



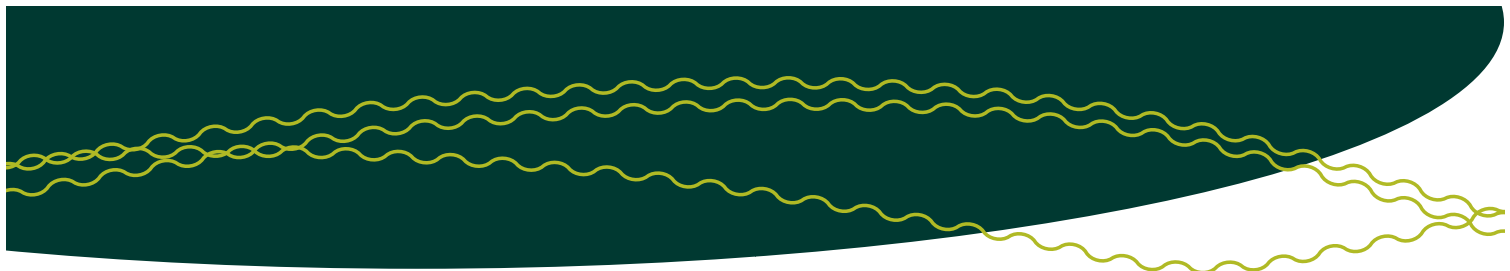
Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

A decorative graphic consisting of several wavy, interconnected yellow lines that resemble a stylized ear or a network of connections, positioned behind the main title.

HEARING SERVICES PROGRAM

Information Booklet



Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
CHOOSING YOUR HEARING SERVICE PROVIDER	4
WHAT YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER SHOULD DO FOR YOU	7
WHAT THE GOVERNMENT PAYS FOR YOUR HEARING SERVICES	9
MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS	11
ADJUSTING TO YOUR NEW HEARING AID	14
WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM NOT HAPPY?	17
CONSUMER SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS	18
FOR MORE INFORMATION	20

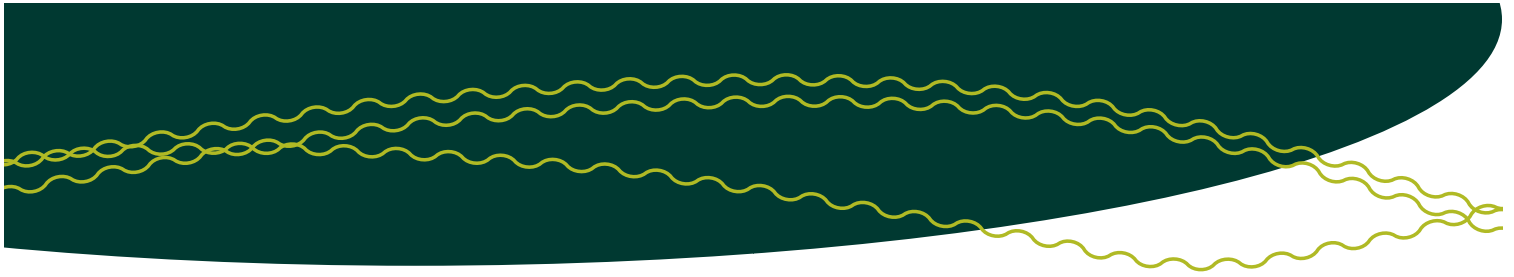
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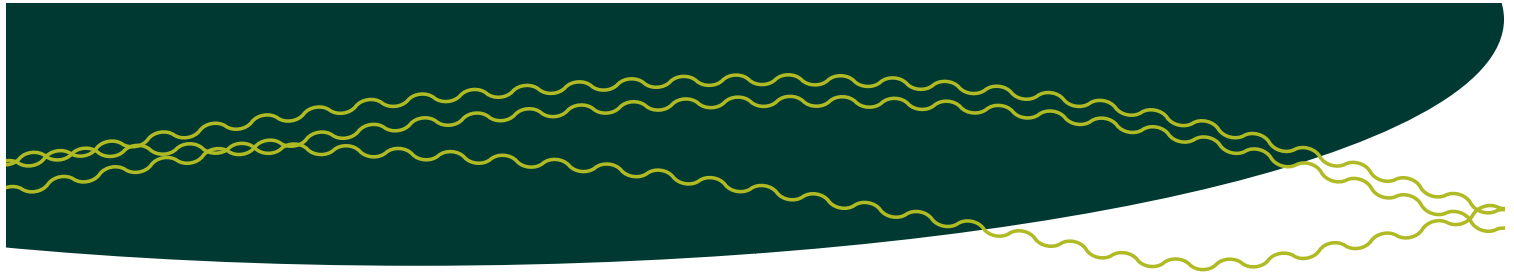


INTRODUCTION

There are many causes of hearing loss. Some hearing losses may be temporary due to short-term medical conditions such as colds, flu or ear infections. Ear wax in the ear canal can (if excessive) cause a temporary hearing loss by plugging up your ear. Your medical practitioner should be able to assist you in having this removed.

Other causes are permanent, including exposure to loud noise, circulation problems resulting from poor blood flow to the ear, damage to the tiny bones of the middle ear, some medications, viral attacks or inherited hearing losses. Medical treatment can improve hearing in some of these cases. For older people, the cause may simply be 'wear and tear' over a lifetime and medical treatment is not possible to correct this hearing loss.

Adverse health effects have been reported for people with hearing problems. Some people with hearing loss may feel inadequate or ashamed because they are unable to hear. Other people experience anger and frustration. Emotional reactions to hearing loss can lead to attempts to hide difficulties from friends and family or even to denying that



there is a problem. People with a hearing loss may also report feeling socially isolated and even depressed. Depression is a serious and common complaint among hearing-impaired people.

What the Australian Government Hearing Services Program can do for you

With your Hearing Services Voucher you can get a free hearing test and hearing rehabilitation. The Program will also provide you with free hearing aids or an alternative listening device to meet your clinical need, if required.

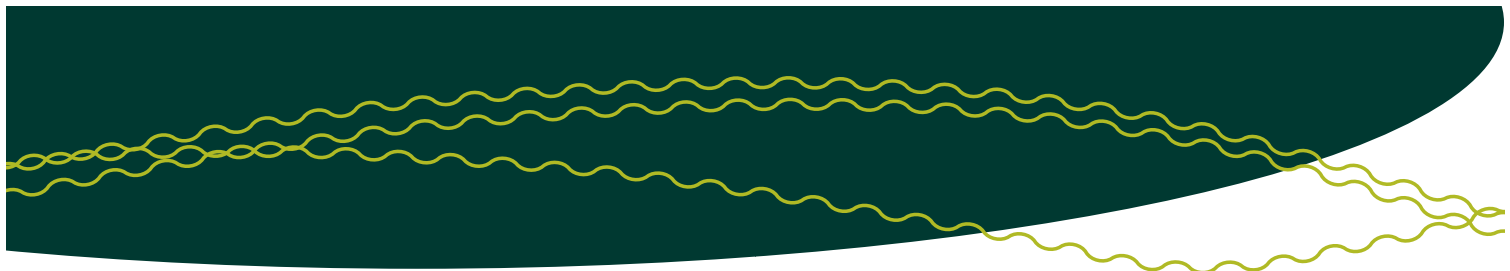
Your clinical need is identified through a thorough and comprehensive assessment of your hearing. It takes into account: your hearing test results (severity and configuration of loss); the nature and extent of your communication difficulties and usual environments; the shape, size and health of your ears; your physical co-ordination and other physical conditions eg blindness; your mental and physical ability to manage different device styles; and the capabilities of proven hearing aid technology.

Clinical hearing needs shape your individual rehabilitation plan incorporating a set of realistic negotiated goals, appropriate advice and counselling, and if required, prescription, selection and fitting of suitable hearing devices. The aim of this rehabilitation package is a quality hearing outcome.

If you choose a 'Top-Up' hearing aid (this will be explained later) the voucher will instead provide a contribution towards the cost of this device. For a small yearly charge, your hearing aids or devices can be serviced and batteries regularly supplied. This is called a maintenance agreement.

The Office of Hearing Services

The Office of Hearing Services manages the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. The Office has a responsibility to keep all your information confidential. This includes your personal and clinical information. You can ask your service provider for a copy of your case file or hearing test results.



CHOOSING YOUR HEARING SERVICE PROVIDER

The first thing for you to work out is which service provider you will use. When we post your voucher, we will also send you a list of hearing service providers closest to your home or preferred location.

You do not need to choose a provider from this list. You can choose from a large number of providers throughout Australia. We are happy to send you the contact details of service providers in other locations if you want them. Please contact the Office and ask us.

A service provider can visit you at home if you are unable to visit them for medical reasons. However, you will need a medical certificate, unless you live in an aged care facility.

When you visit your service provider, it may be helpful for you to have a friend or relative attend with you to assist with questions.

Changing service providers

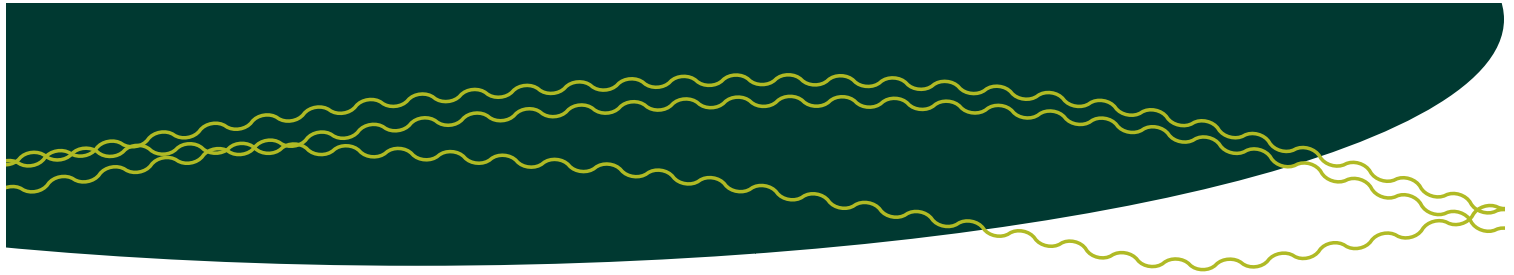
Please note: once you choose a service provider it is preferable to stay with that service provider for the life of your hearing

aid. If this is not possible (for example, if you move), please contact the Office to talk about your options. If you do change providers, your maintenance agreement (explained later) will continue with your new provider.

Explanation of symbols

The Office has marked the list of local service providers with symbols to provide additional information about the services available at that site.

- ▲ **Audiologists** — are university graduates with postgraduate qualifications in audiology or equivalent training. Audiologists have broad responsibilities and expertise in all non-medical areas of hearing services, including complex hearing assessment and rehabilitation of hearing impairment.
- ◆ **Audiometrists** — have completed a certificate course in hearing aid audiometry. They have a minimum of three years experience in hearing assessment, hearing aid prescription and fitting, and management of hearing loss.



* **Permanent site** — A permanent site is defined as a site staffed on a full time basis and offering services for a minimum of 35 business hours a week, with a qualified practitioner present at least 40 percent of this time averaged over any fortnightly period.

★ **Visiting site** — is attended at least once per month by an audiologist or audiometrist. Please telephone the site about the frequency of visits. Staff may not always be in attendance at these locations, but repairs and battery supply can be arranged between visits.

✦ **Remote site** — is visited less than once per month. Please telephone the site about the frequency of visits, repairs and battery supply.

♿ **Disabled Access** — the provider has advised that this site has disabled access.



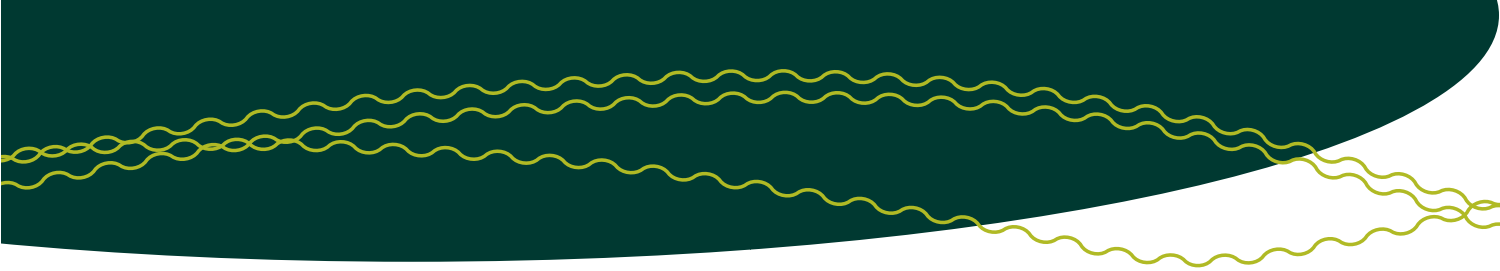
WHAT YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER SHOULD DO FOR YOU

Your voucher entitles you to a quality hearing service that meets your hearing needs. Your service provider will:

- Carry out a thorough test of your hearing.
- Clearly explain how your hearing loss affects you, and address any concerns you have.
- Discuss your needs, goals and expectations.
- Discuss your motivation to wear hearing aids.
- Help you reduce the problems you are experiencing in everyday life which result from your hearing loss.

This will include developing a hearing rehabilitation plan which aims to meet your individual needs and may include advice, information and strategies for managing difficult listening situations.

- Advise you what to do if you are experiencing any problems.



If your hearing test shows you need a hearing device, your service provider will discuss:

- the styles of hearing devices available, and the styles that would best meet your hearing needs;
- the free hearing devices available;
- ‘Top-Up’ hearing devices;
- free Alternative Listening Devices; and
- how well you should expect your hearing device to work.

Your service provider will also provide you with hearing rehabilitation advice and any help you may need.

If you decide to get a hearing aid or alternative listening device, your service provider will:

- offer you a maintenance agreement; and
- be available for you to visit, as long as the device lasts, to make sure it works as well as you expected (your service provider **MUST** see you to determine how successful any hearing device fitting is working at least once after your device is fitted).

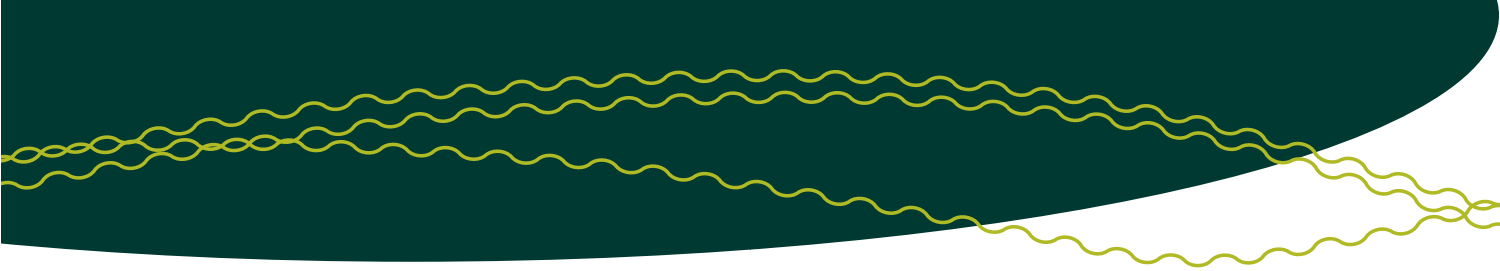
If you have communication difficulties, there are more services available to help you. Please discuss this with your service provider or contact the Office.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT PAYS FOR YOUR HEARING SERVICES

The Australian Government pays all the costs associated with your hearing assessment, hearing rehabilitation, hearing device fitting and follow-up services and for a variety of free hearing devices. The government also pays most of the cost of maintaining your hearing device(s) and the cost of your batteries (refer maintenance agreements below).

If you choose to purchase a ‘Top-Up’ hearing device the government pays your hearing service provider the amount it





would have paid had you chosen a free device. You pay the difference. When you negotiate charges and agreements with a provider for a 'Top-Up' device, you should ensure that this government payment is deducted from the price you are charged.

You are strongly urged to understand the costs and charges involved. If you are thinking of buying a top-up device you should insist that your hearing service provider clearly explains what the government is paying for and how much you would need to pay.

Replacing hearing aids which are lost or damaged beyond repair

If you lose your hearing aid or it is damaged beyond repair, you will need to contact your service provider. You will be asked to fill in a statutory declaration form stating how the aid was lost or damaged before a replacement can be considered. There is a small fee for replacing your hearing aid. Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card and White Card (hearing specific) holders are exempt from this fee.

MAINTENANCE AGREEMENTS

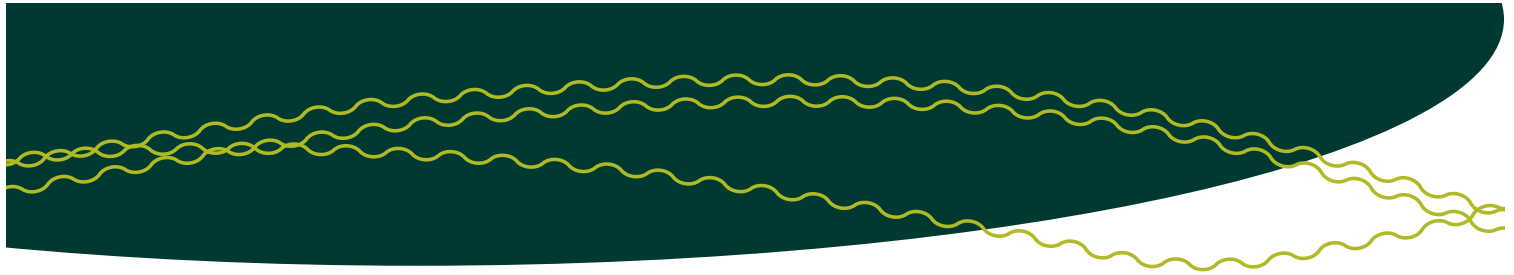
Hearing aids are precision devices powered by small batteries. These batteries must be replaced often and regularly. Like other precision devices, hearing aids work better if they are also cleaned and serviced regularly.

Maintaining your hearing aid and buying batteries can be costly. This is why the Office recommends you have an annual maintenance agreement with your service provider. Your service provider will supply and fit batteries, clean and service the aid and replace any worn or broken parts.

You may be able to arrange to post your hearing aid to your provider if it needs repair and it is difficult to visit your provider. They will post it back after the service or repairs. You may also be able to arrange for your service provider to regularly post batteries to you.

Cost of a maintenance agreement

If you enter into a maintenance agreement, the government pays your hearing service provider most of the cost of this agreement. You will be asked to make a small contribution to this cost.



The annual maintenance charge for a 'Top-Up' device may be higher and should be negotiated between you and your hearing services provider. This also applies if you already own hearing aids and wish to have these maintained under the program.

Only Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold or White Card (hearing specific) holders are exempt from the maintenance co-payment on government free hearing aids. If you hold one of these cards, the Department of Veterans' Affairs pays the standard annual maintenance agreement for you. If you choose a 'Top-Up' device, you must pay the difference between the standard contribution and the amount you negotiate to pay your service provider.

Your service provider will ask you to pay the maintenance charge for the first year on your first follow-up visit. In following years, your service provider will ask you to pay the maintenance charge once a

year (on the same date your hearing aid was first fitted).

You do not have to enter a maintenance agreement with your service provider. However, if you choose not to agree to a maintenance agreement, you must pay the full cost of batteries, servicing and any repairs to keep your hearing aid working. The cost could easily exceed the maintenance agreement. The manufacturer of your chosen hearing device MAY offer a warranty for a specified period. If you elect not to pay your maintenance for this period you may still need to purchase batteries.

Minor maintenance

Sometimes voucher holders lose their eligibility for full services and no longer qualify for free assessment and hearing aids. However, you are still eligible for minor maintenance of your hearing aid(s) for five years.

Minor maintenance includes ear mould renewal and repair, ear mould cleaning and replacing minor parts such as tubing. No annual maintenance fee is charged during this five-year period. Replacing major electronic components and supplying batteries is not included.



ADJUSTING TO YOUR NEW HEARING AID

It can take up to 6 months to adjust to your new hearing aid. Allow yourself a 'settling in' period. If you have trouble getting used to your new hearing aid, ask your service provider for a follow up visit.

Carefully read all the information your service provider gives you. Ask questions if you are unsure of anything. While wearing your new hearing aid, write down any problems and discuss these with your service provider during a later visit.

Become familiar with the controls of your hearing aid – understand how they should be used and when. Learn how to insert your ear mould or aid in your ear canal correctly so you have the best possible comfort and benefit. Learn the correct way to change your hearing aid battery.

Be ready to experience changes. When first wearing your hearing aid, it may help to wear it for short periods. You can then increase the time you wear it as you adjust. It is possible you may begin to hear sounds you have not heard for some time, and have perhaps forgotten. Learn to identify sounds and remember that we often live in a noisy world.

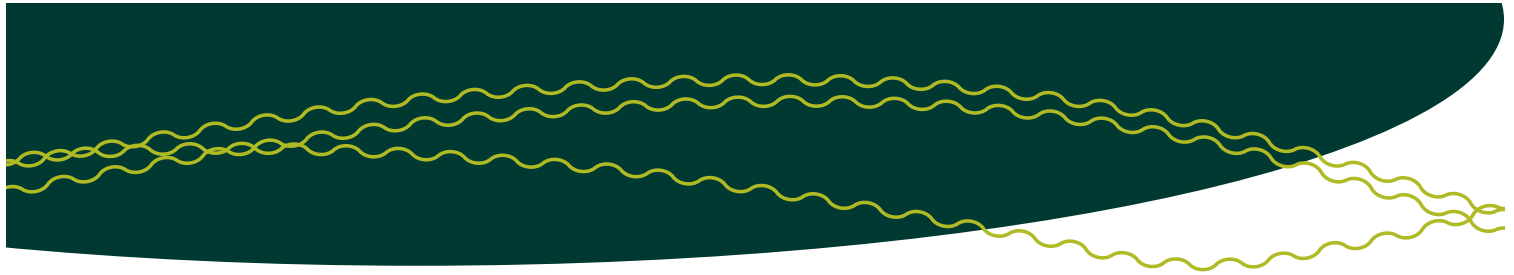
You should aim to wear your hearing aids a minimum of 5 hours per day to train yourself to understand the sounds you are hearing.

Some common problems with hearing aids

There are some common minor problems you may experience with your new hearing aid. A simple modification often corrects the problem. Keep your hearing aid clean and wipe it regularly with a dry cloth or tissue; this helps prevent many problems. Common problems are:

- Your hearing aid may lose volume as your battery runs out. Always remember to turn your hearing aid to the 'off' position when not in use. It may also whistle if you do not turn it off when you take it out of your ear. This will also result in a flat battery if it is left turned on for a long period.





- Moisture may build up in the tubing in a 'behind the ear' aid. This will block sound and your hearing aid can suddenly 'go dead'. You can remove moisture using an air puffer – ask your service provider for more information.
- Avoid getting the hearing aid wet — do not wear it in the shower or in the rain. Remove any moisture with a tissue or dry cloth. If you live in hot or humid conditions or where moisture is a problem, a kit is available for drying your hearing aid.
- Chemicals in cosmetics such as aftershave, hair spray, perfume, sunscreen and even mosquito repellent can damage your hearing aid. Remove your hearing aid before applying such products and allow time for them to dry before wearing your hearing aid.
- Hearing aids should never be exposed to extreme heat (such as the glove box of your car).
- Wax may build up in your ear canal or ear mould, and this affects sound reception. It is a good idea to clean your ear mould regularly and have your ear canals checked when you visit your doctor.

- Your hearing aid may squeak or whistle if it is faulty or the ear mould is not correctly inserted in your ear or when the tubing becomes hard or cracked.

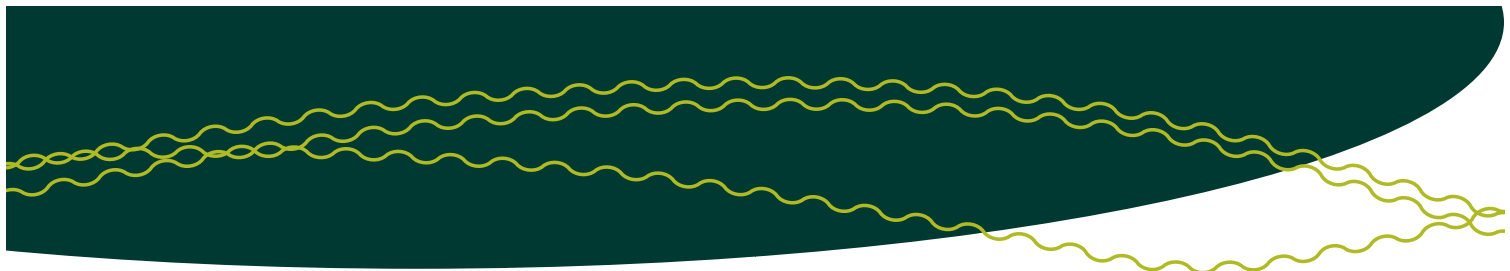
WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM NOT HAPPY?

Complaints

If you have a complaint, speak to your hearing service provider first. If you are not satisfied with the result of that discussion, or if you are uncomfortable with talking to your hearing service provider, contact our complaints officer on 1800 500 726 (voice) or 1800 500 496 (TTY). Calls to these numbers are free, except from mobile phones. You can also write to us at the address below (see *For More Information*). Otherwise, read the Service Charter on our website at www.health.gov.au/hear.

Reviews

If the Office makes a decision that you don't agree with, you can ask the National Manager to review that decision. Such requests must be in writing. There may be time limits affecting when you can seek a review.



Appeals

If you are not satisfied with the review outcome, you may be able to appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). Not all decisions the Office makes can be appealed. The Office will tell you if a decision can be appealed. The address of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal is GPO Box 9955 in the capital city of your state or territory.

Appeals to the AAT should be made within 28 days of getting written notice of the decision from the Office.

CONSUMER SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

There are consumer support organisations in every capital city and many regional areas throughout Australia. These organisations have advisers and teachers who can greatly assist you with your hearing issues, including helping you to manage your hearing loss. Some organisations have a small fee for these services, others are completely free. By talking to these people you will be able to make an informed decision about what will be helpful for your personal needs.

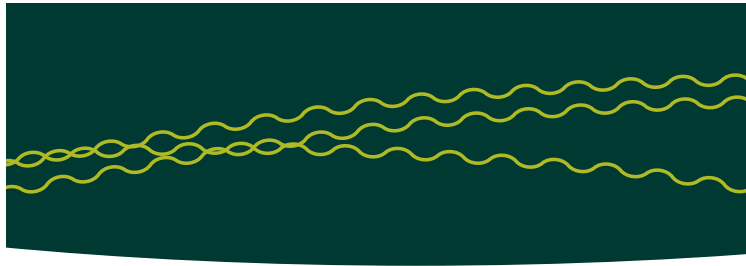
When you visit your hearing service provider, ask them the name of any organisation in your local area that may be able to assist you.

Hearing aid banks

Hearing aids can make a real difference for people with hearing impairment, but not everyone can afford hearing aids or can use the Australian Government Hearing Services Program.

Hearing aid banks can help these people by recycling parts of used hearing aids. Hearing aids provided under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program become your property. If you have hearing aids you no longer need, you may like to consider donating them to a hearing aid bank.

Send any unwanted hearing aids directly to a hearing aid bank or to the Office of Hearing Services, who will send them to a bank. Not every state and territory has a hearing aid bank. The address of the closest hearing aid bank to you can be found at: www.health.gov.au/hear or by ringing 1800 500 726.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To ask about the Australian Government Hearing Services Program, contact the Hearing Services Information Line on 1800 500 726 or for users of telephone typewriter (TTY) telephone 1800 500 496.

You can also write (including about any concerns or complaints you may have) to:

Director, Client Services
Office of Hearing Services
Department of Health and Ageing
Mail Drop Point 113
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601
E-mail: hearing@health.gov.au

Information on the Australian Government Hearing Services Program is available in English and a number of other languages on the Office of Hearing Services internet site: www.health.gov.au/hear

