

Need A Hearing Aid? Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

What is the Audiology Department (Hearing Clinic)?

The Audiology Department at WIDHH is staffed by dispensing Audiologists who are certified nationally and provincially, and hold a BC Hearing Aid dispensing license. Our department provides the following services:

- Hearing tests
- Hearing aid sales and evaluations with latest digital technology
- “Lend An Ear” Loaner Hearing Aid Program for those who cannot afford new aids
- Better Communication Hearing Loss (speechreading) classes
- Musician’s plugs and services
- Drop-in services (West 7th office only) for minor hearing aid repairs and maintenance services (see below for more info)
- Services offered in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, French
- Authorized DVA, Worksafe BC, and First Nations service providers
- Employment and Social Assistance hearing aid funding applications
- 2 Vancouver locations: **2125 West 7th Avenue (at Arbutus)** and **#514 – 2525 Willow Street (at Broadway)**

What is the difference between an Audiologist, a Hearing Instrument Specialist and an Otolaryngologist?

An Audiologist is a health care professional who is university trained to the Master's degree or higher, and specializes in hearing-related communication disorders, including the physiology of speech and hearing organs, physics of sound, hearing loss, hearing loss prevention, aural rehabilitation, and treatment of hearing loss. In Canada, Audiologists will typically complete a four-year university undergraduate degree, followed by a two or three year Master's (graduate) degree. Some Audiologists also obtain further schooling to hold either a Ph.D (usually for university or research positions) or an Au.D (a professional doctorate for clinical practice). The minimum educational requirement for an Audiologist to practice in Canada is a Master's level degree. 'Dispensing' Audiologists will have further specialized training in fitting and dispensing hearing aids.

Hearing instrument specialists (also called hearing aid dispensers, practitioners or dealers) have training in hearing testing, hearing aid fitting and servicing. Their level of education can vary, but it normally includes a minimum of two years of college-level education following high school, as well as courses in hearing testing and hearing aid dispensing and fitting.

An Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist (ENT) or Otolaryngologist is a medical doctor who treats and diagnoses diseases of the ear, nose and throat. ENTs will typically complete a four-year university undergraduate degree, followed by a four-year medical degree, followed by a four or five year specialty residency program. In Canada, ENTs do not dispense or prescribe hearing aids, although they may recommend them.

What is a Hearing Aid Dispensing license?

Only those individuals licensed with the BC Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Consultants are legally allowed to dispense hearing aids in the province of British Columbia. Both dispensing Audiologists and Hearing Instrument Specialists hold this license. In order to obtain licensing, individuals must pass a comprehensive oral and written examination, as well as complete a set number of clinical hours under the training of a licensed dispenser.

To check the status of any license, or to lodge a complaint, you may contact the *Board of Hearing Aid Dealers and Consultants* in Victoria at (250) 952-1502 or you may write to them at PO Box 9625 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC V8W 9P1

I think I need a hearing aid or I have some concerns with my hearing. What do I do now?

- Book an appointment with our Audiology Department at one of two convenient locations:

- **Head Office:** 2125 West 7th Avenue, at Arbutus, phone: 604-736-7391 or email Jeannette Chitty: jchitty@widhh.com

- **Willow Office:** Suite 514 – 2525 Willow Street, at Broadway: phone:778-329-0870, or email Jessica Jickels: jessicajickels@widhh.com

- **For those who use a TTY (telephone device for the deaf):** 604-736-2527 (West 7th office); 778-329-0874 (Willow office)

- Your first appointment will be with an Audiologist who will meet with you to discuss your concerns, test your hearing and provide recommendations. The cost for a hearing test is \$60. If you have a valid audiogram from an Audiologist or hearing aid dispenser within the last 6 months, a discount or fee waiver may apply.
- If a hearing aid is recommended for you, your Audiologist will discuss your options, including style and type of technology. The aids chosen for trial will depend on your hearing loss, your hearing needs, your listening environments, your vocational, social and/or educational needs, and your budget. Once you and your Audiologist have discussed your next steps,

you will be booked for a hearing aid evaluation appointment within 2 weeks. (Please note the \$60 hearing test fee is put towards the cost of new hearing aids).

- At WIDHH, all hearing aids are dispensed with a two month trial period, that is extendable if required. At the end of the trial period, you have the option to return or exchange the aids if you are not satisfied. At the hearing aid evaluation, your Audiologist will perform objective and subjective assessments through special tests called real ear verification to ensure the aid is fit appropriately for your hearing loss and within safe listening levels. Aids not fit through this method could lead to discomfort and poor sound quality. You will also be shown how to properly use and care for hearing aids. You will then be scheduled to return for a follow up appointment, usually within 2 weeks. During the two month trial period, which begins on the day you are fit with the hearing aid, you will likely need to see your Audiologist several times for adjustment and review. It is recommended that you not plan any significant out of town travel during this time so that you will be able attend your appointments.
- After the two month trial period, if you or your Audiologist feels the aid is not providing satisfactory benefit, you may return the aids for a refund less a \$125 testing fee, or trial another aid or pair of aids. There is no fee to trial another set of hearing aids; however, if your final hearing aid purchase is of a different amount than your original purchase, then you will either pay or be refunded the difference in pricing.
- Following a satisfactory trial, you may return to WIDHH at any time for further adjustment and follow-up as needed. Hearing aids are dispensed with either a two or three year warranty, with a one to two year loss and damage warranty, depending on the brand and style. During the warranty period, there is no charge for standard repair and maintenance services. You may also access our drop in Hearing Aid Troubleshooting program, a free service for our WIDHH clients. (Note: Earmolds fit for Behind-the-ear aids only have a 3 month remake warranty).
- Be aware that fitting hearing aids may take several weeks and may require several visits to the clinic before you are satisfied. Do not 'give up' on hearing aids even if you are not satisfied with them immediately. Our WIDHH Audiologists will help guide you through this process as effectively as possible.

Why buy a hearing aid from WIDHH?

There are many hearing aid clinics out there, but we are truly unique:

- We're non-profit. All proceeds from the sales of our products and services are put towards social service programs such as our Lend-an-Ear program

which provides refurbished hearing aids to those who cannot afford new ones. We are dedicated to offering a wide range of quality services that are supported by a community-driven Board of Directors. We are also consecutive winners of the Consumer's Choice Award for Business Excellence (2003 to present).

- Non-sales pressure approach: The best aid for you is the one that meets *your* needs, *your* hearing loss and *your* budget. We carry a wide range of hearing aid brands and styles and do not limit ourselves to a few products only. Some brands and styles are better suited for some individuals than others. Each hearing loss is individual and unique. The brand that works for your friend will not necessarily work for you. We believe in an educated and impartial approach in all of our recommendations.
- Two-month (extendable) trial period: If you are not satisfied with your hearing aid purchase, you may return your hearing aids for a full refund less a \$125 testing fee to pay for the hearing aid evaluation, or you may trial a new set of hearing aids for no charge. You need only pay the difference in price if the new hearing aids are more expensive than your original pair. You will also be reimbursed any differences in cost, if applicable. If you require more time than 2 months, we would be happy to extend the trial period for you.
- Educated Professionals: In addition to providing services to the client community, we believe in maintaining strong professional development within our clinicians and to future clinicians. We have an active relationship with the UBC School of Audiology and Speech Sciences to support, develop, and participate in clinical research and training of new Audiologists.

Why are there testing fees, even if I return my aids?

All of our hearing assessments, hearing aid evaluations and detailed follow-up appointments are conducted by our Audiologists who have received extensive training to provide professional, up-to-date, and quality services for you. We believe strongly in maintaining a superior professional development program so that our clinicians can stay abreast of current developments in hearing aid technology and Audiology. We don't believe in gimmicks or sales pitches to attract people to our offices.

Many of our client referrals are from word of mouth, because our clients know there is an immediate difference when they are served by our clinicians. We have a commitment to outstanding client care and as a result, we need to charge for our professional services. Fees for our services are aligned very closely to provincial and national association guidelines.

What if I don't want to get a hearing aid?

In our experience, a person who is truly not ready to try a hearing aid will not be a successful candidate. We do our best to educate our clients about their hearing loss and if hearing aids are warranted, we provide as much information possible so that the client can make an informed decision as to whether to go ahead or not. The decision is still up to you, without any sales pressure or time limited special offers. The first step is always the hardest, and most people who take the step to try a hearing aid will realize the significant benefits of wearing them after a two month trial. Our Aural Rehabilitation (speechreading) classes, included in the cost of new hearing aids, will teach you strategies to better cope with your hearing loss and adjust to your hearing aids.

Hearing loss is a chronic condition and if left untreated, can lead to withdrawal from social situations, depression, anxiety and other mental health and interpersonal issues that will affect your social, educational and vocational aspects of your life. We believe the best approach in helping those with hearing loss is ongoing education, support and acceptance. Whether you are ready to have us help you today, tomorrow or ten years from now, we will be here. Since 1956, we have provided outstanding quality services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

Additional Questions (adapted from BCASLPA – BC Association of Speech-language Pathologists and Audiologists – Consumer Information):

What is the difference between a hearing 'screening' and a hearing 'test'? Why are some hearing tests advertised as 'free', and others are not?

Hearing assessments are not all created equally. A complete hearing test, also referred to as a 'diagnostic hearing test' or a 'hearing evaluation' includes a full assessment of your hearing ability, your speech understanding ability, and an assessment of your outer ear, middle ear, and inner ear. This type of test can take anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour or more, depending on the degree and type of your hearing loss. This type of test is typically performed by an Audiologist.

A hearing screening is an abbreviated version of a standard hearing test. It is a test only of your ability to hear different tones for each ear. The screening will only indicate if a hearing loss is present or not. A hearing screening typically takes less than 15 minutes. This type of test can be performed by any number of individuals, including public health or school nurses, Speech-Language Pathologists, ENT medical office assistants, hearing aid dispensers or dealers, audiometric technicians and Audiologists. WIDHH will often provide hearing screenings at health fairs and community centres.

The Medical Services Plan (MSP) of British Columbia does not cover the cost of hearing screenings or tests, unless performed at a hospital (under the direction of an ENT). Hearing tests performed in public health units are also free of charge to the public. All other tests are subject to a charge, at the discretion of the Audiologist or dealer. Full diagnostic hearing tests typically cost anywhere from \$75 to \$100. If a hearing test is advertised as “free”, then the test is usually a hearing screening or the fee has been included in subsequent purchase.

How do I know if I need a hearing ‘screening’ or a hearing ‘test’ (full diagnostic evaluation)?

A full diagnostic evaluation is much more thorough than a hearing screening. If you have experienced any of the following symptoms, you should obtain a full diagnostic assessment:

- Sudden hearing loss with or without vertigo (dizziness).
- Significant hearing difference (asymmetry) between your ears (i.e. you have one ear that is significantly better than the other).
- History of ear infections, surgery, or draining ear(s).
- Noticeable difficulty following conversational speech either in quiet or noisy situations.

You may also want to obtain a full diagnostic assessment if you have concerns about your hearing or ears, are considering purchasing hearing aids for the first time, or it is your first time having a hearing test.

If you are simply curious about your level of hearing, wonder whether you are a hearing aid candidate, or you have had your hearing tested before and you would simply like to know whether your hearing has changed, a hearing screening will often suffice. An appointment for a hearing screening typically does not allow sufficient time for discussing hearing aids and options in depth, but only whether or not you are a candidate based on your hearing levels. It is important to understand that a screening does not provide information regarding the cause(s) of your hearing loss. Certain screening results do necessitate referral for a full diagnostic assessment.

What can I do to prepare for my visit with an Audiologist?

The following is a list of suggestions for your first visit with an Audiologist for a hearing aid consultation:

- Bring any previous test results with you. This can help the audiologist to determine whether your hearing has changed, or whether it has remained stable.

- Bring a friend or family member with you to take notes when you go to the hearing clinic for a consultation. There is an awful lot of information presented during a hearing aid consultation, and four ears are better than two!
 - Before you purchase hearing aids, list all of the situations where you have difficulty hearing and understanding conversation. Ask your Audiologist which of these situations you can reasonably expect improvement in your hearing. For example, will your ability to hear conversations at the dinner table improve? What about at a board meeting or restaurant?
 - Ask for information about various kinds of hearing aids, how they will help you, what their limitations are, and the pros and cons of the different makes and models. You should come away from a hearing aid consultation appointment understanding the advantages and disadvantages of different styles and hearing aid technologies.
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I've been told that I need hearing aids. It is all so confusing! Where do I begin?

Hearing aids can indeed be very confusing. There are a large number of hearing aids to choose from. Luckily, you don't have to make a decision on your own. Your Audiologist can narrow down your choices and can guide you in the right direction based on your audiological needs and your budget.

There are many types of hearing aids available, including different models, sizes, and technologies. Included in this variety is a wide range of advanced features with a solution for almost every hearing impairment. You and your Audiologist will work together to choose the hearing aids style and level of technology that will be most appropriate for you.

The two main decisions that you will need to make in regards to your hearing aid(s) are style (size) and level of technology :

STYLE

The style of hearing aid refers to how it appears in your ear. There are several different styles of hearing aids:

- Behind-the-ear hearing aids (BTE) have two parts: The hearing aid fits over your ear, and is attached to a custom-made earmold, which directs the sound to your ear.
- Open Fit BTE aids or Receiver in the Canal (RIC) aids: This small BTE style directs sound into the ear canal through a thin plastic tube and a tiny, plastic dome, ear piece. In the RIC versions, the receiver of the aid sits directly in plastic dome and the microphone remains in the small BTE housing over your ear.

- Custom hearing aids refer to hearing aids that have only one part that fits in your ear. There are several different sizes of custom hearing aids:
 - In-the-ear (full-shell ITE) hearing aids fill up the entire 'bowl' of your ear.
 - Half-shell (HS) hearing aids fill up approximately half of the 'bowl' of your ear.
- In-the-canal (ITC) hearing aids fill up the canal of your ear.
- Mini-canal (MC) hearing aids also fill up the canal of your ear, but are more recessed into your ear.
- Completely-in-the-canal (CIC) hearing aids fit very deeply into your ear canal, and are the least visible of the hearing aids. A pull-string is added to the hearing aid to allow you to pull it out more easily.

The style of hearing aid that is recommended will depend on degree, configuration and the nature of your hearing loss, dexterity issues, size and shape of the ear and ear canal, cerumen/earwax issues, lifestyle and communication needs, and total costs.

You and your Audiologist will discuss these factors to determine the most appropriate and effective hearing aids for your hearing needs and lifestyle.

TECHNOLOGY

Advances in Technology

Technological advances have brought about enormous benefits in amplification. Hearing aids of today are smaller, provide more power in smaller housing and the features available allow for more precise in-office fine tuning and greater overall comfort and satisfaction.

Just as you can define a hearing aid model by its style you can also differentiate between different aids by the technology or circuits used to amplify and process the sound, and by the different features that are available.

The technology of a hearing aid refers to the type of processing it uses, and the number of features that it has. We like to classify them into three levels of technology: Basic, Mid-range and Advanced Digital Technology.

Analog

Before digital hearing aids entered the hearing aid market, all aids were analog, the oldest hearing aid technology available. Most manufacturers do not carry analog aids anymore. Analog aids pick up and amplify acoustic signals directly and "shape" the signal through acoustic filters. This technology has limited flexibility for shaping sound to your specific hearing loss and needs.

Digital

Digital hearing aids contain a computer chip in them, and like a computer,

converts sound into a special code before amplifying it. This is called digital signal processing (DSP). DSP hearing aids take the analog signal (or sound wave) and convert it into 'bits' of data. These data 'bits' are numbers that can be adjusted or manipulated by a tiny computer in the hearing aid. This makes it possible for the hearing aids to be adjusted more specifically to the end users needs in ways that cannot be done with analog hearing aids. These adjustments will be made by your Audiologist.

DSP technology ranges from basic fitting parameters to the most advanced technology currently available in hearing aids. DSP programmable hearing aids are available in all sizes, from CIC through BTE in all levels of technology.

- **Basic Digital** — These aids have limited parameters that can be adjusted to suit your hearing needs. This type of technology is suitable for quiet environments and some noisier environments. Limited benefit in very noisy places such as busy restaurants, noisy traffic, riding in a car.
- **Mid-Range Digital** — These aids are more flexible. The sound is broken down into smaller units or channels to adjust the sound more specifically to your hearing needs. The aids are also equipped with more features to maintain comfort and clarity in noisier environments. Suitable for quiet listening environments, meetings and busier environments.
- **Advanced Digital** — These aids are the most flexible and equipped with the most advanced technology available to provide optimal hearing in noisier environments. Those with very active lifestyles and who are frequently in different environments, (i.e. multiple speakers or a lot of background noise) should seriously consider the more advanced DSP options available.

Generally speaking, the more technologically advanced the hearing aid is, the better it is at reducing background noise, the more 'automatic' it is, and the more features that it has. If you lead a very active life, and you have difficulty hearing in background noise, more technologically advanced hearing aids may be more appropriate for you. If, on the other hand, you lead a fairly quiet life, and need hearing aids only to hear your spouse at home, a basic hearing aid may be sufficient. The more technologically advanced the hearing aid is, the more expensive it is.

Digital hearing aids will have special features, such as a low-battery indicator or beep, feedback reduction capabilities, directional microphones, and multiple programs for different listening environments. (See next section for more detailed description of common digital hearing aid features). If your hearing loss is very unusual, or you are very sensitive to loud sounds, a digital hearing aid can also offer improved comfort for loud sounds while maintaining audibility for soft sounds.

Most hearing aids, regardless of technology, perform well in quiet situations. The main advantage of mid-range and advanced hearing aid technology is better hearing in noisy situations.

The best hearing aids for you depend largely on

- Your expectations, i.e. Do you want hearing aids to reduce background noise?
- Your lifestyle, i.e. Are you active? Do you attend meetings, work, lectures or have frequent social gatherings?
- Your experience, i.e. Do you currently have hearing aids, and if so, are you happy with them?
- Your hearing loss, i.e. Do you have an unusual hearing loss configuration and/or are you very sensitive to loud sounds?
- Your budget, i.e. Can you afford advanced hearing aids if you needed them?

There is so much information available in advertisements and on the Internet, that it becomes very confusing to try to figure out what is most appropriate for you. Your WIDHH Audiologist will help you determine what will work best for your needs and cost range.

Common Digital Hearing Aid Features

Directional Microphones are a proven and effective way to improve speech intelligibility in noisy environments. Directional microphones reduce or limit the sound amplified from behind you while continuing to amplify sound in front of you. You will get the best effect from the directional microphone if you can sit or stand with the noise you do not want to hear behind you and what you want to hear in front of you. Although available in most styles, directional microphones are most effective in behind-the-ear and in-the-ear hearing aid styles.

In more advanced hearing aids, the directional mode will automatically turn on when the noise around you reaches a certain level or when the noise takes on a particular pattern or frequency.

Noise Reduction— In digital hearing aids, there is a monitoring system that allows the hearing aid to determine if the sounds around you are speech or noise. In there is noise, the hearing aid can reduce the noise to make it more comfortable to be in that environment. No hearing aids are currently able to eliminate all noise, but they are much better than older technology at making noisy environments more tolerable.

Feedback Reduction— Many people are familiar with the whistling noise that hearing aids can make. This can be due to many things such as incorrect insertion, poor fit, too much cerumen/earwax in the ear canal. Current hearing aids contain better feedback reduction systems to prevent unexpected feedback from occurring.

Telephone Programs—There are a few different types of telephone programs. With better feedback reduction systems, many people can hold a phone over the

hearing aid microphone without causing whistling. However, for some people telecoil or t-coil programs are still necessary. The t-coil picks up the magnetic field emitted by most landline and portable telephones and converts it back into sound. There is no whistling and surrounding noise from the environment as the hearing aid microphone has been turned off. However, some hearing aids can have a combination of hearing aid microphone and telecoil working so you can hear around you while you are on the telephone.

Direct Audio Input— This is available in most behind-the-ear hearing aids. This allows you to plug an assistive listening device such as an FM system directly into the hearing aid to help you to hear better in noisy situations.

Wireless communication— Some hearing aids have wireless communication so when you adjust one hearing aid (such as the volume) it will adjust the other hearing aid as well.

Bluetooth—Some hearing aids have Bluetooth compatibility. A small adapter is required to 'pair' with other Bluetooth devices such as cellphones and portable music players. This would allow you to hear the cellphone or other Bluetooth compatible devices through both hearing aids rather than just one.

Remote Controls—Some hearing aids can be adjusted by a remote control (much like your TV). The style of the remote control is specific to the manufacturer. There are handheld models, small keychain models, and wristwatch models. Some remotes can adjust the hearing aids together or separately; some control both aids only.

What is the difference between 'directional' and 'omnidirectional' microphones?

Omnidirectional microphones are standard on all hearing aids. They pick-up sounds all around you equally, and provide 'surround sound'. Directional (dual) microphones are an option in most mid-range and advanced hearing aids. They consist of two microphones: A front and a rear microphone. The microphones work together to reduce sounds coming from behind you. This results in a reduction of background noise. Directional microphones can significantly improve speech understanding in noise. While they reduce the effect of background noise to a greater extent, there is still no technology that can eliminate background noise completely. Almost all digital hearing aids of today contain a directional microphone. Directional microphones can also be activated automatically and adaptively, so that it seeks out and reduces significant noise sources in your acoustic environment.

What are some common myths regarding hearing aids?

Myth: Behind-the-ear hearing aids are 'old-fashioned'. The smaller the hearing aid, the more technologically advanced it must be.

Fact: The size of the hearing aid has nothing to do with how technologically advanced it is. In fact, if anything, the larger hearing aids have the capability to be more technologically advanced, because the hearing aid manufacturers have more room to fit components and features into the hearing aid.

Myth: Hearing aids are so advanced now that you can buy 'invisible' hearing aids.

Fact: Cosmetic appearance and visibility can vary significantly and depend largely on ear canal size and degree of hearing loss. In general, men have larger ear canals and therefore have a higher chance of obtaining a less visible hearing aid. Even the smallest hearing aids however, can still usually be seen if someone is looking directly into your ear canal.

Myth: You can now get hearing aids that eliminate background noise.

Fact: There is currently no hearing aid on the market that can eliminate background noise completely. Some hearing aids are able to reduce background noise significantly, but none are able to eliminate it. Unfortunately, hearing aids are not 'smart' enough to know what you consider to be background noise!

Myth: Brand X digital hearing aids are the 'best'.

Fact: Every manufacturer will boast their aid is the best at reducing background noise and improving speech understanding in noise. Most manufacturers will carry a range of styles and technologies; some brands will work better for some people than others. Be careful of advertisements that claim their product is superior or exclusive to that brand. Chances are, the feature in Brand A is also in Brand B; it's just called something else. Work with your WIDHH Audiologist to find the most suitable hearing aid for your specific hearing loss needs. And remember, what may work extremely well for your friend will not necessarily work the same way for you. Every hearing loss is individual.

I have a hearing loss in both ears. Should I buy one hearing aid or two?

In the past, some professionals recommended only one hearing aid, even in the case of bilateral hearing loss. With the backing of countless research studies, however, the recommendation now is that people with hearing loss in both ears should wear two hearing aids.

The advantages that two hearing aids offer are:

- Better understanding of speech.
- Better understanding of speech in noisy situations.
- Better ability to tell the direction of sounds.
- Better sound quality and 'stereo' hearing.
- Smoother tone quality and less distortion because less volume is required when you wear two hearing aids. Less battery drain for the same reason.
- Wider hearing range. A person can hear sounds from a further distance with two hearing aids.
- Better sound identification. With just one hearing aid, many noises and words sound alike. With two hearing aids, as with two ears, sounds are more easily distinguishable.
- Having two hearing aids keeps both ears active. Research has shown that with only one hearing aid, the unaided ear tends to lose its' ability to hear and understand speech. This is called auditory deprivation.
- Hearing is less tiring and listening is more pleasant.
- Greater comfort with loud sounds.
- Reduced feedback and whistling because of lower volume control.
- Improvement in tinnitus, or ringing in the ears. Approximately 50% of people with ringing in their ears report improvement when wearing two hearing aids.
- No need to worry about having people sit on your 'aided' side.
- Hearing aid satisfaction. Research with more than 4000 hearing-impaired people demonstrated that people wearing two hearing aids are more satisfied with their hearing aids than those wearing only one hearing aid.

Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. If one of your ears is 'unaidable' (i.e. the hearing loss is either too severe or not severe enough, or your speech understanding ability is too poor in that ear to benefit from a hearing aid), then two hearing aids may not be recommended. Another situation where only one hearing aid may be recommended is in the case of a person with severe dementia or confusion, or with very poor dexterity, who has no source of help and would be unable to handle two hearing aids. Finally, if, for financial reasons, someone is unable to afford two hearing aids, then one hearing aid is recommended (With the realization that one hearing aid is better than none!).

How much do hearing aids cost?

Please note the following:

- These are general fee guidelines only. A hearing aid practitioner/dealer or audiologist has the discretion to set their own prices.
- Prices are subject to change without notice and are deemed to be accurate in the year 2009.
- Prices for hearing aids are per hearing aid.

- The consumer is encouraged to ask for the total price of the hearing aid and what that price includes (i.e. hearing test, follow-up servicing, warranty).
- Fees and technology change frequently.
- There are no taxes on hearing aids, as they are considered a 'medical device'.
- For simplicity, the hearing aids have been narrowed down into three separate levels of technology, however in reality, hearing aid technology is on a continuum.

Basic Technology	Mid-Range Technology	Advanced Technology
\$850 - \$1500	\$1350 - \$2500	\$2500 - \$3800

Hearing aids have been prescribed for me, but I can't afford them. What do I do?

There is no universal government assistance for the purchase of hearing aids in British Columbia . If your situation is described in any of the following statements, you may be eligible for funding or financial assistance:

- You are on income assistance (Ministry of Housing and Social Development)
- You are attending school, looking for employment, retraining or you are at imminent risk for losing your job due to your hearing loss
- Your hearing loss resulted from hazardous occupational noise exposure. If you have been exposed to hazardous occupational noise in B.C. for more than two years, you should consider applying to the Worker's Compensation Board. Other provinces may have different criteria.
- You are a veteran or RCMP officer
- You have First Nations Status

As well, some extended health insurance plans partially or fully cover the cost of hearing aids, as do some service clubs (for individuals in financial need). If you fall into any of these categories, you may be eligible for some financial assistance. For more information, please ask your WIDHH Audiologist and he/she should be able to either apply for funding on your behalf, or inform you how to apply for funding.

If you do not fall into any of the above categories and cannot afford new aids, you may wish to obtain an aid through the **WIDHH Lend An Ear Permanent Loaner Program**.

WIDHH Lend an Ear Permanent Loaner Program:

This program is intended for adults who are not able to afford new hearing aids

and yet need a hearing aid for basic communication purposes. The hearing aids are previously used or discontinued behind-the-ear style hearing aids that have been donated to the program.

The cost for a permanent loaner hearing aid is \$140. This includes the cost of the hearing test, earmold, and hearing aid. This fee is non-refundable; however, should you decide not to keep the hearing aid, it should be returned to the Agency's "Lend an Ear" Hearing Aid Loan Program. The hearing aid does not come with a warranty; however, if it malfunctions within one year of purchase, we will replace it free of charge.

We have a limited supply of loaner hearing aids. For this reason, we can only provide one hearing aid per client. A hearing aid will be provided only if there is an appropriate hearing aid in the loaner inventory. If there is not an appropriate hearing aid available, the client will be put on the waiting list until an appropriate aid becomes available.

The hearing aid is on a permanent loan and remains, the property of the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. If the hearing aid is no longer needed, it is expected that it will be returned to the clinic, so that another client can benefit from it.

The Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing depends on donations of hearing aids to maintain this program. Individuals wishing to support the "Lend an Ear" program by donations of used hearing aids are asked to drop them off at the clinic or contact: Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at 604-736-7391.

What kind of warranty comes with my hearing aid(s)?

All hearing aids should come with a repair and service warranty. Hearing aids should have a minimum of a one year repair warranty on them. Many hearing aids have two to three year repair warranties. After the repair warranty has expired, you may be responsible for the cost of hearing aid repairs.

Some hearing aids come with a loss or damage warranty. There is usually a one-time replacement limit and a deductible applies.

My hearing aid is not working. What should I do?

Depending on how familiar you are with your hearing aid, you may be able to do some basic trouble-shooting to get your hearing aid working again.

Step 1

The first step is to ensure that you have the correct battery size, and that you have correctly inserted it into the hearing aid. Then, try a new battery in the hearing aid. Even if you have recently replaced the hearing aid battery, some batteries are defective and do not last very long. It is not necessary to try more than one fresh battery. If the hearing aid is still not working, go to Step 2.

Step 2

Visually inspect the hearing aid. If you see wax on the hearing aid, clean it. You should have received a small brush and a wire loop with your hearing aid. Focus on the area at the tip of the hearing aid where the sound comes out. Brush the microphone gently to remove any debris or dust. If you have a wax prevention system on your hearing aid, and you have been shown how to replace it, try to put a fresh wax guard in the hearing aid.

If you have a behind-the-ear style hearing aid, inspect the earmold and tubing for cracks, or wax. You may want to pull the earmold off the hearing aid and clean it in a mild soap and water solution. Make sure it is completely dry (including the tubing) before reattaching it to the hearing aid. If you have a mini BTE or receiver-in-the-canal aid, inspect the plastic dome to ensure it is not plugged.

Step 3

If the hearing aid is still not working, contact your hearing aid clinic.

In many cases, a hearing aid can be repaired in the hearing aid clinic. Some clinics do not charge for in-house repairs, as they are considered to be a part of the original cost of the hearing aid. Others may charge a service fee for in-house repairs. If you are WIDHH client, you may drop in to our clinic to have one of our technicians examine and troubleshoot your hearing aid, free of charge. In general the aids will be fixed free of charge if the aid is under warranty unless there is an unusual cost associated with the parts.

If a hearing aid cannot be repaired in the clinic, it may need to be sent out for repair. Most hearing aid manufacturers in Canada are located in Ontario, and therefore it may anywhere from 1 to 3 weeks to get the hearing aid back from repair. If the aid is no longer under warranty, repair costs vary from approximately \$250 to \$300, depending on two factors: the age of the hearing aid, and the extent of damage to the hearing aid:

- The age of the hearing aid. If a hearing aid is less than five years old, it is normally repairable (and worth repairing). If a hearing aid is greater than five years old, it is normally recommended that a repair estimate be obtained. In some cases, the hearing aid is considered 'obsolete' and the parts are no longer available. In other cases, the cost to repair the hearing aid approaches the cost to obtain a new hearing aid, and therefore it may not be worth repairing.
- The extent of damage to the hearing aid. In many cases, a hearing aid malfunctions simply because it is plugged with wax, or there is a loose

connection in the internal components. If the problem is relatively simple, the repair cost will be lower. If however, the hearing aid has been damaged significantly (either physically or with excess moisture/corrosion), the repair may be more costly.

If you are experiencing fit or feedback problems with your custom hearing aid, a 'recase' may be necessary. Most custom aids come with a recase warranty of one to two years, therefore, if you are anticipating feedback or fit problems, it is a good idea to have the hearing aid recased within this warranty period.

How long do hearing aids last?

The life expectancy of a hearing aid depends on the condition of your ear and the care you give your hearing aid. Hearing aids should last, on average four to five years, however some may only last a few years, while others several more years. Behind-the-ear hearing aids and larger custom hearing aids typically last longer than smaller custom hearing aids. Your aid(s) will require ongoing service. Consumers typically replace hearing aids because of hearing changes, technologic advances, or repairs that are too frequent or too costly. Hearing aids will break down during the course of its lifetime. The frequency of repairs will vary depending on how many hours you wear it a day, the type of environments you are in, ie. noisy, quiet, high humidity, dusty conditions, etc. On average, most people require a repair at least once a year or 2 years.

How do I know what to expect from my new hearing aids?

The amount of benefit a hearing aid will provide can vary significantly from person to person, and for different listening situations.

You can reasonably expect the following:

- In both quiet and noisy situations, you should hear better with hearing aids than without hearing aids.
- Your hearing aids should be comfortable in your ears.
- You should be able to hear speech comfortably. Loud sounds should sound loud, but not uncomfortable.
- The sound of your voice may at first be unusual, however, you should be able to tolerate the sound of your own voice.
- You should not have feedback (whistling) at the volume you need to use the hearing aid.

Things you can not reasonably expect:

- You will not hear as well in noise as you will in quiet. You may still have significant difficulty hearing in noisy situations. The degree of difficulty can depend on your degree of loss and word recognition abilities.
- Hearing aids will not make your hearing as good as you remember it to be. Hearing aids are not a cure for hearing loss; they are a treatment.

Be patient. It likely took many years for your hearing loss to happen. Your brain has adapted to not hearing well. It may take some time for you to adapt to hearing many sounds that you haven't heard for a long time. The more you wear your hearing aids, the better your brain will become at hearing the new sounds. Also, depending on the damage to the inner ear, you may never achieve fully satisfactory results, even if you were to buy the most expensive hearing aid in the world. No matter how well the hearing aid works, if the nerves in your ear are no longer able to hear sounds "clearly" (think of a cataract in the eye; no matter how strong you make your glasses, things will still be blurry), you will still continue to have trouble hearing in many situations. The use of speechreading and communication strategies will help significantly as well as Assistive Listening Devices.

What are Assistive Listening Devices?

Assistive listening devices (ALDs) are devices that can help hearing, and are used in conjunction, or in addition to hearing aids. They will help you to hear better in noisier environments such as restaurant, classroom and meeting situations. They include, but are not limited to FM systems, Infrared systems for the television and radio, amplified telephones, and alerting/signalling devices. They can significantly improve your hearing, and your success with hearing aids. For a complete listing of ALDs, go to www.widhh.ca. Your local hearing aid clinic and Audiologist is also likely able to provide you with information and products.

What can I do to improve my chances of success and satisfaction with my hearing aids?

Having realistic expectations from your hearing aids is very important. Support from family and friends, is equally important. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association is a non-profit organization that provides information and support to hard of hearing individuals. There are local branches in many B.C. cities and across Canada. Contact www.chha.ca for more information.

Speech-reading classes, known as the Better Communication with Hearing Loss classes are offered through the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. (classes are included with new hearing aid purchases). These classes

can greatly improve your chances of success with hearing aids, as you will be taught strategies to better communicate and hear in difficult listening environments. Spouses and/or significant others or family members are encouraged to attend with the hearing aid user. For more information on these classes, please contact Henry Lam, Audiologist, hlan@widhh.com or by phone: 604-736-7391. The Vancouver Community College also offers Speechreading classes. For more information, please contact: dhh@vcc.ca, or by phone 604-871-7342.

We hope you have found this information helpful. For more information about our office hours and services, please see the section under [Services: Audiology \(Hearing Clinic\)](#).

We thank you for your patronage. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Grace Shyng, Head of Audiology, gshyng@widhh.com.

We Look Forward to Serving You!

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