

Outcome 7

HEARING SERVICES

A reduction in the incidence and consequence of hearing loss, including through research and prevention activities, and access to hearing services and devices for eligible people

Outcome Strategy

Through Outcome 7, the Australian Government aims to reduce the incidence of avoidable hearing loss in the Australian community and the consequence of hearing loss for eligible people, and provide access to high quality hearing services and devices.

People eligible for subsidised hearing services are Australian citizens or permanent residents younger than 21 years of age that: hold a Pensioner Concession Card, a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Repatriation Health Card, or a White Repatriation Health Card. People in receipt of a sickness allowance from Centrelink, or the partner or dependant child of an eligible person, can also use hearing services subsidised by the Government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are also eligible if they are over 50 years of age, were participants in a Community Development Employment program between 1 December 2005 and 30 June 2008, or are currently participants in this program.

One in six Australians is affected by hearing loss. With an ageing population, hearing loss is projected to increase to one in every four Australians by 2050.¹ Avoidable hearing loss, especially in young people and people in the workforce, will also increase unless preventive action is taken. Hearing loss reduces the capacity to communicate and participate in social situations and can affect a person's education and employment opportunities.

Outcome 7 is the responsibility of the Regulatory Policy and Governance Division.

Programs Contributing to Outcome 7

Program 7.1: Hearing Services

¹ Access Economics & Cooperative Research Centre for Cochlear Implant and Hearing Aid Innovation (Australia) & Victorian Deaf Society, 2006. *Listen hear!: the economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia: a report by Access Economics Pty Ltd CRC for Cochlear Implant and Hearing Aid Innovation: Vicdeaf, East Melbourne.*

Outcome 7 Budgeted Expenses and Resources

Table 7.1 provides an overview of the total expenses for Outcome 7 by Program.

Table 7.1: Budgeted Expenses and Resources for Outcome 7

	2009-10	2010-11
	Estimated	Estimated
	actual	expenses
	\$'000	\$'000
Program 7.1: Hearing services		
Administered expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	345,477	357,766
Departmental expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	9,224	7,809
Revenues from other sources (s31)	140	147
Unfunded depreciation expense	-	184
Total for Program 7.1	354,841	365,906
Outcome 7 totals by appropriation type		
Administered expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	345,477	357,766
Departmental expenses		
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	9,224	7,809
Revenues from other sources (s31)	140	147
Unfunded depreciation expense	-	184
Total expenses for Outcome 7	354,841	365,906
	2009-10	2010-11
Average staffing level (number)	67	63

Contributions to Outcome 7

Program 7.1: Hearing services

Program Objective

Through this Program, the Australian Government aims to:

- support access to quality hearing services for eligible clients;
- provide better targeted hearing services; and
- support research into hearing loss prevention.

Major Activities

Support access to quality hearing services

Ensure eligible clients have access to free hearing services

Through the Hearing Services program, the Australian Government provides free services for eligible people. In 2010-11, the Department will continue to issue vouchers to clients for hearing assessments, hearing rehabilitation and the fitting of hearing devices, if clinically appropriate.

In 2010-11, the Department, through its Rehabilitation Plus service, aims to improve take-up rates of hearing device rehabilitation services by clients fitted with a free device for the first time. The Rehabilitation Plus service educates and encourages clients on making best use of their hearing aids and assists clients cope with their hearing loss. The Department anticipates that the additional training and support will increase clients' usage of hearing devices.

Ensure program clients receive quality services

In 2010-11, the Department will continue to monitor and evaluate the operation of the Hearing Services program to ensure quality and consistency in the delivery of hearing services to eligible clients. This process will include accreditation and monitoring of contracted service providers and registration and monitoring of qualifications for individual hearing health practitioners. This will ensure that hearing devices provided under the program are of high quality.

The Department will continue to provide a robust, transparent and well supported information service and complaints handling process for services provided under the Hearing Services program. During 2009-10, the program experienced a significant increase in client demand, which put pressure on the delivery of services. This has resulted in an increase in the time needed to process voucher applications and longer waiting times for clients contacting the Client Contact Line.² In 2010, the Department will provide advice to the Government regarding sustainable options to address the mid to long-term policy and administrative issues arising from the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia.

² Telephone: 1800 500 726.

Better targeting of Government resources

The Australian Government is committed to providing cost-effective and sustainable hearing services. From 1 July 2010, the Government will require eligible clients to have a minimum level of hearing loss before a hearing device is fitted. This initiative is designed to ensure that hearing devices are provided to those with the greatest clinical need. In 2010-11, the Department will monitor the impact of the minimum threshold through clinical audits and random client surveys, including working with stakeholders, to ensure the requirement is effective.

Support ongoing research into hearing loss prevention

The Australian Government aims to reduce the incidence of avoidable hearing loss in the community. The number of people affected by hearing loss in Australia is expected to increase over time, with this increase mainly attributed to the ageing population. Avoidable hearing loss can also affect young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people in the workforce, due to increased incidence of middle-ear disease and greater exposure to workplace noise hazards. This will also increase unless preventive action is taken.

Through the Hearing Loss Prevention program research projects, the Australian Government aims to identify strategies to reduce avoidable hearing loss in the general community and its consequent impact on productivity. The program funds research targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, young people and those in the workplace. From 2010-11 onwards, administrative arrangements for research applications processes will be revised.

During 2010-11, the Department will continue to monitor the progress of six research projects funded under the program. These projects focus on the prevalence of hearing loss and its relationship to leisure sound³ in adolescents; the effectiveness of hearing loss and tinnitus simulations as a deterrent of risky behaviours; the effects of the use of swimming pools on the ear health of Indigenous children in remote communities; the prevention of hearing loss associated with otitis media in Indigenous children; and a project to determine key barriers and enablers to effective control of hazardous occupational noise exposure. The reports of these research projects are due in 2011-12. The major challenge is to ensure that the research outcomes funded under the Program influence behavioural change in the priority target groups over time. The Department will manage this challenge through independent evaluation of individual projects.

Program 7.1 is linked as follows⁴:

- Medicare Australia (Department of Human Services) to administer the Hearing Services program, under its delivery of Medical Benefits and Services (Program 1.1)

³ Leisure sound is noise encountered in leisure settings, such as entertainment venues, clubs or open air concerts and when undertaking leisure activities, for example in the use of personal stereo systems.

⁴ The Community Services Obligation (CSO) of the Australian Government Hearing Service Program is delivered by Australian Hearing, which is an agency of the Human Services Portfolio. Accessible at: www.hearing.com.au

Program 7.1: Expenses

Table 7.2: Program expenses

	2009-10 Estimated actual \$'000	2010-11 Budget \$'000	2011-12 Forward year 1 \$'000	2012-13 Forward year 2 \$'000	2013-14 Forward year 3 \$'000
Annual administered expenses					
Ordinary annual services	345,477	357,766	385,349	416,568	447,019
Program support	9,364	8,140	8,248	8,307	8,498
Total Program expenses	354,841	365,906	393,597	424,875	455,517

Program 7.1: Deliverables

The Department will produce the following ‘Deliverables’ to achieve the Program Objective.

Table 7.3: Qualitative Deliverables for Program 7.1

Qualitative Deliverables	2010-11 Reference Point or Target
Produce relevant and timely evidence-based policy research	Relevant evidence-based policy research produced in a timely manner
Stakeholders participate in program development through a range of avenues	Stakeholders participated in program development through avenues such as regular consultative committees, conferences, stakeholder engagement forums, surveys, submissions on departmental discussion papers and meetings
Support access to quality hearing services	
Provide clients with advice on voucher services	Timely and accurate advice provided to clients
Provide appropriate services to eligible clients with special needs	Delivery of quality services to clients with special needs in a timely manner

Table 7.4: Quantitative Deliverables for Program 7.1⁵

Quantitative Deliverables	2009-10 Revised Budget	2010-11 Budget	2011-12 Forward Year 1	2012-13 Forward Year 2	2013-14 Forward Year 3
Percentage of variance between actual and budgeted expenses	≤0.5%	≤0.5%	≤0.5%	≤0.5%	≤0.5%
Support access to quality hearing services					
Number of people receiving hearing services ⁶	569,706	596,706	623,993	651,215	683,079
Number of clients accessing rehabilitation services	2,270	4,540	9,080	13,620	14,301
Number of sites registered to provide services under the Hearing Services program	2,000	2,100	2,153	2,207	2,262
Support ongoing research into hearing loss prevention					
Progress reports submitted from existing grant recipients as per agreement	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

⁵ Two quantitative deliverables from the 2009-10 Portfolio Budget Statements ‘The percentage of contracted service providers audited to ensure the quality of service provision and compliance with legislation’ and ‘The number and percentage of qualified practitioners reviewed and/or monitored to ensure the quality of service provision and compliance with legislation.’ have been deleted as the Department is currently in the process of moving from cyclical audits to targeted risk based audits.

⁶ The estimate from the 2009-10 Portfolio Budget Statements has been updated in 2010-11 to reflect increases in client demand for the program.

Program 7.1: Key Performance Indicators

The following ‘Key Performance Indicators’ measure the impact of the Program.

Table 7.5: Qualitative Key Performance Indicators for Program 7.1

Qualitative Indicators	2010-11 Reference Point or Target
Support access to quality hearing services	
Hearing service providers operate in accordance with their contractual and legislative obligations	Investigation of issues raised by clients and appropriate remedial action by clinical support staff demonstrates that providers meet their requirements
Better targeting of Government resources	
Provision of hearing devices targeted to clinical need	Qualified practitioners operate within the legislated exemption criteria
Support ongoing research into hearing loss prevention	
Ensure research findings are published in accordance with contract requirements	Contract requirements of publishing are met

Table 7.6: Quantitative Key Performance Indicators for Program 7.1⁷

Quantitative Indicators	2009-10 Revised Budget	2010-11 Budget Target	2011-12 Forward Year 1	2012-13 Forward Year 2	2013-14 Forward Year 3
Support access to quality hearing services					
Number of applications received per year	316,056	337,370	359,228	382,504	405,139
Average number of working days taken to issue vouchers to eligible clients	14	14	14	14	14
Maintain or increase the percentage of fitted clients who use their device(s) for five or more hours per day	56%	56%	56%	56%	56%

⁷ The quantitative deliverable from the 2009-10 Portfolio Budget Statement: ‘Increased usage of hearing devices for the Rehabilitation Plus population compared with clients who have not received these services’ has been deleted as there are insufficient numbers of Rehabilitation Plus clients to make meaningful comparisons.

Budget Statements – Department of Health and Ageing

Quantitative Indicators	2009-10 Revised Budget	2010-11 Budget Target	2011-12 Forward Year 1	2012-13 Forward Year 2	2013-14 Forward Year 3
Better targeting of Government resources					
Percentage of clients fitted with a hearing device with hearing loss greater than 23 decibels ⁸	N/A	95%	95%	95%	95%
Support ongoing research into hearing loss prevention					
Existing research and prevention projects are completed in the required timeframes and the results are disseminated widely ⁹	100%	100%	100%	N/A	N/A

⁸ This was a new budget measure announced in the 2009-10 Budget and will commence on 1 July 2010.

⁹ Funding for existing projects ceases in 2012-13.