



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care



Hearing Services Program

Client Information Booklet



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Client information

Welcome to the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. The program provides subsidised high-quality hearing services and devices to eligible Australians with hearing loss.

This booklet provides information about:

- services and devices available under the voucher scheme component of the program
- your rights and responsibilities
- what to do if something goes wrong
- the service you can expect from the Department of Health and Aged Care.

You can find further information about the program including the [Community Service Obligations \(CSO\) component](#) and helpful resources on [our website](#).

Services available to you

The program funds comprehensive hearing assessments, advice, monitoring, counselling and support, and access to hearing devices. If fitted with a hearing device, you can also access subsidised maintenance for a small annual fee.

Choosing a hearing service provider

Under the program you can access hearing services from more than 300 providers in nearly 3,000 locations across Australia. If you are [eligible for the program](#), you will receive a welcome pack which will include a list of up to 20 providers in your area. Our directory can also help you [find your nearest provider](#) registered with the program. You can transfer to a different provider at any time. If you do, your new provider will seek your consent and your file will be transferred to your new provider.

If you live in a remote location ([Modified Monash Model locations 6 and 7](#)) or have specialist hearing needs, you may be eligible to receive [services through the CSO component](#) of the program. CSO includes access to different types of services and devices and is delivered exclusively by Hearing Australia, who can be contacted on 131 797 or via their [website](#).

Your hearing assessment

Before your first appointment, think about what issues you have noticed with your hearing and how you would like to address your concerns. You can bring a friend or family member to your appointment if you wish. Let your provider know if you need an interpreter.

Your first appointment will involve:

- questions about your health, hearing, needs and goals
- assessment of your hearing
- discussion of your results and any treatment options.

Understanding your hearing results

Your practitioner will explain your hearing test results to ensure you understand your hearing loss and how it will affect your communication. If you have a hearing loss you may be able to receive a subsidised hearing device – either a hearing aid or an assistive listening device (ALD).

You should take your time to think about your decision; your provider will work with you to identify any goals you might have for your hearing to improve communication at home, work or socially. You do not need to decide on a hearing device at the initial appointment and should never feel pressured or rushed into making a decision.

If you are not ready, or do not want to be fitted with a hearing device, you are under no obligation to do so. You may wish to discuss with your provider [other communication strategies](#) that might improve how you are hearing.

Hearing devices

Your provider will help you find a device that meets your needs and goals. The program offers fully subsidised hearing devices at no cost to you, and partially subsidised devices, with you paying the gap.

Hearing devices have many features which can help improve your hearing. The choice can be overwhelming, so we have developed a [guide to help you understand the different features](#) and they can meet your goals. It is important to remember that hearing devices are aids, and do not restore normal hearing.

Your provider will discuss if a telecoil or T-coil could benefit you. When activated, telecoils can pick up the signal from a telephone, ALD or hearing loop, and amplify it. Hearing loops can be found in many different places, including public transport, retail counters, theatres, halls and places of worship.

You should be aware that your service provider might set sales targets for their practitioners or receive commissions for selling certain hearing devices. They must disclose this to you, as it might influence the price, type and brand of hearing aid they recommend you.

If you are unsure about getting a hearing device, you can ask your provider if they offer free hearing aid trials. Your provider will explain the conditions of the trial, including any costs and timeframes.

Fully subsidised hearing aids

If you need a hearing device, your provider must offer you one that is fully subsidised at no cost to you. The program funds hundreds of fully subsidised devices which offer a range of beneficial features to help you manage the impact of your hearing loss.

Fully subsidised hearing devices will help you hear in many listening situations, though they have fewer features than partially subsidised devices.

Partially subsidised hearing aids

You may be given the option to purchase a partially subsidised hearing device. Partially subsidised hearing devices usually have additional features.

For these devices, the program subsidises the amount that a fully subsidised hearing device would have cost, and you pay the rest. This 'gap' can be substantial. Your provider must give you a quote that includes:

- the device model and style
- maintenance and repair costs
- returns policy information
- trial period information
- warranty period
- government subsidy amount.

Your private health insurance might help cover some of the gap.

It is entirely your choice whether to choose a partially subsidised hearing device. Your provider will explain why they have recommended a partially subsidised device and must advise you about equivalent fully subsidised devices.

You can get a second opinion at any time. If you wish to do this, ask your provider for a copy of your hearing test results and quote. You can then use this information to ask for quotes for the same or an equivalent device from other providers so you can compare your options.

Some features of the partially subsidised hearing device may not be necessary to address your hearing loss. As hearing device technology has continued to advance, so have the features available in the fully subsidised devices. Do not assume that a partially subsidised device will help you reach a better outcome than a fully subsidised hearing device.

Assistive listening devices (ALDs)

There are fully subsidised ALDs available for people with hearing loss who do not want to wear hearing aids or cannot manage them. These devices can help you listen to the television or improve your hearing in one-on-one conversations. Your provider can help you decide if an ALD is suitable for you.

If you are fitted with hearing aids you may be given the option to purchase an ALD or accessory which works with your hearing aid, such as a streamer which connects your hearing aids to your television.

Rehabilitation

If you have hearing difficulties, but do not want to be fitted with hearing devices, you can access rehabilitation through your provider within 12 months of your first assessment. Your provider will provide training and strategies to manage the effects of hearing loss and improve your communication. This may involve family members and/or carers.

Rehabilitation Plus is available to eligible clients who are being fitted for a fully subsidised device through the program for the first time. Rehab Plus is an opportunity for you to learn how to better manage your hearing loss and learn communication tactics and strategies. For more information about Rehab Plus, talk to your provider.

Client reviews

You can access a client review appointment 12 months after your initial assessment or hearing aid fitting. Client reviews are available annually and allow you to:

- have your ear and hearing health checked
- ensure your devices are working (if you are fitted with one)
- address any hearing, device or communication issues you may have.

Costs

While most services and devices under the program are fully subsidised, there may be situations where you will be asked to pay additional costs.

Annual maintenance agreement (including batteries and device repairs)

The cost of maintaining hearing devices can add up. Maintenance agreements are an easy and cost-effective way to take care of your hearing device. If you choose a maintenance agreement, you may be required to pay an annual fee and the program pays the provider a subsidy to maintain your device. Maintenance agreements cover:

- appropriate battery supply
- adjustments and re-programming if required (including one phone or accessory reconnection service per agreement)
- repairs to the device except rechargers for rechargeable devices
- necessary components for the functioning of the device (for example, earmoulds, thin tube and dome replacement)
- hearing aid cleaning.

If you can't go to your provider, check whether they offer home delivery of batteries and parts.

A maintenance agreement is much cheaper than paying for services and equipment yourself. The annual fee can be higher for partially subsidised devices than for fully subsidised devices.

Replacements

If you lose your hearing device or it is damaged beyond repair, you need to contact your provider. If your replacement hearing device is from the fully subsidised device schedule, the replacement fee is around \$45.

If you choose a partially subsidised hearing device as a replacement, you will be responsible for the additional cost involved in purchasing this device. The program will not reimburse you for the additional cost of a replacement with this partially subsidised hearing device.

You may be able to list your hearing aid on your insurance policy but will need to speak to your insurer.

Department of Veterans' Affairs clients

If you hold a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Gold or White Card (for hearing loss), you are eligible for services and devices under the program. For eligible clients, DVA will pay the maintenance and replacement fees for fully subsidised devices and pay for assistive listening devices and tinnitus treatment.

The range of fully subsidised devices can be accessed through the program and should meet your needs in most cases. If your provider believes that fully subsidised options are not suitable to meet your clinical hearing needs, they can contact DVA to discuss your circumstances.

If you have been fitted with a hearing device through the program and you also need an ALD, you will need to seek approval from DVA to cover the cost. This is because the program will only fund a hearing device or an ALD, not both.

If you choose to purchase a partially subsidised hearing device without prior approval, you will need to pay the additional cost (i.e. the gap) for the hearing device. If you choose to enter a maintenance agreement for your partially subsidised hearing device, you will need to pay the service provider the amount quoted for the maintenance agreement. If you choose not to have a maintenance agreement for your partially subsidised hearing device, you will have to pay for all batteries, servicing and repairs.

More detailed DVA specific information is available on the [DVA website](#).

Additional assistance for any out-of-pocket costs

If you have purchased a partially subsidised device, you may be eligible to receive financial assistance through your private health insurance. If you have private health insurance, you should contact your health fund to discuss possible rebates.

Your rights and responsibilities through the Hearing Services Program

You have the right to:

- be treated with respect

- be informed about services, costs and your treatment options
- be given a choice of hearing devices
- be assured of the confidentiality of your personal information.

You are responsible for telling your provider about any relevant medical information. You should respect staff, actively participate in ongoing care and raise appropriate treatment issues with your provider.

The [Client Rights and Responsibilities fact sheet](#) can be found on the program's website and will also be displayed in your provider's clinic.

For more information on consumer rights and guarantees, please visit the [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's \(ACCC\)](#) website.

Service charter for clients

This service charter sets out the service you can expect from The Department of Health and Aged Care, which manages the program on behalf of the Government.

The program aims to help eligible people manage their hearing loss and improve engagement in the community.

Our customer service standards

When you contact us we aim to:

- answer your call as quickly as possible, or if in writing, respond no later than 28 business days (from the date of receipt)
- give you accurate, helpful and timely information, and wherever possible fully answer the questions or issues you have
- treat you with courtesy and respect.

When we make a decision that affects you, we will tell you:

- the reason for that decision
- what entitlements or other options may be available to you.

When you apply:

- online or through a service provider, your application will be processed in real-time
- through post or email, we aim to send your welcome pack, or notification of ineligibility, within 3-4 weeks of having received your correctly completed application
- if you are eligible, we will advise you of the location of service providers in your area, and information about the hearing services available to you.

We ensure the services you receive are of high quality by:

- making contracts with service providers, which set the standard of service you receive and the rules of conduct by which providers must abide
- giving you a choice of service providers
- giving you information about the hearing services you can expect to receive
- assessing the standard of that service against the program's requirements
- dealing with feedback you may have about the services you received.

Your confidentiality and privacy

We collect information about you so that you can access the services you need. We abide by the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct. If you think we have breached the Privacy Act 1988, you have the right to appeal to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC).

You can call the [OAIC](https://www.oaic.gov.au) on 1300 363 992 or email enquiries@oaic.gov.au.

How you can help us to help you

- Talk to your provider about any concerns you have with your hearing loss, hearing devices, or hearing services.
- Tell your provider as soon as possible if you are no longer eligible for the program or if other important personal details change.
- Make sure information you give us is accurate and complete.
- Take care of your hearing devices to avoid loss or damage.
- Treat our staff respectfully and give us reasonable time to respond to you.
- Provide us with feedback about our performance or the quality of your services.

Complaints

How to make a complaint or give feedback

We aim to improve our service by listening to your suggestions about how to improve service delivery and by resolving complaints, where possible. We believe you have a right to comment or complain about the services you have received, and have your feedback handled professionally within a reasonable time frame.

If you have a complaint about your services, you should raise this with your provider in the first instance.

If this does not resolve the issue, or you are not comfortable talking to your provider, you may raise your complaint with the department (see '[How to contact us](#)'). Please provide as much detailed information as possible.

We aim to resolve most complaints within 30 business days, although more complex matters may require additional time.

More information

You can find [more information on the website](#) and in our [complaints policy](#), including how to:

- raise a complaint which is outside the scope of the program
- request a review or reconsideration if you are not satisfied with the management of your complaint
- appeal the decision through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) or take your complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

How to contact us

- email hearing@health.gov.au
- phone 1800 500 726 (8.30am to 5.00pm AEST and AEDT on standard business days) OR (NRS on 1800 555 727)
- write to

Hearing Services Program
Department of Health and Aged Care
GPO Box 9848 Mail Drop Point 113
Canberra ACT 2601

Health.gov.au

