

AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH DEVICES

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook updates Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures in providing audiology and speech devices for Veteran beneficiaries.
2. **SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This VHA Handbook updates current procedures.
3. **RELATED ISSUES:** VHA Directive 1173, and VHA Handbooks 1173.1 through 1173.15.
4. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Chief Consultant, Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service Strategic Healthcare Group (113), is responsible for the contents of this VHA Handbook. Questions may be referred to 202-273-8515.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** VHA Manual M-2, Part IX, Chapter 7 is rescinded.
6. **RECERTIFICATION:** This document is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of July 2005.

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Under Secretary for Health

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AUDIOLOGY AND SPEECH DEVICES

1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook establishes uniform and consistent Department policy and procedures for providing audiology and speech devices to Veteran beneficiaries.

2. SCOPE

a. Hearing Aids can only be issued to eligible patients in accordance with existing Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regulations, 38 C.F.R., 17.149. Eligibility for a hearing aid will be verified through Remote Order Entry System (ROES) by the Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic before the veteran is scheduled for a hearing aid evaluation (HAE) exam. The Audiology Clinic will prepare the ROES automated form, VA Form 10-2477a, Hearing Aid Order and Issuance Form, and schedule the veteran for an exam.

b. All requests for hearing aids will be referred directly to a VA medical center's Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic or to the nearest Independent Hearing Aid Dispensing Program.

c. If the Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic is unable to verify the veteran's eligibility in ROES, the veteran will be referred to Health Administration Service (HAS) to update the patient's file. If the Veteran's file is current and the Veteran does not have continuing eligibility, Audiology and Speech Pathology will request, through ROES, an eligibility determination by the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service (PSAS).

3. DEFINITIONS

a. **Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic.** An Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic is a VA or contract facility that is specially staffed and equipped to provide audiological and speech services.

(1) **Independent Hearing Aid Dispensing Programs.** Independent Hearing Aid Dispensing Programs are designated by the Director, Audiology and Speech Pathology Service, and provide services in a defined geographical area (generally the primary service area of the medical center). These services include examinations for compensation and pension claims, assessment of social efficiency, audiological and hearing aid evaluations, the provision of hearing aids and other supplementary devices associated with hearing health care, special medical-diagnostic evaluations, and aural rehabilitation. These clinics maintain a stock of hearing aids and accessories which are furnished and replenished through a centralized distribution program by the Denver Distributing Center (DDC), Denver, CO.

(2) **Basic Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinics (satellite clinics).** Basic Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinics (satellite clinics) provide services for patients from a more restricted geographical area. These have a smaller audiology and/or speech pathology staff and usually serve only inpatients and other Veterans for whom travel might be a hardship. Veterans who require special procedures, which cannot be provided at these clinics, are referred to Independent Hearing Aid Dispensing Programs.

- b. **Hearing Aid Evaluation (HAE).** A HAE is a procedure used by an audiologist to determine the extent of hearing impairment and the selection of an appropriate corrective instrument.
- c. **Cochlear Implant.** A Cochlear implant is a surgically implanted device which stimulates the auditory cochlea directly. The unit consists of a speech processor which stimulates the electrodes which have been implanted into the cochlea. *NOTE: This item is only implanted at authorized medical centers.*
- d. **Assistive Listening Devices.** Assistive listening devices are items used to assist a person to hear or amplify sound. Telephone amplifiers, personal amplifiers, infrared television amplifiers are examples of these devices.
- e. **Assistive Device.** Examples of assistive devices used in daily living activities are: telephone or door bell signaling devices, telecaption television decoders, bed vibrators, strobe lights.
- f. **Artificial Larynx.** An artificial larynx is an electronic device which provides external vibration for phonation.

4. REFERRALS

The professional management of each patient will be determined by the Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology at the VA medical center that provides the patient care. The Chief of the Audiology and Speech Pathology Service determines whether the veteran should be referred to an Independent Hearing Aid Dispensing Program, referred to another Audiology Clinic, receive an itinerant visit by a VA audiologist, or referred to a private audiologist.

- a. When a Veteran is referred to another VA medical center, the referring station will send the veteran's audiological file, a VA Form 10-10EZ, Application for Medical Benefits, and any other pertinent data necessary to evaluate the Veteran. The medical center that will be examining the veteran schedules the Veteran's appointments and issues the appropriate hearing aid.
- b. Referrals to a private audiologist will be coordinated through HAS and by the Chief, Audiology and Speech Service. After the private audiologist examines the veteran, the private audiologist sends the ear impression, the results of the hearing aid evaluation, and a recommendation as to the make and model of the hearing aid the veteran requires, to the referring VA Audiology and Speech Pathology Service. The VA Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic will have the ear mold made, or order the custom hearing aid from the DDC, and return the hearing aid (and ear mold if it is an over-the-ear hearing aid) to the private hearing aid center for fitting.
- c. **Non-Contract Hearing Aids.** All orders for non-contract hearing aids will be ordered by the PSAS when it is determined by the VA audiologist that a contract aid is not appropriate for the veteran's medical needs.

d. **Foreign Countries.** When an eligible Veteran resides outside of the continental limits of the United States (U.S.), current model hearing aids may be furnished in accordance with the provision of Handbook 1173.2.

5. EAR MOLDS (ACOUSTIC COUPLERS)

The type and style of ear mold will be determined by the Audiology Clinic issuing the hearing aid.

a. Ear impressions must be taken in order to make a custom ear mold. The impressions will be taken by an audiologist. When non-VA facilities are being used, the audiologist will take the ear impression and return it to the VA Audiology and Speech Pathology Service for fabrication.

b. Custom ear molds are fabricated from the impressions by a commercial source.

c. In emergency situations, temporary ear inserts may be fabricated or stock ear inserts may be used by the Audiology Clinic in the evaluation but must be replaced with a permanent custom ear mold at a later date.

d. In cases where the Veteran is not seen in a VA Audiology Clinic, the type and style of ear mold will be left to the discretion of the service provider.

6. PROCEDURES FOR ISSUANCE OF BATTERIES

a. **Authorized Devices.** Batteries may only be provided for use in authorized hearing aids or electronic devices.

(1) Hearing aids or electronic devices that were not provided by VA may be authorized for batteries if VA determines that the item is medically necessary and appropriate for the eligible veteran's disability. Hearing aids will be authorized by Audiology and Speech Pathology Service using the ROES Hearing Aid Registration option. Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service will authorize electronic devices using the ROES Assistive Device Registration option.

(2) The Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology Service will authorize hearing aids using ROES automated form, VA Form 10-2477a and electronically transmit them to the DDC. PSAS will authorize other electronic devices using the ROES Assistive Device Registration option.

b. **Batteries for Veterans.** Batteries will normally be furnished upon request to eligible veterans using hearing aids or other medically prescribed electronic devices.

(1) Beneficiaries who are Enrolled

(a) **Veterans Residing in the U.S., U.S. Territorial Possessions, or Puerto Rico.** These Veterans will order replacement batteries using VA Form 2346, Veterans Request for Hearing Aid Batteries, which is enclosed with each issue of batteries shipped from DDC. If a Veteran loses the form, ordering of batteries may be made by an electronic mail message, postcard, letter, or by contacting the Audiology and Speech Pathology Service.

(b) **Veterans Residing or Traveling in Foreign Countries.** Direct mail order issues will be made through the local Consular Office of the U.S. State Department to these Veterans. VA

Form 2346 will be provided with each issue and the veteran will use this form to request additional batteries. The Veteran must mail the form in an envelope with the postage of the foreign country affixed when mailed through their postal service to the DDC.

(c) Allied Veterans Residing in the U.S. or Puerto Rico. Batteries will be provided as in subparagraph 6a(1)(a). A copy of the letter of authorization from the allied government concerned will be on file at the DDC to indicate eligibility for continuing service. If the allied Veteran moves from outside the U.S., U.S. territorial possessions, or Puerto Rico, service will be terminated by the DDC.

(d) Veterans in Receipt of Aid and Attendance or Housebound Benefits. Batteries will be provided as in subparagraph 6a(1)(a). However, as Veterans' eligibility status is subject to change due to income limitations, annual checks should be made to verify current eligibility. Termination of aid and attendance or housebound status will be reported to the DDC by the Audiology and Speech Pathology Service.

(e) Inpatients and Outpatients will be furnished batteries by the Audiology and Speech Pathology Service or the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service which will order the batteries using the ROES Battery Order option.

(2) **Batteries for Clinics.** Stocks of batteries will not normally be carried by field facilities for issuance to beneficiaries except in Audiology Clinics where a 90-day stock of batteries is authorized for hearing aid and artificial larynx fittings and for initial issuance of new instruments. Upon issuance of the device, the Veteran will be provided a 4-week supply of batteries. Bulk replenishment for the Audiology and Speech Pathology Clinic will be made by using Battery Stock Order Option in ROES.

(3) **Battery Issuance and Usage.** Quantities of batteries furnished to all eligible beneficiaries will normally be based upon an adequate supply and the following criteria:

(a) Monaural Usage. The maximum number of batteries determined necessary for the operation of one, or the alternate operation of the two authorized hearing aids, for the hours per day and days per week that the beneficiary states the aid(s) are used.

(b) Binaural Usage. Battery issues will be adjusted as required to operate both instruments simultaneously.

(c) Artificial Larynx Usage. The number of batteries provided will be based upon the manufacturer's recommendations and history of beneficiary usage pending the completion of studies relative to power requirements.

(d) Other Electronic Devices. Supplies will be based on battery drain information and history of beneficiary usage.

(e) Excessive Battery Usage. Where there are indications of unusual battery requirement, or a beneficiary indicates that the number of batteries is inadequate, the local Audiology Clinic will be contacted and asked to review the matter with the Veteran.

7. SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION AIDS

a. **Artificial Larynxes.** Artificial larynxes, regardless of type, will not be issued to an eligible veteran until it has been certified by a speech pathologist that speech without the use of a mechanical device is not feasible. *NOTE: A limited stock of artificial larynxes for issuance may be kept on hand in the Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service or the Audiology and Speech Pathology Service.*

b. **Communication and Assistive Listening Devices and Assistive Devices.**

(1) Prescriptions and requests for special function and/or communication electronic devices will be developed by the audiologist or speech pathologist. The special needs of each patient will be documented to clearly establish that the special function device provides superior performance over any of the more common and conventional appliances.

(2) Telecaption television decoders and other assistive listening devices to overcome the handicap of deafness may be provided to Veterans who are profoundly deaf and entitled to compensation on account of a hearing impairment. Veterans who are rated 80 percent or more service connected for a hearing impairment are generally considered profoundly deaf. *NOTE: This should not be confused with all assistive devices which are commonly used in auditory rehabilitation which take the place of, or are used in conjunction with, a hearing aid, e.g., telephone amplifiers, amplified headsets, etc., which may be provided to eligible Veterans.*

8. REPLACEMENT

a. Hearing aids, assistive listening devices, and artificial larynxes will be replaced when the instrument proves to be ineffective, irreparable, or the veteran's medical condition has changed and a different device is needed. Devices will not be replaced because of age or a new make or model is available.

b. Devices may be replaced if the item was destroyed or lost due to circumstances beyond the control of the veteran. If negligence or willful action is suspected, the Chief, Audiology and Speech Pathology Service will determine whether a replacement may be issued, and depending upon the circumstances, VHA Headquarters may be consulted for an opinion.

9. SPARES

a. **Hearing Aids.** Upon request, veterans who have continuing eligibility may be issued a spare hearing aid if the initial hearing aid has been used successfully on a continuing basis. Binaural hearing aids are to be considered as a single unit. A veteran who has a binaural aid may be issued a second binaural unit as a spare.

b. **Other Devices.** Spare assistive listening devices, assistive devices, or artificial larynxes will not normally be provided.