



# HEARING MATTERS AUSTRALIA

*Support from real life experience*

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## Information Sheets

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## Information Sheet Number 16

### **HEARING AID CHECKLIST FOR CONSUMERS**

Hearing Matters Australia is a volunteer organisation dedicated to assisting hearing impaired people and their families. Visit our website to access further Information Sheets and Membership Application Forms.

#### **The First Step**

Admitting you have a hearing loss and should do something about it can be a stressful experience. It is hard to admit that there is a problem. It is hard to acknowledge that it will never go away – people hope to wake up one day and all will be well, or maybe there will be a magic “cure” soon. Many people insist that they cannot hear because everyone else ‘mumbles’.

The fact is that hearing loss is one of the most common disability issues in Australia. Hearing loss can range from mild to profound to total deafness. It can have many causes. It can happen at any time in life. Once gone, your hearing will not come back.

However, it is possible to learn how to manage a hearing loss to minimise its impact on the lifestyle of you and your family

Alternatively, you can refuse to do anything, make life miserable and stressful for yourself and your family and ultimately become more and more isolated and frustrated.

Only YOU can make the necessary decision and commitment, but YOU ARE NOT ALONE. With the help of technology, professional help and the support of family and friends and organisations such as Hearing Matters Australia, you can take charge of managing your hearing loss most effectively.

### **NOW WHAT TO DO**

1. Go to your doctor and see if there is any medical reason why you have noticed a loss of hearing. If recommended, have your ears professionally syringed. Do NOT attempt to clean them out yourself or you may cause other damage. Visit a specialist if referred, but do not accept any statement that there is 'nothing' that can be done.
2. Become an informed consumer and find out what services are available to you in Australia, and what you can do to help yourself. Contact HMA by mail, phone or email as above, or in person at our Sydney Hearing Information Centre and we can help you free of charge.
3. Have a professional hearing assessment by a qualified Audiologist or Audiometrist. Ask for a copy of your audiogram, which is a graph showing your unique hearing pattern – what sounds you have lost, and by how much. Individuals have their own hearing pattern and measurements of frequencies lost. Do NOT settle for short cut assessments in shopping centres or noisy environments or a test carried out superficially.
4. Sit down with your family and discuss the situation and its implications for the whole family now that you know the exact level of your hearing loss and what has been recommended to help you.

### **HOW CAN YOU GET A PROFESSIONAL HEARING ASSESSMENT AND HEARING AIDS IF RECOMMENDED?**

#### **Government Hearing Services Program**

This program entitles you to hearing assessments, hearing aids, fitting and rehabilitation services, batteries and maintenance of your aids at no cost other than small annual fee for the batteries and repairs. The aids you are given are

equal in quality to those on the commercial market. The service provided should be by a qualified professional.

If you are eligible for the Government Program (see HMA Information Sheet 3 *“How to get a Hearing Aid”*) you can apply to the office of Hearing Services for a voucher entitling you to the services described above. You will be sent printed information telling you about the services and where you can choose to go and get your aid. Read this information carefully – it outlines your rights and responsibilities under the Government program.

### **Purchasing Commercially**

If you are not eligible for the Government Program, you have two ways of getting a professional hearing assessment.

- a) Check if there is an Audiology Department in a major hospital near you and make an appointment for a free assessment. In some cases, the Audiology Department will also provide hearing aids for purchase if recommended, but in most cases, you will be given your audiogram and told the recommendation and it will be left to you to choose a private provider to purchase the aids and have them fitted.
- b) Go to an audiologist in private practice or commercial provider convenient to you for both the hearing assessment and aids if necessary.

### **Other**

If you are not eligible for the Government Program and unable to afford to purchase aids commercially, you should still get the hearing assessment as described above at a nearby major hospital free of charge. Then get HMA Information Sheet 3 *“How to Get a Hearing Aid”* to give you further information. The very limited avenues available to assist in this regard are means tested.

## **WHAT TO DO IF HEARING AIDS ARE RECOMMENDED**

### **Prepare Yourself**

If you accept a recommendation to have one or two hearing aids, think carefully about whether or not you are prepared to do the necessary work to learn to use a hearing aid properly. Hearing aids are not little miracles. They are very complex high-tech devices customised for your needs and requiring

you to learn how to use them effectively. If you just put them in the drawer without making a real effort, you have wasted time and money and achieved nothing. You would not buy a car and then leave it in the garage because you were too stubborn to learn to drive. If you want the benefits, you have to do the work!

- Give careful consideration to what you expect a hearing aid to do for you and about your own particular needs. Do you go to business meetings? Do you like to go to the theatre, to movies, listen to music, watch TV? Do your work present special problems? Accept that no hearing aid can return your hearing to what it was, but, well fitted and properly used, it can make your life as nearly normal as possible.
- Weigh up your feelings about the cosmetic appearance of a hearing aid and its technical benefits for you. If you really worry about your hearing aid being seen and letting people know you have a hearing loss, have you considered that they probably know anyway because of your confusion and mistakes due to unheard or misheard conversation? Do you realise that the smaller the aid, the greater the inflexibility in its technical benefits? Are your fingers too large or stiff to handle the very small in-the-ear aids?
- Calculate just how much you can afford to pay for hearing aids if you are not eligible for the Government Program. DO you really need some of the added facilities that are a feature in the top-of-the-range and therefore most expensive aids? The best aid for you is the one that meets your assessed hearing needs and provides you with whatever you need to continue with your present lifestyle. The 'best' hearing aid on the market is the one which best meets your tested hearing needs and suits your particular lifestyle. It is not necessarily the most expensive or the latest model.

### **Choose appropriate professional assistance**

- First make sure that your chosen provider is a qualified professional – hearing assessment should be done by either an Audiologist (University Trained) or an Audiometrist (Technically Trained). Sometimes a provider business is under the supervision of a qualified professional, but others may assist with aspects of the work. If you are not sure that you are

being tested and are in the hands of a qualified person, check and insist upon the appropriate person.

- Take someone with you to ensure that you have heard all the things said in the office and responded accordingly. Clarify any points you do not fully understand at the time. Make sure you understand the conditions of purchase, warranty, follow-up, maintenance agreements, trials periods, etc.
- Make sure you participate actively in discussions with your provider on your lifestyle and what you expect from a hearing aid in various situations you may encounter. Listen to the provider's comments about how realistic your expectations may be and recommendations about appropriate hearing aids based on your hearing needs. Ask about the benefits, limitations, costs, etc. of any hearing aids recommended. Do not be sidetracked by advertising about hearing aids, which may have special features, which you do not require, or advertising, which makes dishonest claims. Discuss your wish to have a Telecoil fitted into your hearing aid and indeed consider making your final choice of model based on its ability to incorporate one. Telecoils are put into hearing aids free of charge at the time of choosing your aid.
- Ask about a trial period for the aids you choose – the more the aid costs, the more you should insist – with an understanding under what conditions this trial will be provided. If you are not happy about the aid provided after giving it a fair trial, take it back and once more discuss a realistic approach to your hearing needs with your provider based in the experience you gained from the trial.
- If you are getting your aid under the government program, you should be offered free of charge a model of hearing aid which properly meets your hearing needs whatever they may be. You may also be offered the opportunity to 'top-up' the aid with extras, which you will have to purchase yourself. Remember these extra features will not make your hearing any better. They may offer you more convenience or something for a special occasion. Ask the provider to describe the benefits and limitations of any such feature. Consider whether or not you really want these additional features and whether you can afford them. Remember to ask the provider the conditions regarding repairs and maintenance of

top-up aids. Choosing to have 'top-up's is your decision as the consumer and should not be left to the provider who is selling it to you.

### **When you get your hearing aid**

- When you go to have your aid fitted, make sure it feels as comfortable as possible and that you can insert it into your ear properly – make sure you understand its workings and all about batteries – again take someone with you if you feel happier, and ask for appropriate information in writing to take home where you can refer to is as required.
- Do not walk out of the provider's office into a busy street with your hearing aid turned on and receive a blast of noise that you vow never to use the aid again. Take your aid home and practise with it in familiar situations a little bit at a time, gradually stretching the types of sound you may hear, the number of people around you, the length of time you can properly concentrate, the ease with which you can handle the aid, maintain it, etc. Your provider should outline such an approach to you. (Also see HMA Information Sheet 4 "*Getting the Best from your Hearing Aid*")
- Make a note about any problems or questions you want to ask and, on your follow-up visit to your provider, make sure you ask and receive answers.
- Different providers will have different follow-up procedures, but regardless, go back to the provider anytime you have a real problem with the physical or technical aspects of the hearing aid – it will do no one any good if you just throw it in the drawer. A provider cannot be expected to fix something he or she knows nothing about.
- Do not make a final purchase or sign off on a Government Program voucher unless you are reasonably satisfied.

**YOU ARE NOW AN INFORMED CONSUMER**