

## **The remuneration of audiologists should not be based on sales targets**

14 July 2017

### **Background**

Media reports have claimed that some audiologists may not act in the best interests of their clients if incentives linked to sales of particular devices or hearing aids lead to perceived or actual conflicts of interest. Audiology Australia takes these reports very seriously.

Audiology Australia's [Code of Conduct](#) was revised and addressed the issue of incentives. The Code of Conduct requires that Audiology Australia members must make recommendations to clients based on clinical assessment and the client's needs, not on the basis of financial gain on the part of the member. In addition, Audiology Australia members must not engage in any form of misinformation or misrepresentation in relation to the hearing services or devices they provide.

In March 2017, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) released a report on 'Issues around the sale of hearing aids' to encourage industry to reconsider commissions, disclosure and sales practices in the context of the Australian Consumer Law. Audiology Australia was heartened to see that the ACCC recommendations were in line with Audiology Australia's Code of Conduct and position on the issue of commissions based on sales.

Audiology Australia welcomes the ACCC's request that "hearing clinic operators review their incentive programs and performance measures to ensure that they do not create a conflict between independent healthcare advice and sales"<sup>1</sup>.

### **Position Statement**

Audiology Australia's position on the remuneration of audiologists is that:

- Commissions should not be based on sales targets;
- Remuneration structures that put audiologists under pressure to meet sales targets place members at risk of breaching the Code of Conduct;
- Remuneration levels should be based on the clinical experience of the audiologist and the outcomes their clients achieve;
- Client outcomes must be measured by scientifically validated and reliable assessment tools in order to be in any way meaningful and a true reflection of client outcomes;
- Audiologists' employment conditions should allow them to adhere to the Code of Conduct and make recommendations to clients based on clinical assessment and the client's needs; and,
- Clients should be protected from unethical conduct when purchasing hearing aids and devices.

### About Audiology Australia and its members

Audiologists are tertiary educated health professionals. Audiologists work with clients of all ages to help them to preserve, manage and improve their hearing, their ability to process and understand sounds, and their balance.

Audiology Australia is the peak professional body for audiologists with over 2,500 members, which is estimated to be almost all of the clinical audiologists currently practicing in Australia. Audiology Australia provides the highest standard of self-regulation for its members and strives to meet the National Alliance of Self-Regulating Health Professions (NASRHP) Standards. Central to this self-regulation is the clinical certification program which includes:

- completion of an Audiology Australia Accredited Australian Masters-level degree and the intensive one-year Audiology Australia internship;
- meeting the rigorous Recency of Practice and Continuing Professional Development Requirements; and,
- adhering to the [Code of Conduct](#) that all members of Audiology Australia must abide by. Our Code of Conduct is in line with the [National Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers](#) and must be displayed, or a copy made available, at all premises where they deliver services.

Clinical certification by Audiology Australia is a requirement to provide government-funded audiological services. Additionally, private healthcare funds also require that the audiologist is a member of Audiology Australia for hearing service fees to be reimbursed.

### Audiology Australia acknowledges that the vast majority of its members are employees and have a limited ability to change their organisations' culture and policies

The majority of Audiology Australia members work for private sector practices (approximately 70% of our members). Approximately 10% of our members are self-employed in independent practice, and the remaining work for various government organisations, private hospitals and education providers. We therefore acknowledge that the vast majority of our members may have a limited ability to change their personal employment conditions.

We will continue to advocate for changes that facilitate ethical practice at an organisational level together with the Australian Government and the organisations that employ audiologists.

### What to do if you are concerned about an audiologist's conduct

Audiology Australia urges any person who has concerns about their hearing to seek audiological services from an Audiology Australia Accredited Audiologist<sup>®</sup>. Furthermore, members of Audiology Australia are required to inform the appropriate professional body if they form the reasonable belief that another member of Audiology Australia, the Australia College of Audiology (ACAud) or the Hearing Aid Audiometrist Society of Australia (HAASA) is in breach of the Code of Conduct.

If you have questions or concerns about ethical behaviour or professional conduct of any member of Audiology Australia, you are encouraged to contact the Ethics Committee at [ethics@audiology.asn.au](mailto:ethics@audiology.asn.au).

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<sup>i</sup> p.4. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. 2017. Issues around the sale of hearing aids.