



Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Hearing Services Program

Client Information Booklet



Contents

- Client information 1
- Services available to you 1
- Choosing a hearing service provider 1
- Translation and Interpretation 1
- Your hearing assessment 2
 - Understanding your hearing results 2
 - Rehabilitation 2
 - Client reviews 3
- Hearing devices 3
 - Fully subsidised hearing aids 4
 - Partially subsidised hearing aids 4
 - Assistive listening devices (ALDs) 5
- Costs 5
 - Annual maintenance agreement (including batteries and device repairs) 5
 - Replacements 6
 - Warranties 6
 - Additional assistance for out-of-pocket costs 6
 - Department of Veterans’ Affairs clients 6
- Your rights and responsibilities through the Hearing Services Program 7
- Service charter for clients 7
 - Our customer service standards 7
 - Your confidentiality and privacy 8
 - How you can help us to help you 8
- Complaints 8
 - How to make a complaint or give feedback 8
- How to contact us 9

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, Disability and Ageing.

You can find further information about the program and helpful resources on [our website](http://www.health.gov.au/our-work/hearing-services-program) (www.health.gov.au/our-work/hearing-services-program).

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 (your provider may charge a small annual co-payment).

Choosing a hearing service provider

Under the program you can access hearing services from more than 380 providers in over 3,000 locations across Australia. Our online directory can help you [find your nearest provider](#) or you can call our contact centre on 1800 500 726. You can transfer to a different provider at any time. If you do, your new provider will seek your consent and your client record will be transferred to them. You should note that you cannot receive services from the new provider that have already been provided to you under your voucher.

If you live in a [remote location](#) or have specialist hearing needs, you may be eligible to receive services through the [Community Service Obligations \(CSO\) 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](http://www.hearing.com.au) (www.hearing.com.au).

Translation and Interpretation

The Australian government provides a free interpreting service for people with limited or no English proficiency. TIS National provides access to interpreters over the phone, via video conference, or to attend an appointment in person. Please see the [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS\) website](http://www.tisnational.gov.au) (www.tisnational.gov.au) to find out if the service is available in your area and for information about the services and instructions for how to book an interpreter.

To access an immediate phone interpreter:

1. Call TIS National on 131 450.

2. When asked state the language you need.
3. Stay on the line while the operator finds an available interpreter. If there are no interpreters available in the language requested, the operator will ask you to call back, or you are able to request an interpreter in another language.
4. The interpreter will tell the TIS National operator who you need to contact and the operator will call and connect you and the interpreter to the organisation requested.

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. If you have a hearing loss you may be able to receive a subsidised hearing device.

You should take your time to think about your decision: your practitioner will work with you to identify 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 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 practitioner other communication strategies that might improve how you are hearing.

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 with 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 practitioner.

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 device is working and fitted correctly (if you are fitted with one)
- address any hearing, device or communication issues you may have.

Hearing devices

If you require a device to assist you with your hearing, your practitioner 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 devices and features](#) (available on our website) and whether they can meet your goals. It is important to remember that hearing devices are aids, and cannot restore normal hearing.

All devices available under the program are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA carries out a range of assessment and monitoring activities to ensure hearing aids are of a safe and acceptable standard for use by the community.

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

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

You are encouraged to research before purchasing any devices and to seek quotes from alternative providers where possible. Costs can vary between providers and depending upon client needs, there is a large range of devices to select from. As with any other significant purchase, deciding what features are necessary and then comparing brands, quotes and features is recommended, as some brands may offer features in the fully subsidised category that other brands only offer in the partially subsidised category.

Take note of returns policy periods to ensure that if you are unhappy with your devices, you will be able to return them for replacement with alternatives.

Your provider must give you a quote that includes:

- (a) the device model, style and device code;
- (b) the full device costs, separately identifying right and left device costs;
- (c) the total government subsidy amount;
- (d) device and accessory costs;
- (e) the cost of the optional annual maintenance agreement, including your co-payment and whether this will change over time;
- (f) the warranty period;

- (g) the provider's returns policy; and
- (h) for partially subsidised devices:
 - (i) any additional maintenance and repair costs above the program's set client maintenance co-payment; and
 - (ii) acknowledgement that you were offered a choice of a fully subsidised device.

Fully subsidised hearing aids

If you need a hearing device, your practitioner must offer you a choice from the range of fully subsidised devices that are appropriate to your needs. 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 are high quality devices suitable for most clients' hearing needs. The program will subsidise the entire cost and you will pay nothing for the devices. If you choose to accept a Maintenance Agreement, the maximum co-payment amount is set by the program for fully subsidised devices.

Partially subsidised hearing aids

Partially subsidised devices usually include advanced technology. This technology, although useful to some clients, does not improve hearing capability. 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.

The program will provide the same subsidy towards a partially subsidised hearing device as it does for a fully subsidised device. If you choose to purchase a partially subsidised device, you are likely to incur additional costs, which may be significant.

For partially subsidised devices, providers may:

- (a) charge the difference between the government device subsidy and the device cost (this could also be charged when replacing lost device/s)
- (b) charge for the purchase of a charger for rechargeable devices
- (c) negotiate a Maintenance Agreement co-payment amount with the client;
- (d) charge additional repair costs;
- (e) negotiate new conditions for maintenance.

Your provider is required to inform you of all charges and conditions associated with your device/s, and include this information on your quote.

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 practitioner 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.

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, use the telephone, 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 under the program, you may be offered 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. These are not subsidised under the program and you will be responsible for the cost.

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, the program provides a subsidy towards the cost of the agreement and you may be required to pay an annual co-payment to your provider. 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 or postage of batteries and parts.

A maintenance agreement is much cheaper than paying for repairs and consumables yourself. For partially subsidised devices, the annual co-payment may be higher than for fully subsidised devices, and there may be other charges or conditions that your provider must specify in advance.

Replacements

If you lose your hearing device or it is damaged beyond repair, you need to contact your provider. You will need to complete a statutory declaration to explain how, when and where the device was lost or damaged. Your device will be replaced with the same device. If your device is no longer listed on our schedule of approved devices, it will be replaced with one of the same category and type.

You may be charged a replacement fee of around \$50.

If you have a partially subsidised device and seek to replace it like-for-like, you are responsible for any additional cost involved in purchasing this device. The program will subsidise the same amount as for a fully subsidised device and will not reimburse any additional cost. You can choose to have a partially subsidised device replaced with a fully subsidised device.

The program will not subsidise the replacement of a broken or lost battery recharger.

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

Warranties

Warranties can't replace, change or take away a consumer's basic rights. Under Australian consumer law, consumers are entitled to a repair, replacement, refund or cancellation if there's a problem with a product or service. These consumer rights:

- apply automatically
- continue for a reasonable time depending on the product or service.

These basic rights can last longer than a business or manufacturer's warranty.

Additional assistance for out-of-pocket costs

If you have purchased a partially subsidised device, you may be able to receive financial assistance through your private health insurance. Contact your health fund prior to deciding on a device to discuss possible rebates.

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 co-payment fees for fully subsidised devices.

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 prior approval from DVA to cover the cost. 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 DVA approval, you may need to pay the additional cost (i.e. the gap) for the hearing device. If you choose to enter into a maintenance agreement for your partially subsidised hearing device, you will need to pay the service provider the amount quoted for the maintenance agreement.

More detailed DVA specific information is available on the [DVA website](http://www.dva.gov.au) (www.dva.gov.au).

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
- a choice of hearing devices, including fully subsidised options
- be assured of the confidentiality of your personal information
- view or receive a copy of your test results/client record.

You are responsible for telling your practitioner 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 \(ACCC\)](http://www.accc.gov.au/consumers) website (www.accc.gov.au/consumers).

Service charter for clients

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

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
- ensuring hearing devices are high quality and approved by the TGA
- 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. Our [privacy notice page](#) explains how we manage the information we collect about you. 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](#) on 1300 363 992 or email enquiries@oaic.gov.au.

How you can help us to help you

- Talk to your provider promptly 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. Providers are required to have complaint procedures in place to address complaints.

All hearing practitioners providing services under the program must meet professional and ethical standards set out in a code of conduct. Complaints about the conduct of a specific audiologist or audiometrist can be made to the Hearing Professional Conduct and Complaints Body. For more information visit <https://hpccb.org.au>.

If your issues are unable to be resolved via the above, or you are not comfortable talking to your provider, you may raise your complaint with the department. 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.

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

- raise a complaint for a matter outside the scope of the program
- request a review or reconsideration if unsatisfied with our management of a complaint
- appeal a decision (where appropriate) through the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART), or take your complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

How to contact us

- email hearing@health.gov.au
- phone our contact centre directly on 1800 500 726 (8.30am to 5.00pm AEST and AEDT on standard business days) OR through the National Relay Service on 1800 555 727
- write to:

Hearing Services Program
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
Mail Drop Point 113
GPO Box 9848
Canberra ACT 2601

Health.gov.au

