


Audiology Australia Statement: Response to ABC Background Briefing “Have I got a hearing aid for you”



If you go to have your hearing tested at an audiology clinic, there's a good chance the clinician will receive a bonus from a manufacturer if they sell you a hearing aid. Despite the existence of an audiology code of conduct, such links are so common they're considered industry standard. Hagar Cohen investigates.

On Sunday 30 November, ABC Radio National's Background Briefing program looked into the practice of hearing aid fitting in Australia.

The segment, Have I got a hearing aid for you raised concerns about the practice of payment of commissions and/or incentives to hearing healthcare workers or the businesses employing them by hearing aid manufacturers when their brand of hearing aids are sold. The segment also highlighted incidences in which audiologists, and other hearing health workers fitting hearing aids, may be pressured as regards their clinical fitting of hearing aids, often instigated through sales training.

The story suggested that all hearing aids are fitted by audiologists, and that improper conduct in regards to disclosure of financial interests is widespread. It is important that the public understands that although hearing aids sold in Australia are subject to approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration, there exists no government regulation or restrictions on who can sell and fit hearing aids. Audiologists are the only university-trained professionals with specific expertise in the fitting of hearing aids and conduct of diagnostic hearing healthcare services. Despite Audiology Australia making numerous entreaties to government to regulate the practice of hearing aid fitting to ensure clients are not exposed to questionable financial and health-related risks from other persons providing audiological services, hearing aid fitting remains unregulated.

Audiology Australia has over 2000 members, representing over 95 per cent of clinical audiologists, and is the peak professional body for audiologists practicing in Australia. Our members practice according to our Codes of Ethics and Conduct and the Practice Standards of Audiology Australia provide guidance for audiology practices to meet Quality guidelines such as the ISO9001.

It is important to highlight that members of Audiology Australia are bound by the profession's Ethics and Code of Conduct which indicates:

Members must avoid any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest and disclose financial relationships with hearing aid manufacturers that could be considered a conflict in the prescription and fitting of hearing aids.

7.6 Members shall not enter into employment or business conditions that may compromise the independence of their clinical judgment.

AND

7.7 Members must act in good faith and for a proper purpose and shall disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest that could improperly influence members' duties and responsibilities.

Audiology Australia's Ethics Committee regularly reviews ethical issues in the profession to ensure requirements of

modern health care practices are met, and provides ongoing training through Continuing Professional Development addressing ethics and clinical conduct to its members.

Our members are required to deliver the highest standard of person-centred care and recommend the device best suited to the specific needs of the client, if this is indicated. The suggestion that Audiology Australia's members are primarily driven by personal financial reward and incentives when providing services is incorrect. Audiology Australia's members are required to hold a Certificate of Clinical Practice in order to qualify to deliver clinical services, and to maintain their clinical certification through continuing education. Any member of the public can request to see an Audiology Australia Member's Certificate of Membership and Certificate of Clinical Practice. Audiology Australia believes that the public has the right to know all of the facts about this issue in order not to ensure that people understand the positive health benefits of use of hearing aids for people with hearing loss. Audiology Australia urges any person who has concerns about their hearing to seek audiological services from one of our Members. Those who have questions or concerns about ethical behaviour or professional conduct of any member of Audiology Australia are encouraged to contact the Ethics Committee at ethics@audiology.asn.au. ●