

Chapter 313

Audiology and Hearing Aid Services

Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Policy and Procedures Manual

Section I. Definitions

Section II: Eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation Services Based on Hearing Loss

To be determined eligible for DVR services based on hearing loss, the consumer must meet all basic conditions of eligibility outlined in Chapter 203, Section III. The following are the requirements for determining eligibility based on hearing loss or a related diagnosis that may be mitigated by hearing aid or audiology services. Also noted below are the required processes and conditions for basing eligibility on a hearing loss or related diagnosis.

To be considered eligible based on hearing loss or related diagnosis, the applicant must have an audiogram that is less than one year old. The applicant is also required to complete the Workplace Communication Assessment Tool (See Attachment A.). The assessment will help the counselor identify areas of function loss and barriers to employment.

To be determined eligible based on hearing loss the applicant must have either:

- At least 40 decibel loss in the better ear unaided, reference ANSI (American National Standards institute), PTA (Pure Tone Average). To find the pure tone average take the average of the 3 most severe consecutive decibel scores from the person's audiogram or;
- At least 30-39 decibel loss unaided reference, ANSI, PTA in the more useful ear with at least one of the following:
 - Speech discrimination less than 75 percent, or;
 - Statement from licensed Audiologist or Ear, Nose, Throat (ENT) Otolaryngologist indicating progressive loss of 10 decibel or more, with the person in good health (no colds/flu symptoms) at the time of audiology testing.

An applicant may also be determined eligible based on a diagnosis of Meniere's disease, vertigo, and tinnitus. This is because these conditions can affect an individual's ability to hear and communicate in an employment setting. Hearing aids and audiology services can mitigate these issues and reduce the impact of these conditions.

An applicant can also be found eligible for services based on one side hearing loss if that hearing loss is severe/profound and a hearing aid will not be effective for that ear. If they rely on the good ear to communicate, they may benefit from hearing aid and audiology services if:

- They provide an audiogram that is less than a year old showing a one-sided loss of 80 decibel loss or greater in the worse ear.
- Based on the Workplace Communication Assessment Tool, the counselor determines the consumer has significant functional barriers to employment.

When determining eligibility based on hearing loss or a related diagnosis, DVR counselors are encouraged to consult with the VR Deaf Services Coordinator or a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf if they have questions or need assistance in interpreting audiological assessments.

Section III: Hearing Aid and Audiology Services

- A. To be determined eligible and receive hearing aid services, an applicant must have an audiogram that is less than twelve months old. For audiogram testing and hearing aid services, we strongly recommend that a certified Audiologist be used based on their educational training background for this specialized field of knowledge, and licensure with the Vermont Secretary of State’s Office of Public Regulation, <https://sos.vermont.gov/opr/>, (under Audiologist listing). If an audiologist is not available locally for a consumer, the counselor can refer them to licensed hearing instrument specialist or dispenser.

Guidance

Spending Guidelines: Insurance typically will cover audiology exams annually/every 12 months, with and without Primary Care referral, depending on the insurance carrier. If the consumer does not have insurance, the DVR counselor can provide funds towards an audiology exam and hearing aid test.

End of Guidance

- B. In most cases the audiologist or hearing aid vendor will provide a hearing aid recommendation. In some instances, an audiologist may feel the need for medical follow up as a result of audiogram testing. The audiologist will discuss with the patient/consumer a referral to be made to a licensed ENT to obtain a “medical clearance to obtain hearing aids” before providing a recommendation. The DVR counselor should request a minimum of three (3) hearing aid recommendations for the purpose of consumer choice around pricing affordability and best fit for their hearing needs.
- C. The DVR counselor will obtain the state contractual pricing through their local state hearing aid vendor and share this cost information with the consumer. The consumer will make the choice of the model that best fits their needs. The DVR counselor should inform the audiologist of the choice so they can schedule and prepare a fitting appointment.

Guidance

Spending Guidelines for Hearing Aids: VR may provide up to \$750 toward the cost of one hearing aid and up to \$1000 toward the cost of two hearing aids. VR does not provide assistance for the cost of a hearing exam, fitting fees, or hearing aid follow up fees.

A DVR counselor may request approval of an exception of the spending guidelines from their regional manager if:

- *The consumer's resources have been used to the maximum extent possible given the consumer's anticipated income and expenses.*
- *A monthly payment schedule for unmet need would be unrealistic in view of costs related to disability and projected earnings capacity.*
- *The consumer is a recipient of SSI or SSDI benefits.*

End of Guidance

- D. Payment: VR authorization for payment processed in one of two ways:
- a. Mail the authorization with the consumer's contribution of the cost via their bank check and a copy of the hearing aid recommendation showing consumer's choice. Bank checks are required by our vendors as it is a guarantee of payment.
 - b. Should the consumer be a patient of a state hearing aid contract vendor/Audiologist, then the consumer can pay the vendor/Audiologist directly, no need for VR to get involved with the patient's method of payment.
- E. The consumer is expected to schedule their own audiology related appointments and arranges all service fees with the audiologist. The consumer should be informed of this early in the process.
- F. All hearing aids have a 45-day trial period for the consumer to test out the hearing aid. The counselor should note the 45-day trial period on the IPE. The 45-day period starts on day one of the fitting appointment when the consumer walks out wearing the aids. The counselor should follow up with the consumer and/or Audiologist on how the hearing aids are working out. During this trial period, if the consumer is not satisfied, the hearing aids can be returned to the Audiologist and their money is returned. The DVR Counselor can void the authorization and the hearing aid purchase can start over again. This is an important protection for consumers.

Guidance

Guidance on Replacement of Hearing Aids: VR will not cover damage to hearing aids or provide replacements within 5 years of purchase. Therefore, the consumer is strongly encouraged to obtain loss or damage coverage for the hearing aid(s). Information about coverage is available through hearing aid manufacturers, hearing aid providers and

audiology practices. Most hearing aid warranties run for up to three (3) years, depending on make and model, and then the last two to four years would need to be addressed by adding the hearing aids to a home or renter's insurance policy and/or purchasing hearing aid insurance through a hearing aid insurance provider like Midwest Hearing Agency, <https://www.mwhi.com/>.

Standards for Exceptions: VR may purchase replacement hearing aids in less than five years if the consumer experiences significant additional hearing loss as verified in writing by a certified clinical audiologist or licensed hearing aid dispenser in good standing with the State of Vermont. The DVR Counselor must consult with the Division Director or designee and document the exception in the case record.

End of Guidance