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## Fully or partially subsidised hearing devices

Under the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (the program), you will be offered the option of being fitted with a hearing device if a hearing assessment identifies you have a hearing loss and a hearing device may assist you. You will be given a recommendation for a fully subsidised hearing device, and may also be offered the option of purchasing a partially subsidised hearing device. These devices have been approved by the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (the program).

### What is a fully subsidised hearing device?

There is a wide range of fully subsidised digital hearing devices available under the program, made by leading manufacturers. These hearing devices are provided at no cost to you by a contracted service provider (service provider) and contain a range of beneficial features to help you manage your hearing loss. Fully subsidised devices must meet, and often exceed, the performance and technical requirements prescribed by the program which are designed to help appropriately manage the effects of most people's hearing loss.

### What is a partially subsidised hearing device?

You may be given the option to purchase a partially subsidised hearing device, which may have more technological features to suit individual lifestyle choices. In this case, the program contributes the amount that would have been paid for a fully subsidised hearing device to your service provider, and you pay the additional amount quoted for the hearing device (i.e. the "gap").

### Do I have to buy partially subsidised hearing devices?

No. All hearing devices provided under the program are of high quality. Purchasing a partially subsidised hearing device is a personal choice, and you are under no obligation to do so.

Partially subsidised hearing devices contain additional features beyond those generally required to help you manage the effects of your hearing loss. These features could include wireless connectivity, more hearing device channels and more automated features, among others.

You should be aware that there are a number of fully subsidised hearing devices available which also have these features. Hearing device manufacturers produce 'families' of devices, incorporating a wide range of features and technology at different price points. As hearing device technology has continued to advance, features previously available only in partially subsidised hearing aids are now more likely to also be available in fully subsidised hearing devices.

It should not be automatically assumed that a partially subsidised hearing device will help you reach a better outcome any more than a fully subsidised hearing device might. Recent research [\[1\]\[2\]](#) has found that older adults with mild to moderate sensorineural hearing loss obtained as much improvement in speech understanding, listening effort and quality of life with the equivalent of fully subsidised hearing devices as they did with the equivalent of partially subsidised hearing devices. More [information about these studies can be found on the program's website](#).

Partially subsidised hearing devices can be very expensive (as a result of research, marketing, overhead and manufacturing costs, which are passed on to the consumer). If a partially subsidised hearing device has been recommended to you, you should ask your service provider the reasons for the recommendation and consider if the benefit you may gain from the device is worth the price.

## **The placebo effect and hearing aids**

The placebo effect has also been found to exist with hearing aids, where sometimes a person's condition improves because they have an expectation that a particular treatment will be helpful. There have been a handful of studies [\[3\]\[4\]](#) into the existence of a placebo effect when hearing devices are fitted, which have found that people tend to report a more positive rating of a particular hearing device when they expect that it will be better.

## **How much do partially subsidised hearing devices cost?**

The additional cost of purchasing a partially subsidised hearing device varies and can be substantial, depending on the price set by your service provider.

If you choose to purchase a partially subsidised hearing device, ensure you understand how much the program will contribute towards the devices, and how much you will contribute towards the devices. Your service provider must supply you with a written quote that includes the device details, all ongoing costs, and information on maintenance and repair costs.

You should ask your service provider about the terms and conditions of purchasing the device (such as the length of the trial period if this is available, any administration fees that apply if you return the hearing devices, and the cost of a maintenance agreement, which is likely to be higher than that for fully subsidised hearing devices).

## **What if another service provider has a better price for a partially subsidised hearing device?**

If you are considering purchasing a partially subsidised hearing device, you can ask your provider for a copy of your hearing results (including your audiogram) and a quote for the device recommended to you. This quote should include details about the device model and style, as well as the full price of the device and information about any additional costs for ongoing maintenance and repairs. You can use this information to ask for quotes for the same device (or an equivalent device) from other service providers, to compare your options.

If you find the same hearing devices available from another service provider at a lower price, you may wish to negotiate the price with your current service provider. Alternatively, you can obtain a quote from the other service provider and decide whether to transfer to them.

## Can I claim a rebate if I purchase a partially subsidised hearing device?

The program cannot fund or reimburse any gap payments clients make to purchase a partially subsidised device. However, depending on your individual circumstances there may be options available to you outside of the program to receive assistance with these costs.

If you have private health insurance, you should check with your fund to determine the degree of coverage you may be able to receive towards the cost of purchasing hearing devices.

### References

[1] Johnson et al., 2015 [‘Does premium listening require premium hearing devices?’](#) International Adult Aural Rehabilitation Conference, Florida.

[2] Cox et al., 2014. [‘Impact of advanced hearing aid technology on speech understanding for older listeners with mild to moderate, adult-onset, sensorineural hearing loss’](#), Gerontology, Vol. 60, No. 6.

[3] Dawes et al., 2013. [‘Placebo effects in hearing-aid trials are reliable’](#), International Journal of Audiology, Vol. 52, No. 7.

[4] Dawes et al., 2011. [‘The placebo effect and the influence of participant expectation on hearing aid trials’](#), Ear and Hearing, Vol. 32, No. 6.