

HEARING AID PURCHASES

I. Prior to Purchase

The VR counselor will assess if the hearing impairment constitutes a substantial impediment to employment based on the report from a licensed audiologist:

- Level of functioning
- Speech reception
- Speech discrimination
- Environmental factors of the work site as it relates to individual hearing loss that would contribute to functional limitations of the hearing loss such as ambient noise, phone use, etc.

The audiology exam must be completed by a licensed audiologist within the last year. If there isn't a current audiology exam, VR will refer the individual to a licensed audiologist. The information from the licensed audiologist should list the type of hearing loss the individual experiences. If the audiologist determines the individual requires additional assessment, the individual will be referred to an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Specialist in order to rule out a more serious condition or to consider other possible solutions.

Determine financial participation

The counselor will review the individual's present financial situation and update the Client Participation Worksheet if there have been significant changes in income or if it has been more than a year since the worksheet was completed. The percentage of the individual's financial participation must be discussed with the individual and listed under the client responsibility section of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The counselor must receive approval from the regional administrator or State office for any exceptions to this policy. Any exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis and individuals are asked to participate to the fullest extent feasible. Please see [Client Financial Participation SP.docx](#) for more information regarding the client's responsibility and exceptions.

The client and/or counselor will complete a comparable benefits search to cover VR costs. Insurance must be used as primary payment if the individual has insurance coverage for hearing aids.

Identify services to be provided

The counselor will justify on the IPE the need for the hearing aids, using the information from the audiologist and other information acquired during the eligibility process.

VR will not consider purchasing over the counter (OTC) hearing aids.

II. Authorizing for Purchase

The VR authorization must comply with the *Client Financial Participation Worksheet* and adhere to this payment schedule.

The service category listed on the IPE is Treatment/Restoration. On the authorization, the service category is Treatment/Restoration, Subcategory: Hearing Aids.

Level 1 Hearing Aid - Invoice price \$0 to \$500

Pay invoice price for the hearing aid and \$709.00 per aid for the dispensing fee.

Level 2 Hearing Aid - Invoice price greater than \$500

Pay invoice price for the hearing aid and \$1208.00 per aid for the dispensing fee. Dispensing fee rates will be considered for increases annually.

Auxiliary or 'add-on' items must have a purpose related to employment and require counselor's prior approval justifying additional expenses.

Many insurance companies do not cover hearing aids for adults, and a denial EOB is not required. If the individual has insurance that covers hearing aids, most vendors require that to be specifically stated on the authorization to bill insurance first. If the authorization states the vendor does not have to bill insurance, or if the authorization says nothing about insurance, they will not send through insurance thereby speeding up the process.

The dispensing fee rate is listed above. All other items, including shipping costs, are paid at the manufacturer's invoice cost, and are itemized on the invoice. The exception to this is ear molds that are not power ear molds.

Pay the Medicaid rate for ear molds (code V5264/V5265). The Medicaid rate effective July 1, 2023 is \$73.77 per mold. The exception for paying more than the Medicaid rate for ear molds is when a power ear mold is dispensed which costs the vendor more than the Medicaid rate. In those cases, a vendor must provide a copy of the manufacturer's invoice for the ear molds (from Starkey, Widex, ReSound, Phonak, etc.) that documents their actual cost. VR will reimburse the vendor for the manufacturer's invoice cost of the ear mold.

If there is client participation in the cost, VR pays 100% of the ear mold charges. This eliminates any confusion as to whether or not the ear molds might be considered an assessment. The rest of the costs (aids, dispensing, shipping and add-ons), VR pays their percent of the VR rate, and the client pays their percent of the VR rate.

A catch-all code, V5267, may appear on a bill. This catch-all code indicates a "Hearing aid or assistive listening device (not otherwise specified)". The invoice is required to determine what the item is. There is not a separate V code for Com

Dex, Remote/RC-Dex, Phone Dex, TV Dex, T Dex, FM Dex, Call Dex, Uni Dex, and Mic as this technology is constantly changing as more devices are developed and added. If the invoice does not indicate what the item is, the provider must be contacted.

Keep in mind that Contralateral Routing of Signals (CROS) and Bilateral Contralateral Routing of Signals (BICROS) hearing aids can potentially have both a Level 1 and a Level 2 dispensing fee.

If the billed amount is less than the allowable amount, pay the billed amount.

Notes:

- The authorization, bill/HCFA and invoice(s) must be submitted to the state designated VR staff for review and approval prior to payment.
- The term 'dispensing fee' is synonymous with 'fitting fee'.

III. Other Considerations

A warranty is typically covered in the hearing aid cost. Counselors should verify the extent of the warranty and offer guidance to the individual so it is understood what other costs may apply to the maintenance, replacement, and care of the aid. The counselor and individual will discuss and identify the following responsibilities:

Individual's responsibilities

- Damages not covered by the warranty.
- Maintenance costs associated with the hearing aid or auxiliary aid.
- The cost of any auxiliary aids such as a phone clip or remote not directly related to employment.
- The replacement of hearing aids that are lost, stolen or damaged. They will be advised to purchase hearing aid insurance which may be obtained through the provider of the aid or homeowner's/renter's policy.

Counselor's responsibilities

- The counselor will discuss the Hearing and Hearing Aids Care handout, which covers budgeting for additional expenses including the eventual cost of hearing aid replacement.
- The counselor will discuss and include any additional expenses such as replacement or extra batteries and cases, cleaning, etc., in the client responsibility section of the IPE.

Authority: 34 CFR 361.54(b) / NDAC 75-08-01-28

Summary of Changes

9/18/2023

- Language requiring the client be seen by an audiologist within a year was added.
- A waiver for requests to waive any or all of the client financial participation must be approved by the RA.
- Statement indicating VR will not purchase over the counter hearing aids was added.
- The negotiated costs were updated.
- The Hearing Aids Care handout no longer needs to be signed by the client, but should be documented in case notes.