

Hearing Aid Services - Update for audiologists and audiology providers *1 July 2011*

As you are aware, two key changes to the way the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) manages hearing aid services will be introduced today. This newsletter provides you with an update about the changes which will impact on the way you manage applications for hearing aids provided through the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme and claims for hearing aid subsidies.

New national Services Manager for hearing aid services

Accessible's new service has now started. This means that from today, please send **all new** applications for Ministry funded hearing aids, hearing aid repairs and claims for the hearing aid subsidy to Accessible – contact details for Accessible are on page 3 of this newsletter.

Just a reminder that **new applications, requests for repair or claims** which are sent to Enable New Zealand from today will be returned to you as Enable New Zealand is no longer able to process new requests. If an invoice addressed to Enable New Zealand, accompanies your claim or repair, these will be returned to you and you will need to send Enable New Zealand a credit note. A new application or claim form, and any accompanying invoice, will need to be completed (using Accessible's forms) and sent to Accessible. Such returns will add to the administration time and resource for both you and Enable New Zealand and also delay the approval of the request for your client.

Enable New Zealand will continue to manage all applications for hearing repairs, hearing aids for children and adults and subsidy claims which were received by them up to 5pm on 30 June 2011.

Outstanding applications for hearing aid funding

In our message to you on 4 May, we advised that because there were a number of applications that had previously been waitlisted but now approved for trial that have not yet been finalised, a final date for consideration of these would be 30 June 2011. The majority of these applications were approved for trial in November or December last year. We were optimistic that six months would give you sufficient time to arrange to review the client's needs and situation, trial hearing aids and advise Enable New Zealand of the outcome.

Unfortunately Enable New Zealand is still awaiting a decision on a high number of these applications. If a client of yours is still in the process of trialling hearing aids could you please inform Enable New Zealand via email to hearing@enable.co.nz before Friday 8 July and provide a clear indication of the timeframe for completion of the trial and the invoicing process. Again such returns will add to the administration time and resource for both you and Enable New Zealand and also delay the approval of the request for your client.

Enable New Zealand will not process payments for applications approved for trial before December 2010 that have not been finalised by 12 August. Such applications will therefore be withdrawn. Enable New Zealand also has a mandate from us to withdraw any such applications where the client has not already commenced trialling of hearing aids on or before 30 June 2011.

Applications which have been approved for trial from January 2011 should be progressed so that these can be finalised as soon as possible. This will allow Enable New Zealand to complete all processing requirements as they exit from this service.

Resources

The *Hearing Aid Services Manual* and the *Guide to Getting Hearing Aids* are now available on Accessable's website www.accessable.co.nz/hearing. These documents remain in final draft version - this will allow us a few weeks to review their content before they are finalised into their finished format.

<http://www.accessable.co.nz/hearing/Hearing%20Aid%20Manual%20Final%20draft%202011.pdf>

The *Guide to Getting Hearing Aids* has been developed into two separate booklets for ease of use by audiologists with your clients – one for each funding scheme as the information is slightly different. We plan to provide each audiology provider with a small number of copies of the booklets once they have been printed, however these will be initial sample copies and you will need to print off copies for use with your clients.

The Hearing Aid Services Manual contains three parts:

- Part One is a summary of the funding guidelines and all elements of the Hearing Aid Services Notice
- Part Two contains all the process requirements which Accessable has developed
- Part Three contains copies of the relevant application and claim forms.

Hearing Aid Services Notice

The published version of the Hearing Aid Services Notice (the Notice), which also comes into effect today, is now available on the following website:

[http://www.dia.govt.nz/Pubforms.nsf/NZGZT/Supplement_HgAid79Jun11.pdf/\\$file/Supplement_HgAid79Jun11.pdf](http://www.dia.govt.nz/Pubforms.nsf/NZGZT/Supplement_HgAid79Jun11.pdf/$file/Supplement_HgAid79Jun11.pdf)

A couple of questions have been raised about aspects of the Notice which require clarification:

1. Hearing and hearing needs assessment

The Notice shows a slight difference in wording of assessment requirements between the Hearing Aid Subsidy Scheme and the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme. It was our intention that the two clauses would be the same and unfortunately the words "hearing and" have been left out of the Funding Scheme section (BC4). This is not a big concern, however, as the new Hearing Aid Services Manual addresses this and describes the services correctly.

2. Approved Assessor

The Assessor declaration on the new application and claim forms requires that the assessment, selection and fitting of hearing aids and/or accessories to completion will be carried out in accordance with the NZAS Standards of Practice and the Ministry of Health's Disability Support Services accreditation framework.

This means that provisional members of NZAS or appropriately skilled and trained audiometrists will be able to complete parts of the assessment or fitting process providing they are directly supervised by a full member of NZAS. The role of audiometrists within this process will be further clarified once the work to define the scope of practice and any training requirements for trained audiometrists has been completed. In the meantime, a prudent approach should be taken if provisional members of NZAS or trained audiometrists participate in any aspect of the assessment or fitting for hearing aids.

The Approved Assessor has the ultimate clinical responsibility for an application or claim. Please note that this is not a change from the previous responsibilities of an Approved Assessor.

Payment process for hearing aids purchased through the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme

The payment process for hearing aids for children (under the previous Children's Hearing Aid Fund) will be extended to include adults' hearing aids which are supplied under the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme.

When an application has been approved for trial, you will request trial hearing aids from a manufacturer and inform Accessable of the trial request. Accessable will then pay the manufacturer directly. This means that you will not need to pay for any hearing aids funded through the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme. If a trial is unsuccessful, you will need to return the hearing aids to the manufacturer and they will process a credit return to Accessable. This process will be clearly defined by Accessable in the process section of the Hearing Aid Services Manual which has been published on the Accessable website.

Average Price Target

The Hearing Aid Services Notice includes a price monitoring programme – this will be based on the introduction of an average price target to assist with the management of future cost growth for hearing aids. We are working with NZAS and the Hearing Industry Association (HIA) about setting an average price target for hearing aids purchased through the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme. We are meeting with representatives from HIMADA next week and following this discussion we will meet with NZAS and HIA once again before confirming this average price target with you.

Once the average price target is introduced, Accessable will monitor audiology providers' hearing aid recommendations against the average price target. Feedback to audiologists will start about 6 months after the average price target has been set. Accessable will be mindful that the target may not be achieved within this initial period. They will work with audiology providers to discuss any issues and agree an approach to assist the provider with achieving the target in the future.

Please note that the average price target:

- includes accessories, such as remotes, but excludes applications for FM systems or bone-anchored hearing aids
- does not apply to hearing aids recommended under the Hearing Aid Subsidy Scheme
- will not result in reduced overall spending on hearing aid services but any reduction in expenditure in this made in this area will mean shorter waiting times for some people and could result in future improvements to hearing aid services.

Application requirements for the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme

Accessable has developed a more streamlined process for applications submitted under the Hearing Aid Funding Scheme for hearing aids which are not complex and are low or moderately priced. This means that applications for hearing aids and accessories, excluding FM systems and Bone Anchored Hearing Aids, that are priced less than \$1,600 (excl. GST) per aid (including accessories), do not require additional supporting information. This will reduce the administration time for you when completing such applications.

Thank you for your understanding as we have progressed the recent changes to hearing aid services – we look forward to our ongoing work with you so that hearing aids can continue to be provided to people who have hearing loss.

If you have any questions about the new systems and processes, please contact Accessable at the contact details below. If you need to clarify any points about the Hearing Aid Services Notice, please contact the NZAS executive or the Hearing Industry Association who will be able to raise these with us for further discussion.

Contact details for Accessable:

Phone: 09 620 1700

Freephone: 0508 001 002

Fax: 09 620 1702

Email: hearing@accessable.co.nz

Website: www.accessable.co.nz/hearing

Sue Primrose

Development Manager, Service Access Team, Disability Support Services