



Self Help for Hard of Hearing People



The official website for Self Help for Hard of Hearing People (Australia) Inc

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## Information Sheets

SHHH's Information Sheets are provided as a service to members and those in the community at large who have an interest in hearing impairment. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information provided, SHHH accepts no responsibility for any adverse consequences arising from the contents of these sheets.

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### Information Sheet Number 3

#### **HOW DO I GET A HEARING AID?**

If you have a loss of hearing which affects your lifestyle – your ability to cope in one to one conversations, in social groups, when using the telephone, or listening to television or radio – you should seek the services of qualified professionals. The steps you should take are:

- Consult your local doctor who will check for any medical condition which may be treatable. A build up of wax in the ear should be cleared by your doctor.
- If there are indications that your hearing loss may be treated medically or surgically your doctor may refer you to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist.
- Once it has been determined that no medical or surgical procedures would help, you should seek a hearing assessment by a qualified audiologist or audiometrist.
- Your hearing is tested over a range of frequencies. An audiogram is produced to show your particular results. Your audiologist or audiometrist should discuss your audiogram with you; advise whether you would benefit from a hearing aid and the most suitable type of aid to meet your needs.

- You should be wary of extravagant advertising claims and offers of 'special deals' on hearing aids or magic devices which will restore your hearing.
- See Section 5 below for advice on selecting a hearing aid and ask for a copy of the SHHH Information Sheet No. 16: *"A Hearing Aid Checklist for Consumers"*.

**Hearing care should be regarded as part of overall health care. It is important that you know what services and what assistance are available to you.**

**1. IF YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE HEARING ASSESSMENT AND HEARING AIDS THROUGH THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT'S HEARING SERVICES PROGRAM, YOUR OPTIONS ARE:**

**Through accredited private providers or Australian Hearing Centres**

- If you are a Centrelink Pensioners Concession Card holder or receive a sickness allowance through Centrelink
- If you are a Department of Veterans Affairs beneficiary (or a dependant or spouse) with a Repatriation Health Card (Gold or White with reference to hearing conditions)

**Through Australian Hearing Centres**

- If you are a young person under 21 years of age
- If you are a remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- If you are a pensioner or child with complex needs
- If you are Australian Defence Force personnel

To check your eligibility, contact the Office of Hearing Services on Freecall 1800 686 126

A small charge per year is made currently for ongoing maintenance of the aid and supply of batteries for each eligible person under this program. (This is paid by Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans and their dependants). A further small charge is also made for replacing lost or damaged aids with a statutory declaration required regarding the loss or damage.

**How to apply for government-funded assistance**

All applicants for government assistance will be handled by the Office of Hearing Services in Canberra who will provide a Hearing Services Voucher to enable eligible applicants to choose between Australian Hearing or a comprehensive list of private providers for their hearing services.

Applications can be picked up from the offices of most doctors, hearing aid providers and Australian Hearing Centres. It is also possible to have an application

sent to you by ringing Freecall 1800 500 726. The Office of Hearing Services will provide you with all necessary information about the Government program as well as a list of local providers.

**2. IF YOU ARE OF WORKING AGE AND A LOSS OF HEARING IS LIMITING YOUR JOB PROSPECTS:**

You may be able to obtain help through the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS). If a hearing impaired applicant is accepted into a CRS program, hearing help may be available as part of the rehabilitation program. CRS offers help in retraining and funding appropriate employment and you may be referred for free testing and fitting of hearing aids. Apply to your nearest CRS Centre listed in the White Pages of the telephone directory under "Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service."

**3. IF YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR GOVERNMENT HEARING SERVICES AND MUST PURCHASE A HEARING AID, YOUR OPTIONS ARE:**

**A. Audiology Departments in major public hospitals and Macquarie University**

Hearing tests are available to all adults, regardless of income. Clients are usually limited to those living in the area served by each hospital but some hospitals have no restriction. Some hospitals may require a doctor's referral.

There is usually no charge for a hearing assessment carried out in a public hospital unless the assessment is related to a claim for compensation for loss of hearing. In this case, the service is not covered by Medicare and a charge will be made.

Hearing aids are generally not available through hospital audiology departments, but there are exceptions – check with the hospital and see **Audiology clinics** below.

**Sydney metropolitan hospitals**

Concord Hospital	Hospital Rd, Concord	(02) 9767 6900
Liverpool Hospital	Goulburn & Elizabeth Sts, Liverpool	(02) 9828 3646
Neuro-Audiology Clinic		
Mona Vale Hospital	Coronation St, Mona Vale	(02) 9998 0387
Prince of Wales Hospital	High St, Randwick	(02) 9382 2271
Royal North Shore Hospital	Pacific Hwy, St Leonards	(02) 9926 7111

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital	Missenden Rd, Camperdown	(02) 9519 6111
St Vincents Hospital	Victoria Rd, Darlinghurst	(02) 8382 3323
Westmead Hospital	Darcy Rd, Westmead	(02) 9845 7479
The Children's Hospital	Hawkesbury Rd & Hainsworth St Westmead	(02) 9845 2788

### **Macquarie University**

Audiology Clinic	5 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Building C5A Macquarie University	(02) 9850 8746
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In country and interstate areas, enquire at your nearest large public hospital or visit the Audiological Society of Australia's website ([audiology.asn.au/servicelisting.htm](http://audiology.asn.au/servicelisting.htm)) for a list of such hospitals.

### **Audiology clinics**

These clinics offer a range of audiology services including supply and fitting of hearing aids. Check with your hospital to see if they have this service. Hearing aids will be prescribed and fitted by an audiologist and professional follow-up services, including hearing rehabilitation programs, will be offered.

Macquarie University may be able to supply reconditioned aids at a nominal cost to eligible needy clients through their *Hearing Aid Bank*, which is operated in association with SHHH. (See section 4. below). Hearing assessment may be free or there may be a charge.

### **B. Audiologists in private practice**

There are also a number of audiologists in private practice who will make a full assessment of your hearing and prescribe and fit hearing aids. You will pay a consultation fee, but this may be deducted from the cost of an aid if you go ahead with a fitting. They offer professional advice, follow-up service, and on-going maintenance.

For information on available qualified audiologists, contact the Audiological Society of Australia, phone (03) 9642 4866, fax (03) 9642 4922, website [audiology.asn.au/servicelisting.htm](http://audiology.asn.au/servicelisting.htm).

### **C. Commercial hearing aid providers**

Hearing aids can also be purchased from commercial hearing aid providers. They are not necessarily qualified audiologists or audiometrists. It is very important that you make sure that your hearing test is carried out by such a person, that there is a range of hearing aids available to meet your particular needs which are discussed with you, and that there is an on-going service to ensure that the aid works

properly and to your satisfaction. There should be a trial period before the purchase is considered final.

Some hearing aid providers will offer to carry out tests in your own home. Be aware that tests using portable equipment without the benefit of a sound treated room will be less comprehensive and less accurate. If at all possible you should insist on using proper testing facilities.

### **Cost**

The retail cost of one hearing aid can range from approx \$1000 to over \$10,000 with new technology and special features. The important point to remember is that the most suitable hearing aid for *you* is the one which technically meets *your* hearing needs and with features which are useful in *your* lifestyle. Please read section 5 below for further advice on **Selecting a Hearing Aid**.

## **4. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

### **Medical Funds**

If you have medical insurance cover you may be able to claim something for hearing aids. You should establish your entitlement and the conditions affecting it before deciding to go ahead with a purchase. See the ***Health Funds Information*** sheet on the SHHH website.

### **SHHH Hearing Aid Bank**

Operated by SHHH in co-operation with the Audiology Clinic, Macquarie University. Donated pre-used behind-the-ear aids are made available at a nominal cost.

Applications may be made to the SHHH office, accompanied by:

- (i) A current Centrelink Health Care card or a letter from your employer stating that you are a "low income earner" as defined by Centrelink,
- (ii) A recent audiogram, and
- (iii) A certificate from a medical practitioner indicating there is no medical reason against fitting a hearing aid.

## 5. SELECTING A HEARING AID

(Refer also to SHHH Information Sheet No. 16: *A Hearing Aid Checklist for Consumers*)

- **Start with Realistic Expectations** – you should think carefully about what you want and expect from a hearing aid, including the effort that is needed to use the aid properly. Discuss all this with your family and your audiologist or audiometrist to make sure you are being realistic.
- **Understand Top-up Provisions** – in some cases the type and degree of your hearing loss will determine the type of aid which would be suitable for you. Sometimes you will have a choice. Under the Federal Government's procedures for eligible people, the provider of your choice will be required to explain to you exactly what aids are available to suit your needs under the provisions of the Hearing Services Voucher provided to you. The full cost of an appropriate aid or aids plus the hearing testing and follow-up assistance will be covered by your voucher. Should you wish to select a different aid of your choice, you can now pay a 'top-up' amount in addition to the free voucher. Be sure you have ALL aids explained to you and that you really will benefit from the extra features offered with a 'top-up' charge.
- **Buyer Beware!** – when choosing, you should consider the potential usefulness of the aid rather than its cosmetic appeal. Beware of suppliers advertising 'miraculous' results from very small and inconspicuous aids. Do not allow yourself to be exploited by commercial interests.
- **Telecoils** – we strongly recommend that you ask your hearing aid supplier about the benefits of a hearing aid which includes a telecoil. This will allow you to pick up sound from audio loop systems which are installed in many cinemas, churches, public halls, and places such as ticket offices, service counters, etc. It also opens up options for the use of assistive listening devices for extra help in noisy situations or when listening to TV or using the telephone. Ask for SHHH Information Sheet No. 8: *"What is a Telecoil?"*
- **Ask about options** – ask about such options as aids which provide for direct audio input. Different options can provide for extra help in listening situations which many hearing aid wearers find difficult. You may benefit from an option which will enable you to use other assistive devices.
- **Choose to suit your needs, not fashion** – you should be aware that the smaller the aid, the smaller the switch and volume controls. If your fingers are no longer nimble or if your vision is impaired, you may have difficulty with these controls or in changing the battery. Be sure to understand and try all the controls on various aids before making any decision – you may manage a larger behind-the-ear or body level aid more easily. Some aids may have a

remote control option – understand what is involved here with different buttons and different programmable options.

- **Pay only for what you need** – with advances in technology, new hearing aids offering many special features are now on the market. The cost can be several thousands of dollars per aid. You should be guided by a competent, qualified audiologist or audiometrist as to whether you are likely to benefit from such aids. You should also think carefully about whether your lifestyle and your ability – and commitment – to make full use of these additional features warrant the cost.
- **Consumers must seek details to make decisions** – be sure to establish the conditions of a purchase before committing yourself. Is there a trial period? Is the cost refundable if you are not satisfied? What follow-up and maintenance services are available to you?

Ask for SHHH Information Sheet No. 4: *"Getting the Best from Your Hearing Aid."*

<p><b>Always remember that it takes time to learn to be a good hearing aid user. Success will come with patience, perseverance and practice!</b></p>
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