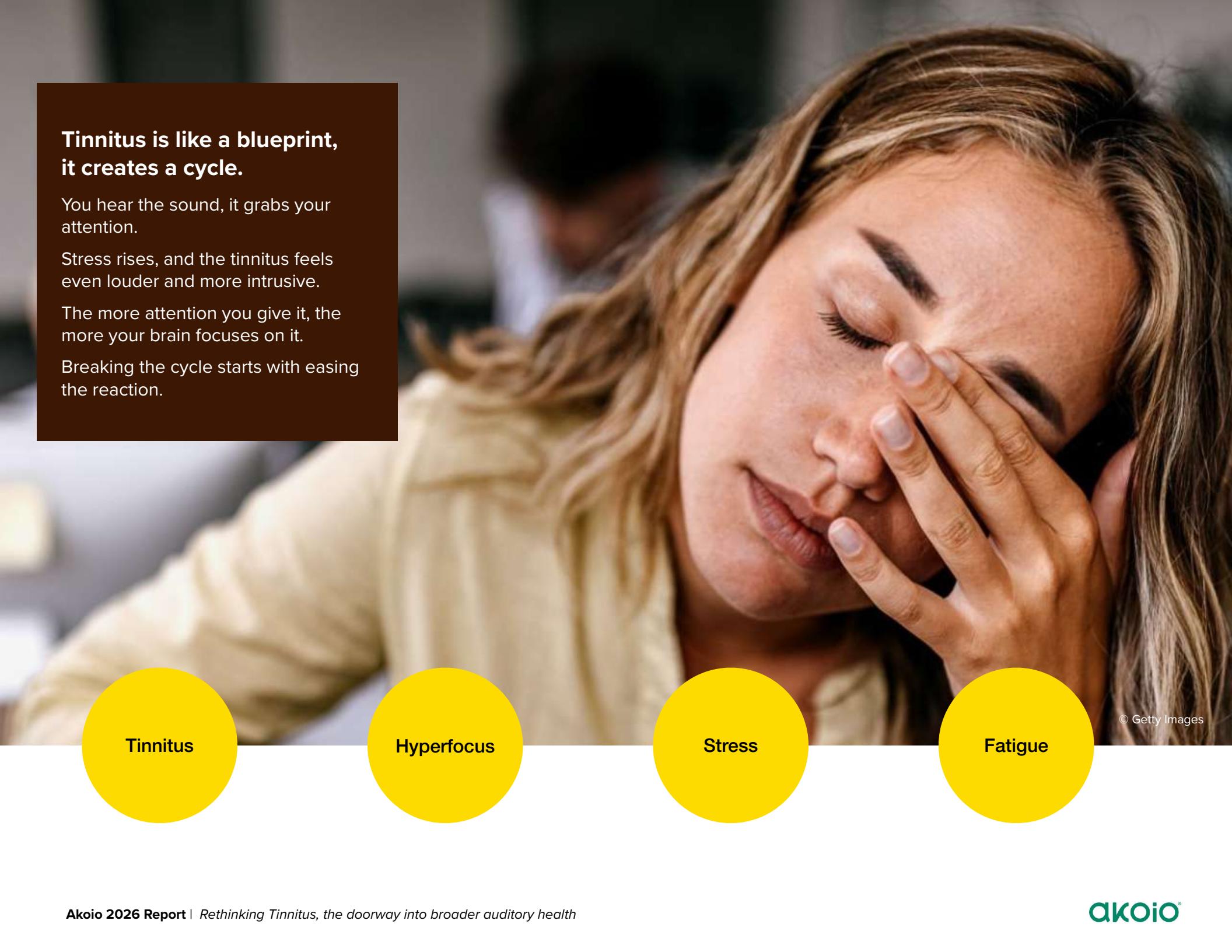
Tinnitus is more than just “ringing in the ears,” it’s closely tied to broader health issues that affect millions.

Stress and poor sleep often make tinnitus worse, creating a cycle of fatigue and frustration. Many people with migraines or cardiovascular conditions also report tinnitus, highlighting strong links to overall health and wellness.

And while it frequently coexists with hearing loss and noise exposure, tinnitus can also appear in people with normal hearing tests, showing that it impacts a much wider population than many realize.

\* [Frontiers in Neurology: Tinnitus Patients with Comorbid Headaches](#)

\*\* [PubMed: Contribution of Tinnitus and Hearing Loss to Depression](#)



## Tinnitus is like a blueprint, it creates a cycle.

You hear the sound, it grabs your attention.

Stress rises, and the tinnitus feels even louder and more intrusive.

The more attention you give it, the more your brain focuses on it.

Breaking the cycle starts with easing the reaction.

Tinnitus

Hyperfocus

Stress

Fatigue

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# Formula for Relief?

**Distraction and Stress Reduction** enables a person from focusing on the tinnitus.

Just like an itchy bug bite, the more you scratch it, the more it itches.

Traditional approaches highlight sound for distraction, however, any activity that gets prioritized and captures the brain's attention can reduce tinnitus perception.





## Why it Matters for Business

**Tinnitus is more than a medical condition.** It is often the very first entry point into auditory health, making it a powerful channel to engage millions who may not identify as having hearing loss. Its impact resonates across generations. Young adults encounter tinnitus through gaming, overstimulation, and lifestyle stress.

**Families experience it in the form of parenting fatigue, daily stress, and sleep disruption, often missing work.** Older adults face it alongside hearing loss, health decline, and cardiovascular concerns.

This wide reach creates a unique opportunity for businesses to connect with individuals through Akio Education Workshops that address everyday challenges while improving quality of life.



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## Absenteeism is on the rise

Stress and mental health challenges drive absenteeism in the United States workforce. Stress alone causes up to one million workers to miss work each day, costing employers productivity and profitability.

Mental health-related leaves of absence increased 33 percent in 2023 compared to 2022 and are now up 300 percent since 2017. Workers reporting fair or poor mental health miss nearly 12 workdays per year for mental health reasons, compared to about 2.5 days for those reporting good mental health.

**12d**

# of missed work days  
annually due to mental  
health reasons \*

**33%**

Increase in mental  
health leaves  
compared to 2022 \*\*

**Tinnitus can play an important but often overlooked role in absenteeism.** Persistent ringing or buzzing in the ears is closely linked to stress, sleep disruption, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and fatigue. Research shows tinnitus can impair job performance and increase missed workdays, particularly in noisy or cognitively demanding environments. For many workers, tinnitus compounds existing stress and mental health strain, further increasing absence risk.

\* [Gallup Poll: The Economic Cost of Poor Employee Mental Health](#)

\*\* [SHRM: Mental Health-Related Absences Up 33% in 2023](#)



# Hearing Loss is not the entry point. Tinnitus is.

While the most severe tinnitus cases may find their way into clinical care, millions with manageable symptoms are left without guidance or effective solutions.

**For many, tinnitus is not simply a byproduct of hearing loss but the first sign of changes in auditory health.**

This makes it a pivotal entry point into the broader hearing health journey and an overlooked opportunity to create meaningful impact.

**5M**

Chronic cases  
managed through  
limited clinical care.\*

**45M**

Manageable mild  
tinnitus cases  
lack awareness and  
access to help.\*

**2.5M**

Veterans Affairs  
reports tinnitus is  
#1 disability affecting  
veterans.\*\*

**Millions undeserved + health crisis = massive untapped market**

\* NIH: Quick Statistics About Hearing, Balance, & Dizziness

\*\* Veterans Benefits Administration: Annual Benefits Report Fiscal Year 2022

# The Apple Hearing Study, paints prevalence and health risk.



The Apple Hearing Study,\* one of the largest tinnitus surveys (May 2024), paints a comprehensive picture of tinnitus, based on over 160,000 participants.

**78%**

Participants  
experienced tinnitus  
in their life.

**15%**

Experience  
tinnitus  
daily.

**36%**

Ages 55 and  
older experience  
tinnitus.

**10%**

Tinnitus moderately  
or entirely interferes  
ability to hear clearly.

These insights lay groundwork for better health strategies and development of targeted tinnitus interventions, using biometrics like Heart Rate Variability (HRV).

\* [Apple Hearing Study](#)

Tinnitus severity suggests links to physiological stress markers beyond auditory perception alone.

# Tinnitus Solutions

## HR Wellness program

By embedding *Akoio Educational Workshops* into existing wellness programs it positions auditory health as essential to employee well-being.

## DYI solutions

Digital tinnitus solutions are attempting to link to broader health tracking, including stress, sleep, heart rate, and mental well-being to tinnitus management.



# Tinnitus Touches Each Generation Differently.



**Birth-11 age group**  
Ear infections,  
noise exposure



**12-19 age group**  
Loud music,  
concerts, gaming,  
school stress,  
excessive  
headphone use



**20-29 age group**  
Clubbing, excessive  
headphone use,  
overstimulation,  
work stress, sleep  
disruption, anxiety



**30-49 age group**  
Parenting stress,  
career pressure,  
workplace noise  
exposure, fatigue,  
migraines



**50-64 age group**  
Early hearing loss,  
cardiovascular  
issues, workplace  
stress, poor sleep



**65-79 age group**  
Progressive  
hearing loss,  
chronic illness,  
medication side  
effects



**80 + age group**  
Advanced hearing  
loss, multiple  
health conditions,  
medications, daily  
challenges

Akoio creates opportunities for cross-generational learning, offering guidance and tools that adapt to the needs, habits, and challenges of every age group.

# Begin with meeting people where they are at.



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## What Organizations Can Do

### 1. Recognize tinnitus as an early signal

Use it as an entry point to engage people before challenges escalate.

### 2. Integrate auditory health into wellness strategies

Incorporate into existing wellness, health, and workplace initiatives alongside stress, sleep, and mental well-being.

### 3. Design environments that reduce auditory strain

Evaluate workspaces for noise exposure, cognitive load, and sound fatigue.

### 4. Pulse Surveys

Understanding your employees' auditory health needs.

# Akoio Research Reports

**Lifelong Sound Health**  
A FRAMEWORK OF AUDITORY HEALTH ACROSS OUR LIFESPAN

**Cornerstones of Lifelong Sound Health**

**AKOIO**

**Auditory Fatigue**  
HOW IT AFFECTS PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTIVITY AND LIVELIHOOD

**The Cycle of Auditory Stress**

**AKOIO**

**Accessibility and the Human Experience**  
THE INFLUENCE OF NOISE ON ALL OUR LIVES

**Accessibility is “stuck,” why?**

**96%**  
“Noise is a barrier to inclusion and opportunity for many people.”

**Noise's Unseen Accessibility Impact**

**AKOIO**

# Services

## Workplace Education



We leverage our expertise to improve workplace environments and employee well-being through sound wellness initiatives that help businesses create healthier, more productive spaces and stronger employee connections.

## Human-Centric Solutions



Noise, poor acoustics, and inaccessible environments quietly erode focus and well-being. Akoio helps organizations integrate human-centric auditory solutions that support how people work, think, and feel.

## The Akoio Super Network



Leverage our network to collaborate and connect with companies dedicated to reshaping accessibility and auditory thinking and gaining deeper insights into the realms of noise, sound, and hearing across the healthspan.

**Contact us:** [akoio@akoio.com](mailto:akoio@akoio.com)

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION READY TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP  
TOWARDS ENHANCING AUDITORY HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY?

LET'S CHAT.

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