



Health Care

Hearing Services

Purpose

This fact sheet outlines the arrangements for hearing services for eligible members of the veteran community. These arrangements include rehabilitation, including the fitting of a free hearing aid/device which meets the members individual clinical needs.

What are hearing services?

Hearing Services consist of hearing assessments, management and hearing rehabilitation, including the fitting of hearing device(s) where needed.

DVA's Hearing Arrangements

The Department of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) hearing services, which includes maintenance of hearing aids, are provided through the Office of Hearing Services (OHS) which is part of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

Free of Charge Hearing Aids are provided to meet your clinical need

Under the hearing arrangements, free top quality hearing aids are provided to the member to meet their assessed clinical need. These hearing aids are predominantly from what is known as "free to client" aids. This wide range of "free to client" hearing aids are high quality digital aids that include both in the ear and behind the ear styles. It is anticipated that hearing aids from this range will usually meet the individual clinical needs of veterans.

In October 2005, a number of changes were made to the range of "free to client" hearing aids through the OHS Program. A new agreement between the OHS and manufacturers of hearing devices was negotiated. Manufacturers who agreed to the new hearing arrangements provide higher minimum specifications in all hearing devices available on the "free to client"

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Free of Charge Hearing Aids are provided to meet your clinical need, *continued*

range of hearing aids, as well as additional features on the 'behind the ear' devices, including directional microphones and noise suppression.

These changes mean that eligible veterans, dependants, and war widows/widowers with hearing difficulties have access to current, proven hearing device technology, free of charge.

The special features included in the hearing aid provided to a veteran, depend upon the veteran's clinical needs and will be decided in discussion with the veteran's OHS hearing services provider.

Non-Standard Device

Occasionally, the situation may arise where a "free to client" device will not meet a veteran's clinical need and, therefore, will not provide a satisfactory rehabilitation outcome. If a hearing provider advises a veteran that a hearing aid from the "free to client" range cannot meet their clinical need, veterans should be strongly advised not to purchase a device from the "top up" range.

In these cases the veteran's hearing services provider is responsible for submitting an application to the OHS for the approval of a "non standard device". If the application shows sufficient clinical justification for a device other than one from the free to client range, this non standard device should then be fitted to the veteran, free of charge.

If veterans are placed in this situation they are strongly encouraged to contact their DVA office, as soon as possible, and the matter will be subsequently investigated with the OHS expeditiously.

Hearing Aids chosen by veterans beyond those necessary to meet clinical need

Veterans who prefer hearing aids with additional features beyond those necessary to meet their clinical need may choose hearing aids from the "top up" range. Unlike a hearing aid from the "free to client" range or a "non standard device" which meets clinical need, the features available in a "top up" device are not necessary for a successful rehabilitation outcome, though they may provide additional benefits.

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Hearing Aids chosen by veterans beyond those necessary to meet clinical need, *continued*

It is important to note that the Government will only pay for devices according to clinical need. These devices can be generally sourced from the “free to client” range. Where a veteran chooses a device that is not from the “free to client” range (ie from the “top up” range), the veteran is liable to pay the difference between the “free to client” device and their preferred choice from the “top up” range. If veterans are subsequently unhappy with the purchase of a “top up” device they can return it to the provider, however they could be charged a small fee. Veterans should check this with their services provider.

IN SUMMARY:

If a hearing aid from the “free to client” range meets a veteran’s clinical need there is no cost to the veteran.

If none of the hearing aids from the “free to client” range meet the veteran’s clinical need, the veteran should ask their hearing provider to seek approval from OHS for a “non standard” hearing aid. Where the OHS approves this “non standard” device there is no cost to the veteran. OHS audiologists may also suggest alternatives to the provider which they believe are suitable.

Please note there should be no cost to a veteran for a hearing aid that is assessed as meeting clinical need.

The only reason a veteran should make a contribution towards the cost of their hearing aid is where they make the decision that they want a hearing aid with additional features that are above and beyond what is required to meet their assessed clinical need.

If a veteran is unhappy or uncomfortable with the outcome of a visit to a hearing aid provider, they should contact the Primary Care Policy Group in the Department on (02)6289 6243. They will liaise with the OHS to address any issues.

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Clinical Need

Clinical hearing need is identified from a thorough comprehensive assessment of a veteran's hearing. It takes into account:

- hearing test results (severity and configuration of loss);
- the nature and extent of communication difficulties and usual environments;
- the shape, size and health of ears;
- physical co-ordination;
- other physical conditions eg. blindness, mental and physical ability to manage different device styles; and
- capabilities of proven hearing aid technology.

Clinical hearing needs shape a veteran's individual rehabilitation plan. This plan incorporates a set of realistic negotiated goals for a person, as well as appropriate advice and counselling. Such plans also include the prescription, selection and fitting of suitable hearing devices if required. This rehabilitation package is structured based on the individual's clinical hearing needs and aims to provide a quality hearing outcome.

Who is eligible?

Gold Card Holders – People who have a Repatriation Health Card for all conditions are eligible for treatment of hearing problems where their doctor considers such treatment to be clinically necessary. Hearing aids are provided under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program at no cost. DVA will pay the annual maintenance fee for any hearing aid/s that are provided under this Program. This Program does **not** include top up devices.

White Card Holders – People who have a Repatriation Health Card for specific conditions, and have either an accepted disability that relates to hearing loss, or if their need for hearing services is due to the effects of malignant cancer, are eligible for treatment of hearing problems where their doctor considers such treatment to be clinically necessary. DVA will pay the standard annual maintenance fee for any hearing aid/s that are provided under this Program. This Program does **not** include top up devices.

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Pensioner Concession Card or ***Dependant*** of a veteran – If a person has a Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) or is a Dependant of an eligible veteran, they can also access the Australian Government Hearing Services Program at no cost. However, DVA does not pay the annual maintenance fee for any hearing aid/s that are provided under this arrangement.

How do I access Hearing Services?

All DVA clients who require hearing services are referred directly to the OHS by their Local Medical Officer (a general practitioner registered with DVA). The LMO can arrange for a hearing assessment by completing a form for *Application for Hearing Services* and submitting it to the OHS. The OHS will process the application and issue eligible beneficiaries with a voucher to obtain hearing services as well as a Directory of Service Providers.

The Directory of Service Providers contains more than 200 accredited providers who will accept the voucher and provide a hearing assessment free of charge. If the OHS hearing services provider ascertains that a hearing aid is necessary, a free aid that meets a veterans clinical need will be provided from either the free to client or non-standard device range of aids. The veteran will also be provided with the support necessary to operate the hearing aid and this package of assistance should provide a satisfactory hearing outcome. DVA will also pay for the annual maintenance fee and batteries associated with these hearing aids for all Gold Card holders and for those White Card holders who have an accepted disability associated with hearing loss.

Veterans and their hearing services provider

It is important that veterans liaise closely with their hearing services providers at all times in order to ensure that the hearing aids provided meet their clinical need. If the veteran is dissatisfied, or is experiencing difficulties with their hearing aid/device, they should be encouraged to go back to their hearing services provider to discuss their concerns. It may be that their hearing requirements have changed and need re assessing or that their current hearing aids/device needs adjusting or re fitting.

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Tinnitus

Veterans, who have concerns pertaining to both tinnitus and hearing loss, are encouraged to contact their OHS hearing services provider to discuss these concerns in order to reach a satisfactory solution.

In situations where an eligible veteran suffers from tinnitus only their doctor or audiologist may prescribe a device known as a tinnitus masker. If prescribed, a tinnitus masker can be provided under DVA's Rehabilitation Appliances Program following a successful trial of the device. Also, a veteran's doctor or audiologist can refer a veteran for tinnitus management if necessary.

DVA does not currently pay private audiologists for tinnitus retraining or management programs, such as Neuromonics or Tinnitus Retraining Therapy.

Other fact sheets

Other fact sheets related to this topic include:

- *Index – Health Services for Veterans: DVA 13*
- *Repatriation Health Card - For All Conditions (Gold): HSV 60*
- *Repatriation Health Card - For Specific Conditions (White): HSV 61*
- *United Kingdom Veterans: HSV 62*
- *Other Commonwealth and Allied Veterans (excluding United Kingdom): HSV 63*
- *Community Transport: HSV 123*
- *Private Car, Bus, Train, Tram and Ferry Travel: HSV 124*
- *Taxi and Air Travel: HSV 125*

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More information

All DVA fact sheets are available on request from any DVA office or on the DVA web site at www.dva.gov.au/factsheets/default.htm.

If you need more information about this topic, contact your nearest DVA office or visit the DVA web site at www.dva.gov.au.

DVA telephone numbers:

General Enquiries	133 254
Connects callers from anywhere to their capital city State office.	
Non-metropolitan Callers	1800 555 254
Connects non-metropolitan callers only to the capital city State office.	
Dialling from interstate	1300 13 1945
Allows callers to contact any State office via a series of voice prompts.	
Local Veterans' Affairs Network (VAN) offices	1300 55 1918
Connects callers with their nearest VAN office.	

Note: *If you use a mobile phone, calls may be more costly. You are advised to use a normal phone (i.e. a landline phone) when ringing these numbers.

You can also contact OHS about hearing aids on free call number **1800 500 726**. Users of TTY equipment should call **1800 500 496**.