# DVR/DBVI Hearing Aid ProtocolFrequently Asked Questions

1. What happens when a client offers to “pay the difference” between the cost of a hearing aid through the manufacturer and one that is not on the contract. For example: The hearing aid that is on the contract is $1,398. The hearing aid when purchased from the audiologist is $5,600. Would Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) pay the audiologist $1,398 and the client pay the balance?

Answer: VR will only purchase hearing aids on the contract. The Vocational Rehabilitation counselor (VRC) could ask for a second opinion, the client can pay for the hearing aid, or ask the audiologist to find one that is on the contract.

1. We have a client who has hearing aids that are 2-years old. He does not need to replace the aid(s) at this time. However, he needs two new ear molds. The price quote came in at $140. Would we pay the $50 per ear mold under the current hearing aid contract OR would we pay the going rate for the ear molds?

Answer: We are not paying the fitting fee for hearing aids – we should work with the audiologist to help the person get fitted for ear molds and then pay for them directly to the audiologist at the $140 amount – that being said – replacing ear molds is a very common occurrence and in the future this person should budget for this.

1. Who do we contact if we have a question about the hearing aid procurement process?

Answer: All questions regarding the hearing aid procurement process should go through Terry Morrell at Terry.L.Morrell@maine.gov, 207-470-7668 or Nancy Winter at Nancy.A.Winter@maine.gov, 207-623-7958. Clients should not contact the hearing aid manufacturers directly.

1. Do we cover impressions for in-the-ear hearing aids?

Answer: Impressions for in-the-ear hearing aids are included in the fitting fee. However, we will pay for up to $50 per mold for behind-the-ear molds.

1. Is there a warranty on hearing aids and how long is the warranty?

Answer: Equipment warranty: The contract vendor must provide a minimum 24-month warranty on equipment covered by the contract that includes parts and labor. Parts excluded from the warranty are the ear piece, the cord, tubing, and batteries. Each hearing aid sold under the contract must have a 1-year loss and damage warranty. The recipient, and/or the audiologist or hearing instrument dispenser, may only file one loss claim during the 1-year loss and damage warranty term. The contract vendor shall not charge for packaging, shipping, invoicing, postage, insurance or handling while the

hearing aid is under warranty and as long as the contract vendor is participating under the terms of the contract.

1. How long does a client have before they can decide if the hearing aid is a good match for them?

Answer: New equipment trial period: For the purposes of the contract, the trial period for a new hearing aid(s) is 90 days. New hearing aids that are not satisfactory to the recipient must be returned to the contract vendor, dispenser or audiologist, within 90 days of the dispensing date, but no sooner than 30 days, unless there is apparent damage. There will be no cost to the recipient or the authorized audiologist or hearing instrument dispenser if new equipment is returned within the 90-day trial period. The contract vendor may not charge any restocking fees for hearing aids returned during the 90-day trial period.

1. When an audiologist recommends an “in the ear” model for a type of hearing aid for someone, they need to send the impressions of the person’s ears along with the order for the hearing aids. Where should these impressions be sent?

Answer: Impressions should be sent directly to the hearing aid manufacturer.

1. What do we say to an audiologist if they inform us that the hearing aid they recommend is not on the list of manufacturers?

Answer: At this time, per our protocol, the State of Maine is only purchasing hearing aids for clients that are available on these lists. This gives the audiologist/hearing aid dealer more than 475 hearing aids from which to choose. Please keep in mind that our need is for the hearing aids to help a person in their current or future work environment, so there should be a hearing aid from one of these 12 manufacturers that will work well for our clients. In addition, counselors should be certain to fill out and use the Hearing Loss Assessment form which specifically addresses a person’s need for hearing aids on the job. This form should be sent to the audiologist/hearing aid dealer to help them understand the type of amplification the person requires on the job.

1. What if someone requires an FM Loop system in addition to new hearing aids to be used at their work? Are those systems available to purchase directly from the manufacturers?

Answer: If someone requires an FM Loop system (this is a system that is tied to hearing aids but separate from them) – then DVR/DBVI would need to purchase it separately from the hearing aid from the audiologist/hearing aid dealer. The case would need to be made that the person requires it for their job (should be mentioned on the Hearing Loss Assessment form).

1. When we ask clients if they can make a contribution, is it okay to recommend an amount that they should contribute?

***Answer: No, the best way to discuss making a contribution would be to let client know how much it would cost to get a hearing aid and then let the client determine how much they feel or ask if they are able to contribute towards the cost. Never say how much you think would be a good amount for the client to contribute.***

1. If an audiologist recommends other equipment such as FM system, do we pay the $550.00 fitting fee?

***Answer: No, we do not. The fitting fee is only for hearing aids that are purchased under the contract.***

1. How many batteries are covered in the fitting fee?

***Answer: At least ten batteries would be included in this.***

1. Can we accept an audiogram from a hearing aid specialist?

***Answer: No, the audiogram must come from an audiologist.***

1. Do we work with hearing aid specialists?

***Answer: Only if they are willing to work with us through our contracts and understand that we will not be purchasing hearing aids from the hearing aid specialists. In general, it is better to work with licensed audiologists because they have more training to assist our clients in figuring out which hearing aids will work best for them.***

1. If the client decides that the first hearing aid is not a good fit and they want to try a different one, do we pay the fitting fee a second time?

***Answer: No, we do not. The fitting fee is a one-time fee to adjust and fit until the right fit is made.***

1. If we purchase a hearing aid through the second opinion, does the $550.00 or $800.00 fitting fee apply?

***Answer: No, as this is only for hearing aids on the contract.***

1. If the client has health insurance, what should the counselor’s next step be?

***Answer: Verification of medical insurance coverage - DVR/DBVI will only authorize purchase of the appropriate hearing aids after the client has provided verification of the amount of coverage, or denial of coverage, by the client’s medical insurance carrier in writing, for the case file. Any insurance benefit will be used as the required comparable benefit. The VRC is required to fill out the Hearing Aid Protocol Health Insurance Worksheet.***

***Encourage clients to contact the Bureau of Insurance to ensure their insurance company is providing accurate information. The Bureau of Insurance contact information is (207) 624-8475 or toll free 1-800-300-5000.***

1. Is it appropriate to encourage the client to save for future hearing aid needs?

***Answer: Counselors must help clients to plan for how replacement needs will be met by non-VR sources after the VR case is closed. Since the client will be working, it is expected that clients will plan for taking care of their hearing aids – including annual check-up with the audiologist, repairs if needed, batteries, etc. Clients should ask the audiologist/hearing aid vendor for estimated costs for repairs, annual check-up and upkeep of the hearing aids, so that they can prepare and save for these costs. The counselor and the client will identify a savings plan as part of the individual’s plan of employment (IPE) to ensure that the client will be able to provide for maintenance of the hearing aid(s) and replacement of them.***

***It is also important for the VRC/Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD) to discuss caring for their hearing aid(s), such as maintenance and responsibility of the hearing aid(s) and saving up for future hearing aid(s). This must be in the plan.***

1. I have insurance that will cover a percentage of my hearing aids and I am not aware of my out of pocket expenses. How do I figure out my out of pocket expenses?

Answer: To determine your out of pocket expenses, you will need to work directly with your insurance company representative. Your out of pocket expenses may include deductibles, coinsurance, and hearing aid services not covered by your insurance. Each insurance company has numerous different insurance plans that vary depending on the specifications in the contract which is why it is very important to work with your own insurance representative. Insurance companies also require an evaluation process that is different than that of DVR/DBVI’s evaluation process in determining whether one is eligible for hearing aids through them.

1. My insurance covers a portion of my hearing aids but I’m not sure of my out of pocket expenses. I need hearing aids as soon as possible or I will lose my job. Can I apply for DVR/DBVI services while navigating my insurance process?

Answer: Yes, you can apply for DVR/DBVI services anytime. However, this will require you to follow through with our eligibility process (audiogram/hearing aid evaluation testing) while you go through the evaluation process with your insurance company. DVR/DBVI will not be able to move forward with purchasing your hearing aids until it is determined your insurance benefits are not comparable. However, if this causes a delay in services or the client is at risk of losing their job, exceptions may be made.

Thanks again everyone for your patience and perseverance. If you have any other questions that have not been addressed here, please let me know. We will update this and put it on the website.

Libby Stone-Sterling

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Director

Terry Morrell

Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (DDHHLD) Director