

**Operational
Policy**

Section
Prosthetic and Assistive Devices

Subject
Hearing Devices

Policy

The WSIB may pay for the provision, replacement, or repair of hearing aids and related accessories, and hearing assistive technologies where entitlement has been established for work-related traumatic hearing loss or occupational noise-induced hearing loss.

Guidelines

Definitions

Audiologist: regulated health professional qualified to measure hearing, and prescribe, supply, and fit hearing aids and assistive technologies according to individual needs.

Hearing aid: a small battery-powered electronic apparatus which typically fits in or behind the worker's ear, and is designed to amplify and modulate sound to compensate for impaired hearing.

Hearing aid accessories: items required for the proper care and maintenance of hearing aids. Hearing assistive technologies (HATs): items that can present auditory, visual, or tactile information to workers with impaired hearing.

Hearing device: any item, including hearing aids, that is used to provide amplification for workers with impaired hearing.

Hearing instrument practitioner: practitioner qualified to test hearing, and to select, fit, counsel and dispense hearing instruments pursuant to a prescription.

Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL): permanent loss of hearing in both ears resulting from sensorineural (inner ear) damage due to prolonged, continuous, hazardous noise exposure (see 16-01-04, Noise-Induced Hearing Loss).

Traumatic hearing loss: sudden onset of hearing loss experienced after an acute trauma (see 15-04-01, Traumatic Hearing Loss).

Hearing aids

Entitlement criteria

Workers should request approval from the WSIB before purchasing a hearing aid to avoid having to pay for the device if it is not ultimately approved by the WSIB.

The WSIB may authorize the purchase of a hearing aid when

- the worker has an allowed claim for NIHL or traumatic hearing loss, and
- it is prescribed by an audiologist or physician, and
- a hearing evaluation (i.e., audiogram) has been conducted which meets practice standards, and contains findings that support the use of a hearing aid.

**Operational
Policy**

Section
Prosthetic and Assistive Devices

Subject
Hearing Devices

The WSIB expects the hearing aid dispenser to conduct a trial for at least 30 days from the date the worker is provided with the hearing aid before submitting a payment request to the WSIB. This trial period helps ensure the worker has been fitted with the proper hearing aid.

Payment

Once the worker has entitlement to a hearing aid, the WSIB pays up to the amount set out in Operational Policy Manual document 18-01-05, Table of Rates. This amount covers the hearing aid and its integrated options and features.

Options and features are components integrated within the hearing aid that range from basic functioning and user control, to advanced components that are often digital in operation and are related to programmability, fitting, and sound/noise management (e.g., receiver tubes, domes, adaptive directional microphones).

Exceptions

The WSIB only pays for costs above the amount set out in the Table of Rates if there are exceptional circumstances. An exception may be made if there are no hearing aid models available for the amount set out in the Table of Rates that meet the clinical requirements of the worker as documented by the treating health professional.

When reviewing hearing aids above the amount set out in the Table of Rates, the WSIB considers the integrated options/features clinically required for the worker to be able to function fully and safely at home, work, and/or in the community.

Examples of exceptional circumstances may include workers with severe to profound hearing loss who may require high gain hearing aids that use prescriptive methods not found in other hearing aids, and workers with tinnitus who may require noise generation options/features that are not available for the maximum allowable amount.

Hearing aid repairs

After the warranty period, the WSIB may pay reasonable costs to repair a hearing aid unless there is evidence that the device was deliberately damaged, misused, or the operating instructions were not properly followed. The WSIB also covers the cost for the loan of a hearing aid while repairs are being made.

Hearing aid replacements

Whenever the WSIB allows a request for a replacement hearing aid, it pays up to the amount set out in the Table of Rates unless the requested device meets the exception criteria outlined above.

Generally the WSIB does not replace a hearing aid before 5 years. The WSIB recognizes that how long a hearing aid lasts depends on a number of factors including usage and the model purchased. Consequently, all hearing aid replacement requests before 5 years must be

**Operational
Policy**

Section
Prosthetic and Assistive Devices

Subject
Hearing Devices

accompanied by documentation from the relevant treating health professional which substantiates the worker's need for a new hearing aid. The documentation must include a detailed explanation as well as any recent evaluation (i.e., audiogram) and/or other supporting information.

When determining the necessity of replacement before 5 years, the WSIB considers the information provided as well as relevant factors such as the condition of the hearing aid and/or changes in the worker's clinical requirements.

Condition of the hearing aid

The WSIB may authorize a replacement before 5 years when a hearing aid is beyond repair unless there is evidence that the device was deliberately damaged, misused, or the operating instructions were not properly followed. The WSIB may consider a hearing aid beyond repair in situations such as those where high repair costs makes replacement a more appropriate alternative, or the nature/extent of the damage prevents repairs.

Clinical requirements

The WSIB may authorize a replacement before 5 years when there is a permanent change in the worker's work-related or non-work-related clinical condition that impacts the ongoing use of the current hearing aid as documented by the treating health professional (e.g., ear infection resulting in permanent worsening or hearing loss, permanent change in mobility, dexterity, or vision that impacts the worker's ability to properly handle the current hearing aid).

Lost hearing aids

If the worker's hearing aid is lost or stolen, the WSIB may authorize a replacement device on a once only basis. In the event the WSIB has authorized a replacement and the device is lost or stolen again, the purchase of a new device is generally the worker's responsibility.

Hearing aid batteries

The WSIB may authorize reasonable requests for the replacement of hearing aid batteries.

Hearing aid accessories

The WSIB may authorize payment for hearing aid accessories that are required for the proper care and maintenance of hearing aids. Hearing aid accessories include items such as a cleaning kit, sanitizer, wipes, brush, carrying case, battery tester, telephone pads, dri-aid kit, wax guard/basket, and ear mold blower.

Hearing assistive technologies (HATs)

The WSIB may authorize the provision of HATs, which are items that present auditory, visual, or tactile information to workers with impaired hearing (e.g., alerting systems, telephone amplifiers, television specific devices, FM systems). When determining entitlement, the WSIB

**Operational
Policy**

Section
Prosthetic and Assistive Devices

Subject
Hearing Devices

considers evidence that the requested HAT supports the worker's return to work, facilitates improved communication at home or in the community, or increases the worker's personal safety.

Workers should request pre-approval from the WSIB for the initial purchase of a HAT as well as for subsequent repairs/replacements, in order to avoid having to pay for items not ultimately approved by the WSIB.

After the warranty period, the WSIB may pay reasonable costs to repair a previously authorized device, unless there is evidence that the device was deliberately damaged, misused, or the operating instructions were not properly followed.

The WSIB authorizes the replacement of a HAT when necessary. When determining the necessity of the replacement, the WSIB considers factors such as the condition of the device, and permanent changes in the worker's clinical requirements that impact the ongoing use of the device as documented by the treating health professional.

Application date

This policy applies to all requests for initial or replacement hearing aids and related accessories, and hearing assistive technologies that are received by the WSIB for approval on or after February 1, 2011, for all injuries/diseases.

Document history

This document replaces document 17-07-04 dated November 23, 2009.

This document was previously published as:

17-07-04 dated October 12, 2004.

06-04-03 dated February 23, 1994.

References**Legislative authority**

Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997, as amended
Sections 32, 33, 119(1)

Workers' Compensation Act, R.S.O. 1990, as amended
Sections 50, 51, 52, 73

Minute

Administrative

#1, November 19, 2010, Page 484