

Hearing loss treatment

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Introduction

Hearing loss refers to a reduced level of hearing. Comcare is liable for medical treatment for hearing loss that is:

- reasonable for the employee to obtain in the circumstances
- obtained in relation to a compensable condition,
- classified as medical treatment under the SRC Act, and
- appropriate in cost.

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Types of hearing loss and treatment options

Hearing loss can occur in one ear or both ears, vary in degree of severity, occur in all age groups and be reversible, temporary or permanent. Hearing loss can occur suddenly or gradually, depending on the cause.

Generally, hearing loss is classified into three types:

- **conductive** - can be acquired or congenital and is caused by blockage or damage in the outer and/or middle ear. Conductive hearing loss leads to a loss of loudness and can often be helped by medical treatment, surgery or hearing aids, depending on the cause.

- **sensorineural** can be acquired or congenital and is caused by damage to, or malfunction of, the cochlea (sensory part) or the hearing nerve (neural part). Sensorineural hearing loss leads to a loss of loudness as well as a lack of clarity. Sensorineural hearing loss is generally treated with hearing aids. Individuals with severe hearing loss who have not had success with hearing aids may be appropriate candidates for cochlear implants, electronic devices that directly stimulate the hearing nerve.
- **mixed** – hearing loss with a combination of conductive and sensorineural causes.

In addition, some individuals experience tinnitus which is a sensation of noise when no external sound is actually present, such as ringing in the ears or another noise pattern. The underlying cause of tinnitus can be treated medically or surgically when it is identifiable. When the underlying cause of tinnitus is not identifiable, treatment is focused on helping the patient learn to cope with tinnitus noise, such as by using other low level noises to block out or 'mask' the tinnitus.

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Assessing whether recommended hearing aids are reasonable

Claims for hearing aids should be made using the [Hearing Aid Request Form](#) and completed by an audiologist, audiometrist or ENT surgeon. Employees can claim compensation for hearing aids under the SRC Act regardless of whether they are also eligible to receive hearing aids under the Australian Government's Hearing Service Program or another scheme.

However, Comcare considers that devices on the [Australian Government Hearing Services Program's](#) schedule of 'free-to-client' devices are generally reasonable and adequate for meeting employee's basic hearing needs, such as to communicate with small groups in quiet environments or to hear the television. For this reason, Comcare requires clinical justification for any hearing aids recommended that are more expensive than those on the schedule of free-to-client devices.

It may be reasonable for employees with more complex hearing needs, such as the need to work in an open plan office or participate in meetings, to benefit from hearing aids with more sophisticated noise eliminating features.

If a treating practitioner indicates that there is not a device on the free-to-client schedule that could meet an employee's needs and recommends more sophisticated hearing aids, the Claims Manager (CM) should assess whether the

recommended aids are reasonable based on whether any extra features are necessary to meet the employee's reasonable hearing goals.

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Determining the appropriate cost of hearing aids

At least one quote for the cost of recommended hearing aids should be obtained before liability is accepted.

If a CM is not satisfied that a quote for hearing aids is the appropriate cost they should obtain a competitive quote from another hearing aid provider the employee could access.

A CM can request a competitive quote for hearing aids that would meet an employee's needs from another provider directly. However, the CM should first telephone the employee to obtain their permission to send the completed hearing aid request form, including any test results to the other provider to obtain a competitive quote.

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Repair or replace hearing aids

Comcare expects damaged or malfunctioning hearing aids to be repaired under warranty when this is possible.

Comcare may pay for the repair or replacement of damaged or malfunctioning hearing aids not under warranty, depending on which option is the best value investment towards meeting the employee's hearing needs.

Comcare will only fund the replacement of working hearing aids where there is clinical justification that the replacement aids will provide significant additional benefit towards meeting the employee's hearing goals.

Comcare may fund the replacement of lost or damaged hearing aids after it has received a signed statutory declaration explaining how the hearing aids were lost or damaged.

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