



Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

The veteran's guide to better hearing



Psst! Did you know?

Nearly three in four people over the age of 70 have some degree of hearing loss. It's a common part of ageing.



A person with short grey hair, wearing a green shirt, is seen from the side, looking out a window. The view outside shows a tree and some foliage. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene.

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Is your hearing loss or tinnitus affecting your life?

Living with hearing loss or tinnitus can be difficult. This may affect your quality of life, relationships and your ability to rest and sleep well. In some instances it can have a harmful affect to your overall health and wellbeing.

Hearing loss and tinnitus affects everyone differently and at times it can be frustrating and isolating. However, there are many devices and treatments available to help you with your hearing loss and tinnitus to enable you to live a full and active life.

Remember, your quality of life matters.

On the next page is a table to help you consider if you are experiencing hearing loss or tinnitus. If you answer yes to any of these questions then it may be time to arrange an appointment to have your hearing tested by a qualified hearing provider.



Hearing loss and tinnitus are two of the most common conditions experienced by former Australian Defence Force members.

Veterans of all ages may experience one or both of these conditions due to their exposure to loud noise during military training and service.

QUESTIONS



| | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Do you strain to listen?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you have difficulty following conversations?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Are you often asking people to repeat themselves or to speak up?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you misunderstand people and respond inappropriately?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you feel embarrassed when you can't hear what others are saying?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Are there situations or environments that you struggle to hear in? e.g. restaurants, clubs, church, parties, in the car, at the gym, at work, in meetings or in presentations</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do people complain of having to 'shout' for you to be able to hear them?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Are you and your family getting frustrated because you can't hear them?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you find yourself withdrawing from social activities because it is difficult to hear?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Are there experiences that you would like to have but have reconsidered because of your hearing?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you find yourself turning the volume up on the radio or television or do others tell you to turn it down if it's up too loud?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you have difficulty hearing conversations on the telephone?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you have difficulty hearing the telephone or doorbell?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Do you have ringing in your ears?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <i>Does your hearing loss or tinnitus worry you?</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The first steps to improving your hearing

Eligibility

As a Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) client you have a number of options available to you. DVA funds hearing devices and services for Gold Card and White Card holders with accepted conditions of hearing loss and/or tinnitus.

If you are a Veteran White Card holder and believe your hearing loss or tinnitus is a result of your service, then DVA will fund your appointment and any tests to determine if your condition is related to your service.

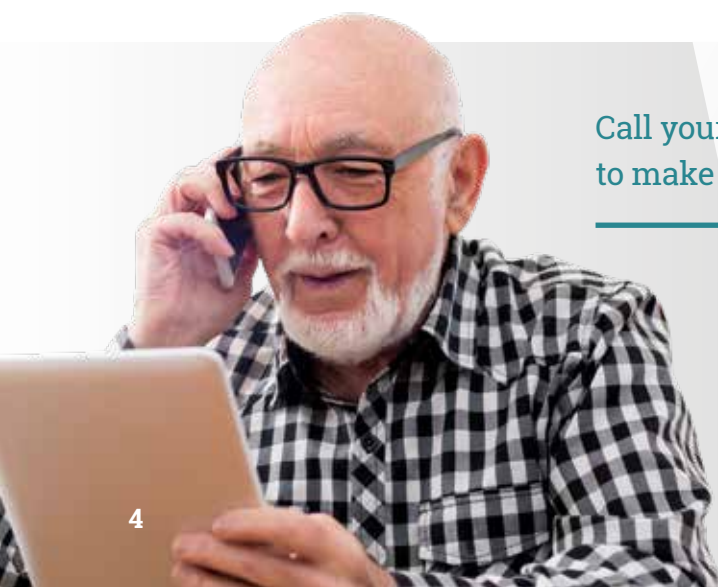
If you are a DVA client but not a veteran, check your eligibility for the Hearing Services Program (HSP) on the Department of Health's website www.hearingservices.gov.au or call 1800 500 726.

Hearing Services Program

The HSP has supported DVA clients since service personnel returned from the Second World War with hearing loss. The program was later expanded to cover all eligible Australians and is administered by the Department of Health. Most hearing providers are registered with the HSP and are familiar with providing services to veterans and DVA clients.

Making an appointment is easy

To make an appointment with a hearing provider in your local area, visit the HSP website hearing provider locator www.hearingservices.gov.au or call 1800 500 726.



Call your local hearing provider
to make an appointment.

Preparing for your appointment

During your appointment your hearing provider will ask about your service, medical and work history and the effect your hearing loss or tinnitus is having on your life. This will help them identify suitable rehabilitation options for you.

They will also ask about your experiences in different listening environments, situations and activities.

You may wish to have someone accompany you to the appointment, they may also be a helpful sounding board when you are reviewing the device and treatment options recommended by your hearing provider.

To ensure you get the most out of your appointment with your hearing provider, take a few minutes to think about how your quality of life, relationships and your ability to rest and sleep may be impacted by your hearing loss and/or tinnitus.

QUESTIONS to consider before your appointment



| Yes | No |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Do you think you need to do something about your hearing?

Are you being pressured by family and friends to do something about your hearing?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Are you curious to find out about your hearing?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Are you interested in the types of hearing devices that are available now?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Do you prefer conversations with just one person?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Do you prefer quieter environments?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Does your hearing loss or tinnitus cause you to feel tired or stressed?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Do you feel safe at home?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Do you feel safe outside the home?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Are you interested in exploring options to improve your hearing or tinnitus?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

Are you open to considering combinations of options, such as devices and treatment?

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|

QUESTIONS to help you prepare for your appointment



***Ask your partner, family or friends if they have noticed any changes in your hearing.
Make a list of what they have noticed.***

Write down any key medical information related to issues you have had with your ears.

Note any medications, vitamins or supplements you are taking.

Summarise your service history, especially roles that may have exposed you to any noise.

***Write down any questions you have for your hearing provider, for example:
What training will you provide to ensure I'm comfortable with my new device?***

During your appointment

At the beginning of your appointment be sure to tell your hearing provider you have a Veteran card.

As a DVA client you are eligible to receive at no cost to you:

- the initial assessment with your hearing provider
- if prescribed, hearing devices through the HSP (go to page 11 for more information)
- Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) available through DVA (go to page 12 for more information)
- any training you require to understand and use your new hearing devices
- follow up rehabilitation and ongoing support
- repairs, maintenance and batteries on the devices provided by DVA and HSP.

During the appointment DO NOT pay for a hearing device, as DVA does not reimburse for hearing devices already purchased.

During your appointment your hearing provider will provide you with information, so you can make an informed decision about the hearing devices and treatment that will best suit you.

The hearing provider will talk about your hearing needs and provide a quote. This written quote will outline any proposed devices and the cost, if any.

Your hearing provider will explain the types of devices and treatments and how they may benefit you.

Remember, if there is a cost for a device, ask your hearing provider to seek prior approval from the HSP or DVA. You will need to wait for this approval to come through from HSP or DVA before you purchase.

When discussing types of hearing devices with your hearing provider consider:

- how comfortable are you with technology?
- are you likely to use all of the features and functionality? (Don't be afraid to ask questions about these features and functionality if you are unsure what it is or does)
- which aspects of your life are important to you?
- what activities or situations do you want to enjoy in the future?
- how easy are these devices to fit, adjust and use?

QUESTIONS you may wish to ask your hearing provider during the appointment:



Do you consider hearing devices from a range of manufacturers?

It is good practice for a hearing provider to present products from a number of manufacturers.

Of the products you have quoted which of these devices is provided at no cost through the Hearing Services Program?

The Hearing Services Program offers a large range of fully subsidised devices at no cost.

Will you provide me with training and support for all of these devices?

Devices provided through the Hearing Services Program are provided with fitting, training and support at no cost.

Will I need to pay for repairs and maintenance to any of these devices?

For fully subsidised devices provided through Hearing Services Program and DVA, repairs and maintenance are provided by your hearing provider at no cost to you.

What will happen if I lose or need to replace my hearing device?

Replacement devices are available through the Hearing Services Program. Your hearing provider will be able to explain to you how to get new devices.

What happens after this appointment?

How long do I have to make a decision about hearing devices?

You don't have to make a decision straight away. Sometimes, it is good to consider the information and discuss it with the person that accompanied you to the appointment or someone you trust. If you have any questions or concerns about the products offered to you, call your hearing provider to further discuss your options.

During the appointment DO NOT pay for a hearing device, as DVA does not reimburse for hearing devices already purchased.

Remember, if there is a cost for a device, ask your hearing provider to seek prior approval from the HSP or DVA. You will need to wait for this approval to come through from HSP or DVA before you purchase.

Considering your options

Your hearing provider may offer a number of hearing device options, some of which are fully subsidised, and some which may require you to contribute towards the cost of the device and maintenance. Devices that incur a personal cost are commonly called partially subsidised hearing devices.

If your hearing provider is recommending you pay or contribute to the cost, ask them what they can offer from the fully subsidised Hearing Services Program.

Your hearing provider may feel that your hearing needs are exceptional and cannot be met by Hearing Services Program hearing aids and/or DVA-covered assistive listening devices. If this is the case, you could ask your hearing provider to consider what specialist services are available to you, or ask them to call DVA to discuss your unique circumstances.

The choice is yours

You have the choice to be fitted with fully subsidised hearing aids or partially subsidised hearing aids.

If you agree to buy partially subsidised hearing aids, remember there may be considerable out-of-pocket expenses. Make sure your provider gives you a quote for hearing aids, and read all the terms and conditions before signing anything.

If your provider tells you that partially subsidised hearing aids are necessary for you, ask them to seek advice from DVA before you go ahead.

Remember DVA does not reimburse you for hearing devices once you've purchased them.



Getting your hearing device fitted

Your hearing provider will show you the different features of your hearing aids/devices, teach you how to use them and do some fine-tuning adjustments to make sure they sound acceptable to you.

Feel free to ask your hearing provider any questions or discuss any concerns you may have during the fitting.

Remember your hearing provider wants you to have a good experience and will be happy to answer any questions. They want you to get used to wearing the aids/devices and be comfortable using them.

It can take a little while for you to be comfortable using your new hearing aids and devices. Give yourself some time (up to 6 months) to adjust to your new hearing aid and/or device.

Some questions you could ask your hearing provider:



Would any Assistive Listening Devices offered by DVA be suitable for me?

DVA offers a range of ALDs that can work in combinations with hearing aids. There is no limit to the number of devices you can have through DVA as long as a hearing provider prescribes them to meet your clinical need.

What evidence is there that these hearing aids will benefit me?

How regularly should I have my hearing and hearing aid/device checked?

What should I do if I'm having difficulty with my hearing aid/device?



Hearing Services Program

The Hearing Services Program (HSP) was established to provide veterans with the hearing support they need. The program offers a range of hearing rehabilitation services and a wide variety of high-quality hearing aids.

The HSP conducts regular reviews of the range of fully subsidised devices, and as technology advances additional devices are added to the available range.

You may be given the option to purchase a partially subsidised hearing device, which may have more technological features to suit your individual lifestyle choices. In this case, the program contributes the amount that would have been paid for a fully subsidised hearing device to your service provider, and you pay the additional amount quoted for the hearing device.

Rehabilitation Plus

Rehabilitation Plus provides additional support, often recommended to first-time users of hearing aids, and can provide you with the additional support and assistance you need to be comfortable and overcome any initial concerns you may have with your new hearing aids or devices. This support is provided in either group sessions or individual appointments.

Community Service Obligations

For DVA clients who require specialist hearing services, the Community Service Obligations (CSO) program can provide further support. CSO services are provided by Hearing Australia. If your clinical hearing needs cannot be met through the HSP or ALDs supplied through DVA, your provider may refer you to Hearing Australia for a further assessment for specialist services through the CSO program.

For more information about the Australian Government's Hearing Services Program:

Phone: 1800 500 726

Email: hearing@health.gov.au

Website: www.hearingservices.gov.au

You can provide feedback on the Hearing Services Program by emailing hearing@health.gov.au or by calling 1800 500 726.

Assistive Listening Devices

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) are designed to help you hear better in specific situations, such as using the telephone, watching television or in social situations.

ALDs available include:

- induction loops (a cable that picks up and transmits sound to your hearing aid, allowing you to hear better in a designated induction loop areas)
- headsets for watching the television
- microphone/FM listening systems (a hand-held microphone that transmits sound directly to your hearing aid)
- doorbells with signal lights
- smoke alarm packages for the hearing impaired
- wireless streaming devices (devices that transmit sound from multiple devices to a hearing aid)
- some telephone accessories (telephones are supplied through your telecommunications provider)
- tinnitus devices.

DVA pays for ALDs – there is no cost to you for ALDs.

DVA also covers costs for ALD repairs, parts and replacements.

You are eligible for the DVA ALDs if you are:

- a Veteran Gold Card holder; or
- a Veteran White Card holder (only for items that are used for the specific conditions accepted by DVA as related to service); and
- assessed by an appropriate health provider as requiring the device(s) to meet a clinical hearing need.



Accessing these devices

Speak to your hearing provider. They will work with you to assess your needs and arrange for you to be supplied with an ALD(s) to help your listening and communication goals.

Depending on your needs, you may be eligible for more than one type of ALD.

ALDs can be used either alone or in combination with a hearing aid(s). When talking with your provider it is important to consider all options to help you meet your hearing goals.

Repairs, maintenance and replacement

Your hearing provider can arrange for your ALD to be repaired or for new batteries, if required. If the ALD cannot be repaired or no longer works with your hearing aids, your provider can also arrange for a new one to be ordered from DVA and provided to you.

For more information about accessing ALDs:

Phone: DVA General Enquiries on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).

Website: www.dva.gov.au/ALDs

TTY users: call 1800 555 677 and ask for 1800 838 372.

Speak and Listen users: call 1800 555 727 and ask for 1800 838 372.

The National Relay Service is an Australian Government initiative providing phone captioning and chat calling solutions to people who are deaf or have hearing or speech impairment. **Internet relay users:** connect to the National Relay Service nrschat.nrscall.gov.au to call 1800 838 372.

DVA Tinnitus Program

Tinnitus is when you experience a ringing, buzzing or hissing sound in your head or ears. The loudness and pitch of these sounds can vary.

There is no specific treatment that can cure tinnitus. DVA funds services to diagnose tinnitus and helps you manage the effects it has on your health and lifestyle through the Tinnitus Program.

The DVA Tinnitus Program funds support, equipment and treatment for eligible DVA veterans who hold a Gold or White card and have tinnitus as an accepted condition. The program has been specifically designed to assist veterans with managing their tinnitus. Eligible veterans can request these services and devices at any time at no cost.

Some examples of treatments that have been funded include:

| Treatment/Device | Description |
|-----------------------|--|
| Audiologist treatment | Scientifically validated treatment provided by an audiologist. |
| Tinnitus counselling | Tinnitus counselling can assist individuals develop coping strategies, understand tinnitus and the effects, and help people adjust and accept tinnitus. |
| Hearing aids | Specialised hearing aids provided with tinnitus settings included. |
| Sound enrichment | Introduced, external sound to help mask tinnitus and make it less noticeable. Sounds may take the form of filtered, static noise, music or filtered sound effects. |
| Sleeping aids | Specialised devices to assist individuals coping with tinnitus to assist with sleeping. These devices are available through the Rehabilitation Appliances Program (RAP) and funded by DVA. |



Accessing the DVA Tinnitus Program

If you believe you are experiencing tinnitus, talk with your doctor or hearing provider. They may refer you to a hearing practitioner or an Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) Practitioner for an assessment.

If you are a Veteran White Card holder, once you have been assessed and your tinnitus confirmed, the Audiologist or ENT Practitioner can provide you with a copy of your assessment. This can be uploaded with your request to DVA for your tinnitus to be accepted as a condition.

Hearing aids through the HSP can often help.

If your Audiologist or ENT Practitioner is suggesting equipment or treatment for your tinnitus beyond hearing aids and ALDs, they should send this request through to DVA with clinical information before commencing any treatments. This may include:

- audiogram
- clinical reports
- formal evaluation of tinnitus severity
- proposed rehabilitation plan
- quote.

For more information about accessing the DVA Tinnitus Program:

Phone: DVA General Enquiries on 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).

Website: www.dva.gov.au/ALDs

TTY users: call 1800 555 677 and ask for 1800 838 372.

Speak and Listen users: call 1800 555 727 and ask for 1800 838 372.

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Cochlear support

Cochlear implants provide clients with severe to profound hearing loss with adequate hearing for detecting speech. There are two components of a cochlear implant, the implanted component that is surgically placed under the skin, and an externally worn speech processor that sits behind the ear. The speech processor requires ongoing maintenance and can be upgraded depending on clinical need. The internal component is rarely upgraded unless revision surgery is required to fix implant failure or malfunction.

Cochlear implants and treatment are provided to DVA clients through the HSP and Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS) arrangements in the same way as all Australians.

As a DVA client with a Veteran Gold or White Card, the ongoing maintenance payments are provided at no cost. In addition, you may be eligible for accessories and other services to complement your cochlear implant and improve your quality of life.

For more information

For more information about the Hearing Services Program, please contact:

Australian Government Hearing Services Program

Phone: 1800 500 726

Email: hearing@health.gov.au

Website: www.hearingservices.gov.au

If you would like more information about ALDs, Tinnitus treatment or other DVA services, contact:

DVA General Enquiries

Phone: 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372)

Email: GeneralEnquiries@dva.gov.au

Website: www.dva.gov.au/hearing

DVA health provider enquiries

Hearing providers can contact DVA if they have any queries:

Phone: 1800 550 457

Email: Health.Approval@dva.gov.au

Hearing or speech impairment assistance

TTY users: 1800 555 677

ask for the 1800 numbers above.

Speak and Listen user: 1800 555 727

ask for the 1800 numbers above.

The National Relay Service is an Australian Government initiative providing phone captioning and chat calling solutions to people who are deaf or have hearing or speech impairment. **Internet relay users:** connect to the National Relay Service nrschat.nrsconnect.gov.au for the 1800 numbers above.

DVA is committed to improving the experiences for our clients. To give feedback or suggestions on your hearing experience please complete the DVA feedback form on our website dva.gov.au/feedback or call 1800 VETERAN (1800 838 372).



