

Chapter 313: Audiology Services and Hearing Aids

Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Policy and Procedures Manual

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Table of Contents

Section 1:	Definitions	2
Section 2:	Eligibility for Services Based on Hearing Loss or a Related Condition	2
	General Requirements	2
	Requirements Based on Hearing Loss	2
	Requirements Based on a Related Diagnosis	2
	Requirements Based on a One-Sided Hearing Loss	3
Section 3:	Hearing Aid and Audiology Services	3
	General Requirements	3
	Guidance: – Spending guidelines for exams.	3
	Spending Guidelines for Hearing Aids	4
	Payment Authorization	4
	Guidance: – Replacement of hearing aids.	5

Section 1: Definitions

- A) **"Audiology services"** means hearing assessment, diagnostic, and hearing aid fitting services provided by a licensed provider.
- B) **"Related diagnosis"** means Meniere's disease, vertigo, and tinnitus.

Section 2: Eligibility for Services Based on Hearing Loss or a Related Condition

General Requirements

- A) To be determined eligible for DVR services based on hearing loss or a related diagnosis, the applicant must:
 - 1) Meet all basic conditions of eligibility outlined in Chapter 203, Section 3;
 - 2) Have an audiogram that is less than one year old; and
 - 3) Complete the Workplace Communication Assessment Tool. The assessment will help the VR counselor identify areas of functional loss and barriers to employment.
- B) When determining eligibility based on hearing loss or a related diagnosis, VR counselors are encouraged to consult with the DVR Deaf Services Coordinator or a VR rehabilitation counselor for the deaf if they have questions or need assistance in interpreting audiological assessments.

Requirements Based on Hearing Loss

- C) To be determined eligible based on hearing loss the applicant must have:
 - 1) 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 three most severe consecutive decibel scores from the person's audiogram; or
 - 2) At least 30-39 decibel loss in the better ear unaided, reference ANSI, PTA with at least one of the following:
 - a) Speech discrimination less than 75 percent; or
 - b) A statement from a 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.

Requirements Based on a Related Diagnosis

- D) 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.

Requirements Based on a One-Sided Hearing Loss

- E) Applicants can be found eligible for services based on one-sided hearing loss if:
- 1) The hearing loss is severe or profound, and a hearing aid will not be effective for that ear.
 - 2) They rely on the good ear to communicate and could benefit from hearing aid and audiology services.
 - 3) They provide an audiogram that is less than a year old showing a one-sided loss of 80 decibels or greater in the worse ear.
 - 4) Based on the Workplace Communication Assessment Tool, the counselor determines the applicant has significant functional barriers to employment.

Section 3: Hearing Aid and Audiology Services

General Requirements

- A) To be determined eligible and receive hearing aid services, an applicant must have an audiogram that is less than one year old.
- B) For audiogram testing and hearing aid services, we strongly recommend that a certified audiologist be used. This is based on their educational and training background in 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 a licensed hearing instrument specialist or dispenser.

Guidance: – Spending guidelines for exams.

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

End Guidance.

- C) In most cases the audiologist or hearing aid vendor will provide a hearing aid recommendation. In some instances, however, an audiologist may feel the results of audiogram testing warrant medical follow up. The audiologist will discuss a referral to a licensed ENT with the consumer to secure “medical clearance to obtain hearing aids” before providing a recommendation. The VR counselor should request a minimum of three hearing aid recommendations to ensure consumer choice around affordability and best fit for their hearing needs.
- D) The VR 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 choose the model that best fits their needs. The VR counselor should inform the audiologist of the choice so they can schedule and prepare a fitting appointment.

Spending Guidelines for Hearing Aids

- E) DVR may not set an absolute limit on specific service categories or total services provided. However, DVR may set spending guidelines to ensure reasonable effective use of funds. The VR counselor may make an exception to spending guidelines with the approval of the VR regional manager.
- F) When considering exceptions to the spending guidelines, the VR regional manager must consider the consumer's ability to contribute to their services. The consumer contribution must be:
 - 1) Reasonable,
 - 2) Based on financial need, and
 - 3) Not so high as to effectively deny the consumer a necessary service.
- G) DVR may contribute \$750 toward the purchase of one hearing aid, and \$1000 toward the cost of two hearing aids.
- H) DVR cannot require consumers who are SSI and/or SSDI beneficiaries to provide funding toward their services, including hearing aids.
- I) DVR does not help with the cost of hearing exams, fitting fees, or hearing aid follow-up fees.

Payment Authorization

- J) DVR authorization for payment may be processed in one of two ways:
 - 1) Mail the authorization with the consumer's contribution to the cost 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.
 - 2) Should the consumer be a patient of a state hearing aid contract vendor or audiologist, the consumer can pay the vendor or audiologist directly and there is no need for DVR to get involved regarding the patient's method of payment.
- K) The consumer is expected to schedule their own audiology-related appointments and arrange payment for all service fees with the audiologist. The consumer should be informed of this early in the process.
- L) All hearing aids have a 45-day trial period for the consumer to test them out. The counselor should note the 45-day trial period on the IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment). The 45-day period starts on the day the consumer walks out of the fitting appointment wearing the aids. The counselor should follow up with the consumer and/or the audiologist on how the hearing aids are working out. In the event the consumer is not satisfied during this trial period, the hearing aids can be returned to the audiologist and their money will be refunded. The VR counselor can void the authorization and the hearing aid purchase can start over again. This is an important protection for consumers.

Guidance: – Replacement of hearing aids.

- DVR will not cover damage to hearing aids or provide replacements within five years of purchase. Therefore, the consumer is strongly encouraged to obtain loss or damage coverage for the hearing aids.
 - ⊕ Information about coverage is available through hearing aid manufacturers, hearing aid providers, and audiology practices.
 - ⊕ Most hearing aid warranties run for up to three years, depending on make and model. The last three to five years would need to be addressed by adding the hearing aids to a homeowner’s 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/>. DVR may provide financial support for the additional coverage based on consumer need.
- Standards for Exceptions:
 - ⊕ DVR may purchase replacement hearing aids in less than five years if the consumer experiences significant additional hearing loss and this is verified in writing by a certified clinical audiologist or licensed hearing aid dispenser in good standing with the State of Vermont.
 - ⊕ The VR counselor must consult with the DVR Director or designee and document the exception in the case record.

End Guidance.