



## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This factsheet was updated 4 September 2020. As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, the Hearing Services Program (the program) understands that this is a particularly challenging time for many of our Contracted Service Providers (providers) and we are committed to keeping providers informed with the latest advice on COVID-19.

There have been many issues raised by providers and it is important for providers to understand that the Department of Health manages and regulates the delivery of the Hearing Services Program to clients by providers, the Department does not regulate audiology services or the business practices of providers. Specifically, the program is not responsible for and does not manage the operational and business decisions of individual providers, such as, business opening hours or the opening and closing of sites.

The following information is in relation to the Coronavirus and we remind all providers of the need to keep up to date.

### Changes to the factsheet since 7 August 2020

The telehealth special arrangements for the provision of hearing services to program clients, as specified in this factsheet, apply until **30 June 2021**.

### Coronavirus (COVID-19) general advice

The Australian Government has a website for COVID-19 information [www.australia.gov.au/](http://www.australia.gov.au/). This website contains information for states and territories, business, health, travellers, financial support etc.

In addition, find up-to-date information on COVID-19 at <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>. This includes

- [Advice for the health and aged care sector](#) including Public Health Unit guidelines, epidemiology reports and other resources.
- [Advice on using personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#).

Information on the Australian Government's assistance packages for businesses can be found at

- <https://www.business.gov.au/Risk-management/Emergency-management/Coronavirus-information-and-support-for-business>
- <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/businesses>
- [www.pm.gov.au/media/supporting-australian-workers-and-business](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/supporting-australian-workers-and-business)
- <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/subjects/affected-coronavirus-covid-19>.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Please see the information on the Department of Health's website regarding [PPE](#). As of 2 May, the highest priority of the Government is to ensure access to masks and other PPE for front line acute health service and primary care staff. This includes

- public hospitals (supporting the states and territories), general practices, community pharmacies, and other settings where people are most likely to be presenting with COVID-19
- residential aged care facilities in the event of an outbreak.

Please note that masks are available to allied health in certain circumstances.

## Updates to program requirements due to the impact of COVID-19

### Closure of sites temporarily

From 27 March, until further notice, providers are not required to update the site status in the portal, if their business has decided to **temporarily** close, however we do recommend you inform clients of the program directly about the closure.

### Temporary sites

From 27 March, until further notice, providers can operate from new temporary sites (e.g. community centres) by following the same requirements for home visits (please see below).

### Home visits

When conducting home visit appointments providers can

- Use the site ID for the site you usually work from when submitting a claim.
- Charge clients a travel fee under private service arrangements (this does not apply to temporary sites).

If providers decide to conduct home visits for program clients, practitioners must perform a subjective assessment of the testing environment and ambient noise levels. Practitioners will need to document on the client file how they managed any ambient noise.

Practitioners should be reminded about their obligations under the Scope of Practice for Audiologists and Audiometrists, which states

- Clinicians must apply principles and methods in order to adhere to appropriate standards for calibration and maintenance of equipment and the testing environment (see Diagnostic Assessments under 'Overarching knowledge and tasks applicable to all client groups')
- Clinicians must assess and improve the test environment in order to make it more suitable for audiological assessment of the adult client (see Diagnostic Assessments under 'Knowledge and tasks applicable to adult clients').

### Ambient noise level testing and equipment calibration

In accordance with the current Australian Standards, the Service Provider Contract requires sites to have appropriate equipment and facilities for providing services to clients including ambient noise level testing and equipment calibration. From 27 March, until further notice, providers are not required to perform ambient noise level testing and equipment calibrations. It is expected that practitioners perform biological calibrations of their audiometer, and check the calibrations of their 2cc coupler and probe tubes.

Please note that ambient noise level assessment requirements for home visits, as specified above, still apply.

### Request for a revalidated service

The process for requesting a revalidated service has changed. For further information, please refer to the [Requesting a revalidated service](#) webpage.

## Client consent

From 27 March, until 30 June 2021, for all forms/quotes that require a client signature, verbal consent can be obtained. When completing any of these forms/quotes, you must verbally relay the information to the client over the phone (or through another method of communication), make a note of the date and time of call and if client gave verbal consent on the form. The form/quote can still be sent to the client for their records.

## Services available to clients

Providers can deliver urgent services to clients of the program if their usual service provider is closed. The below arrangements apply from 27 March until further notice.

### Relocating clients in the portal

If a client approaches your clinic for urgent assistance with their device/s, you will need to follow the usual processes by transferring them to your site in the portal, and obtaining their consent.

The transfer will initiate a notification of relocation email to the client's usual service provider. If you are the client's usual service provider, when you re-open you will need to contact the client to determine

- if they genuinely want to relocate to another service provider
- if they approached another service provider to seek urgent assistance during your closure, but wish to continue receiving services from you.

If the client has genuinely chosen to relocate, you should promptly forward their file to the current service provider.

If the client wishes to continue receiving services from you, you will need to transfer them back to you in the portal and obtain a record of their consent, as usual.

### Repairs and maintenance

If a client has a damaged hearing device that needs to be serviced in the clinic or sent to the manufacturer for repair (and their usual service provider is closed) they can attend any service provider of the program for assistance.

If a client in this instance attends your clinic for help, you can service the hearing device or dispatch it to the manufacturer for repair. If you send the hearing device to the manufacturer, you should include a covering note to ask that it is returned to the client's usual service provider.

In this situation, you should contact the client's regular service provider (if possible), before undertaking this process as there will be occasions where the regular service provider will be closed for a significant period of time.

To cover the costs of delivering this service, including the costs of repairs, spare parts and postage, providers are advised that

- If the client has a current Maintenance Agreement with the regular service provider, the temporary provider can claim a Relocated Maintenance and Battery Supply (711/722).
- If the client does not have a current Maintenance Agreement and agrees to enter into a Maintenance Agreement, a Maintenance Item 700/710 can be claimed by the temporary provider.

### Lost or damaged beyond repair devices

If the client has an urgent need for a lost device to be replaced, including remote controls, clients are not required to complete a statutory declaration. Instead providers must document the date and time the client notified the clinic of their lost device, and how, when and where their device was lost.

Damaged devices must be returned to the manufacturer to determine if they are damaged beyond repair (DBR). DBR letters from the manufacturer must be retained on the client's file.

Depending on availability, you may consider offering a hearing aid on loan while the client's device is sent for repair or awaiting replacement.

Providers may claim the item 555 to cover the cost of the co-payment (for non-DVA gold or white card holders) for lost and DBR devices, provided program requirements are met for this Item.

### Information on alternative service delivery

On a daily basis hearing practitioners see the most vulnerable people within the Australian Community. Our priority is to ensure the safety of clients and reduce any risk. As a result, providers should limit all face-to-face contact with clients and strictly enforce social distancing and disinfecting procedures within their clinics. Further, providers must comply with the relevant requirements in their state or territory to provide hearing services to program clients.

We recognise the importance of ensuring clients can hear during this difficult time and we have looked at ways providers can continue to deliver and claim for services. We encourage providers to use telehealth services where appropriate, however, we have outlined below certain activities that must be completed face to face to minimise clinical risk. As normal, providers must keep detailed and accurate clinical notes on the client file, including client consent (verbal or written), device quotes, maintenance agreements etc. To ensure compliance with program requirements, including COVID-19 special arrangements, the program will monitor claiming patterns and all claims will be subject to audit activities.

### Exceptions listed below apply from 16 March 2020 until 30 June 2021.

Service	Service Delivery	Claim an item
<b>Assessment / Reassessment</b>	Practitioners will need to use their clinical judgement to determine what tests are necessary to assess a client's hearing and communication needs, this may include limiting the number of frequencies tested.  Otoscopy, pure tone audiometry and speech audiometry must be completed face to face.	600, 800
<b>Initial / Refitting</b>	Practitioner should determine how best to program devices (e.g. 2cc Coupler/remote programming – where available).  Fitting can be completed via telehealth if technology allows and the clinician is satisfied client outcomes are not compromised.  Notes should reflect the approach taken and why.  If the 2cc Coupler is not available at your site/clinic, it is acceptable for the device to be pre-programmed and 2cc measurements to be completed by another site for your	630, 650, 660, 640, 820, 830 (631, 651, 661, 641, 821, 831)  760, 770 (761, 771)  635, 655, 825 (636, 656, 826)

Service	Service Delivery	Claim an item
	<p>clinic or the manufacturer and shipped with the device to your site/clinic, provided the following conditions are met</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2cc measurements must be completed by a QP or intern under a supervision agreement as this is part of the fitting service.</li> <li>• Device programming details must be kept on file.</li> <li>• Device fitting must be verified within 12 months of the COVID-19 restrictions being lifted, to ensure optimal client outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>A Refitting can be provided without a hearing reassessment (Item 800) performed on the voucher <b>if</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the client's hearing aids are more than 5 years old;</li> <li>• a hearing reassessment is not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions (i.e. hotspots and lockdown);</li> <li>• the client's hearing device is unreliable or unrepairable (i.e. the client is at risk of device failure);</li> <li>• there is no suspected significant change in the client's hearing;</li> <li>• there is no other known clinical reason not to proceed;</li> <li>• a reassessment is performed once it becomes possible; and</li> <li>• there is documentation recorded on the client's file indicating the client is having a positive outcome prior to a claim being submitted.</li> </ul> <p>If the above conditions are met the claim for the refit item will need to be submitted <b>through the Hearing Services Online portal</b> (portal claim) against the individual client record.</p>	
<p><b>Follow-up of Initial / Refitting</b></p>	<p>Can be completed via telehealth if there are no issues with comfort, sound quality or management (i.e. a successful follow-up is completed).</p> <p>If the client requires adjustments or there are issues with the fitting, the client will need to attend a face to face appointment, unless the client's device enables remote programming.</p>	<p>630, 650, 660, 640, 820, 830, 760, 770</p> <p>635, 655, 825</p>

Service	Service Delivery	Claim an item
<b>Reviews</b>	<p>Practitioners will need to use their clinical judgement to determine if annual reviews can be conducted, including which activities they can complete, via telehealth whilst maintaining client safety.</p> <p>The required program activities must be performed and completed (face to face or telehealth), in order to claim a Review Item.</p> <p>If the client reports a change in hearing or ear health, they must be seen for a face to face appointment.</p>	930, 940
<b>Maintenance</b>	<p>Maintenance agreements can be renewed by gaining verbal consent. However, if a client has a current voucher <b>and the clinic chooses to waive any client co-payment</b>, a claim for batteries and maintenance may be submitted without seeking consent from the client if you are still providing services. This would apply to all maintenance agreements expiring from now <b>until 30 June 2021</b>.</p> <p>For DVA clients, you <b>must</b> obtain verbal or written consent and note this on the clients file if you wish claim items 777/888.</p> <p>Providers should consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posting batteries and spare parts.</li> <li>• Asking clients or carers to post device to clinic for repair.</li> </ul>	700, 710, 790, 791 (777)
<b>Device replacement</b>	<p>Can be completed via telehealth when replacing with like for like device.</p> <p>Client can notify provider of lost device over the phone (without a Stat Dec). File notes must include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the date and time of client's verbal notification of lost devices</li> <li>• how, when and where device was lost.</li> </ul> <p>Verbal consent for device quote can be obtained (a copy can be posted to client for their records). The date and time of phone call must be noted on file.</p> <p>Like for like devices must be programmed before posting to the client. Notes on file should include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information on the replacement device</li> <li>• device programming details</li> <li>• date posted to the client.</li> </ul> <p>If not replacing with like for like, subjective verification of sound comfort/quality, and device insertion and management must be completed as per fittings/refittings.</p>	840, 850 (555, 888)

Service	Service Delivery	Claim an item
	<p><b>Note:</b> Lost devices must be replaced with same for same unless the lost devices are no longer on current approved device schedule. In this case the replacement should be in the same style and category as the lost device.</p>	
Spare aid	<p>Can be completed via telehealth if spare device is identical to their primary device.</p> <p>The spare aid must be programmed prior to posting to client. Notes on file must include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information on the spare aid</li> <li>• device programming details</li> <li>• date posted to the client</li> <li>• verbal consent for device quote. The date and time of phone call should be noted on file.</li> </ul> <p>If fitting a different spare aid, subjective verification of sound comfort/quality, and device insertion and management must be completed as per fittings/refittings.</p>	960
Rehabilitation/Rehab Plus	<p>Can be completed via phone and/or videoconference as required based on clinician and client preference.</p> <p>Group rehabilitation sessions should NOT be offered face to face. Can be offered by videoconferencing if the technology is available and it can be completed without compromising client outcomes.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> The Rehabilitation Service Items provide flexibility in their scope to be adapted to the participant(s) current needs. For example, these sessions can be focussed on managing communication during a time of social distancing when clients may be physically isolated from their friends and family.</p>	670, 680, 681
Issuing vouchers	<p>Providers are required to confirm if ongoing services are required. This can be completed over the phone, confirmed by a signed battery and maintenance agreement or booked appointment.</p>	