# Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual C-700: Medical Services and Equipment

Revised May 3, 2021

## C-704: Durable Medical Equipment

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### C-704-10: Hearing Aids

Hearing aids may be authorized when they are expected to improve the customer's ability to participate in employment and/or training that is required for a specific employment outcome. The VR counselor documents the expected outcomes in the case file as part of the assessing and planning process.

The VR counselor develops the individualized plan for employment (IPE) to purchase hearing aids after receiving:

* an audiological assessment on the [VR3105C, Hearing Evaluation Report: Audiometric Examination](https://twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html), completed by a licensed audiologist or hearing aid specialist;
* the completed hearing evaluation form with hearing aid recommendations recorded on the [VR3105D, Hearing Evaluation Report: Hearing Aid Recommendations](https://twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html); and
* medical clearance from an otologist or otolaryngologist on the [VR3105B, Hearing Evaluation Report: Otological](https://twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html) Examination, or medical records from the otologist or otolaryngologist dated within the last 90 days.

If the staff is experiencing substantial delays in securing the evaluation with the otologist or otolaryngologist, a VR Supervisor (VRS) may grant an exception to waive the otological evaluation. In the event there is a substantial delay (90 days or more) in securing the evaluation:

* for seasoned hearing aid users with no medical issues (for example, no sudden hearing loss or extreme changes in hearing loss), the VRS can grant an exception to waive the otological evaluation if the customer’s PCP or other physician provides the hearing aid clearance.
* for a first-time hearing aid user, the VRS can grant an exception to waive the otological evaluation by an otologist or otolaryngologist or the customer’s PCP. If the customer does not have a PCP, the physician who performs the office’s general medical evaluations may provide medical clearance.

An LMC review/consultation will be required when the medical clearance is not from an otologist or otolaryngologist. If the LMC believes an otological evaluation by an otologist or otolaryngologist is necessary, the evaluation will be required. Refer to VRSM E-200: Summary Table of Approvals, Consultations, and Notifications.

When the VR counselor receives a recommendation for a complete-in-canal (CIC) hearing aid, he or she ensures that the audiologist sufficiently justifies the added benefits of a CIC hearing aid when compared to an alternative style with the same capabilities.

It is recommended that the VR counselor consult with a Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Technology Specialist](https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/deaf-hard-hearing#resource-specialist) for consideration of additional technology before purchasing the hearing aids.

For information on purchasing hearing aids, see [D-209-3: Contracted Goods and Services](https://twc.texas.gov/vr-services-manual/vrsm-d-200#d209-3) and [D-210: Exceptions to Contracted Fees and MAPS Fees](https://twc.texas.gov/vr-services-manual/vrsm-d-200#d210).

When an audiologist or hearing-instrument specialist provides a vocational justification that warrants an aid without a manual telecoil, it is recommended that the VR counselor consult with a local deaf and hard of hearing technology specialist before purchasing the aid. The VR counselor may request a workplace or environmental assessment completed by the deaf and hard of hearing technology specialist to identify additional technology needs.

Staff Qualifications for Hearing Aid Dispensers

Individuals who provide and bill for services associated with the purchase of hearing aids and related accessories must meet the qualifications and licensing requirements of the [Texas Department of State Health Services](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/), which is the designated regulatory authority for audiologists and hearing aid specialists (hearing aid dispensers).

| **Job Title** | **Job Function** | **Required Qualifications** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Audiologist | * Provides audiological examinations * May dispense hearing aids * May provide basic audiometric assessments | Licensed by the State Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology  To dispense hearing aids, the audiologist also must be licensed by the State Committee of Examiners in the Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Instruments. |
| Hearing aid specialist | * Dispenses hearing aids * May provide basic audiometric assessments (MAPS 92551–92559) * May provide hearing aid evaluations | Must comply with all provisions of:  Texas Administrative Code, Title 22, Examining Boards, Part 7, State Committee of Examiners in the Fitting and Dispensing of Hearing Instruments, Chapter 141, Licensure and Regulation of Hearing Instrument Fitters and Dispensers |

Comparable Benefits

Use of comparable services and benefits is not required for rehabilitation technology, including hearing aids.

Customer Participation in Cost of Services

Customers may be required to participate in the cost of services. For more information on applying basic living requirements (BLR) to contracted hearing aids and accessories, refer to VRSM D-203-4: Customer Participation in the Cost of Services.

Hearing Aid Recommendations

The selected provider must complete the [VR3105D, Hearing Evaluation Report: Hearing Aid Recommendations](https://twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html), indicating the:

* brand name and model number (not serial number);
* type of hearing aid, such as:
  + behind-the-ear;
  + in-the-ear;
  + in-the-canal;
  + complete-in-canal; or
  + bilateral contralateral routing of signal;
* color selection;
* receiver information;
* earmold information;
* quantity of hearing aids;
* cost of hearing aids; and
* any required justifications.

Service Charge to the Hearing Aid Dispenser

The service charge is the dispenser's usual and customary charge, not to exceed the Maximum Affordable Payment Schedule (MAPS), for:

* initial fitting, including activation of a telecoil;
* up to four follow-up visits without any time limitations for adjustments, including:
  + post-fitting evaluation; and
  + report of hearing aid performance and customer level of satisfaction; and
* instructions on the care and use of the instrument.

Service Charge for Replacement Hearing Aids

For hearing aids replaced under the three-year warranty, use MAPS code 00076 if the dispenser requires payment of a service charge. If the service charge for a replacement hearing aid or aids is paid, four additional follow-up visits are included in the cost of the service. These are in addition to unused visits from the original service charge.

MAPS Codes for Hearing Aid Service Charges

* 00075 - Unspecified service charge. Rate to be determined by PRS/CO Programs
* 00076 - Service Charge for Hearing Aid $0 - $1000 Manufacturer’s Lowest List Price
* 00077 - Service Charge for Hearing Aid $1001-$1500 Manufacturer’s Lowest List Price
* 00078 - Service Charge for Hearing Aid $1500+ Manufacturer’s Lowest List Price

The hearing aid dispenser must complete the Initial Fitting Acknowledgements on the VR3105E and submit the report to TWC-VR immediately upon receipt of the customer’s signature indicating receipt of the hearing aids. The hearing aid dispenser must schedule an appointment with the customer to return for post-fitting no later than 14 days after the date that the customer received the hearing aids. If the customer does not attend an appointment with the dispenser within 14 days of receiving the hearing aids, the dispenser must notify VR staff that the customer has not returned for the post-fitting appointment. If the customer does not keep the post-fitting appointment, VR staff contacts the customer before the 30-day trial period ends to verify that the customer has received and is satisfied with the hearing aids. When the hearing aids are returned within the 30-day trial period, the original service charge covers any services for the replacement hearing aids.

Earmolds and Canal Impressions

Earmolds and canal impressions may be:

* required for hearing aid purchases;
* purchased from the contracted hearing aid manufacturer, audiologist, or hearing aid dispenser;
* paid for separately (not to exceed MAPS); and
* purchased for diagnostic purposes.

Custom-made ear plugs, which look like earmolds and are made for sound protection, may be purchased to preserve the customer's residual hearing while performing work duties.

Binaural

Binaural aids may be purchased when:

* recommended by the audiologist or hearing aid service provider; and
* a documented vocational benefit exists.

Hearing Accessories

An audiologist or hearing aid dispenser may recommend certain accessories and devices that work with the hearing aids to enhance the customer's ability to hear and understand conversational speech and environmental sounds. One example is a device that streams sounds from the telephone, television, and music player, as well as a compatible microphone, directly to the hearing aids. These may be purchased when the VR counselor determines that any of the recommended accessories are vocationally relevant, as such accessories must be vocationally necessary and not used solely for personal purposes.

Another accessory that may be purchased is a hearing aid drying kit, which draws moisture from the hearing aids to prolong their life span. The audiologist or dispenser is not required to recommend the kit for VR staff to purchase this accessory.

MAPS Codes for Contracted Hearing Aids, Earmolds, and Accessories

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Beltone | BELTO |
| Oticon | OTICO |
| Phonak | PHONA |
| GN Resound | GNRES |
| Siemens/Signia | SIEME |
| Sonic Innovations | SONIC |
| Starkey | STARK |
| Unitron | UNITR |
| Widex | WIDEX |

Repair

Payment for repair of a hearing aid, including labor and shipping and handling charges, must not exceed the cost of a new hearing aid.

Frequency Modulation System

The VR counselor may purchase a frequency modulation (FM) system directly from a manufacturer or an audiologist. However, the VR counselor may not pay a service fee, including any fitting and dispensing fees, when he or she purchases an FM system through an audiologist.

When additional training is needed for an FM system, the VR counselor contacts the deaf and hard of hearing technology specialist to request training for the customer on the use of the device and to perform troubleshooting of any issues with the device. Services provided by the deaf and hard of hearing technology specialist are free and may be used when available. If the required training is not available from the deaf and hard of hearing technology specialist, the VR counselor may negotiate payment with the provider for training the customer on the use of the device and for solving problems that arise with the device.

Process and Procedure

When the VR counselor receives, reviews, and approves a completed VR3105D, Hearing Evaluation Report: Hearing Aid Recommendations, two service authorizations (SA) are issued and submitted:

* to the hearing aid manufacturer or contractor for the purchase of the hearing aid and any accessories, with delivery instructions indicating the name and address of the dispenser where the items are to be shipped; and
* to the hearing aid dispenser for related service fees and any accessories.

The hearing aid dispenser then submits the VR SA for the hearing aid and any accessories to the hearing aid manufacturer or contractor for fulfillment. The manufacturer or contractor ships the hearing aid or aids and any accessories to the hearing aid dispenser for dispensing.

Payment for Hearing Aids to the Manufacturer

Upon receipt of an invoice that complies with requirements in VR-SFP Chapters 3 and 6 and VRSM D-208-2: Elements of an Invoice, and receipt of a VR3105E, Hearing Aid Fitting and Post-Fitting Report with the Initial Fitting Acknowledgements section completed, VR pays the hearing aid manufacturer or contractor for the hearing aid and/or accessories.

Payment for Hearing Aids Service Charges to the Dispenser

For the hearing aid dispenser to receive payment for services provided, the hearing aid dispenser must submit the following documentation:

* A completed [VR3105E, Hearing Aid Fitting and Post-Fitting Report](https://twc.texas.gov/forms/index.html), indicating the customer has received the hearing aids and is satisfied with the hearing aids and any accessories, as indicated by the customer signing and dating the form;
* Post-fitting documentation such as:
  + an audiogram of functional results for each ear (aided); or
  + measurements for each ear (aided); and
* An invoice that complies with VRSM D-208-2: Elements of an Invoice

Returns

The hearing aid dispenser that dispensed the goods or equipment to the customer must provide written notice to the VR office that issued the SA when any goods or equipment purchased with VR funds are being returned to the manufacturer for any reason.

This notice must include:

* a description of the item returned;
* a description of the condition of the item returned;
* the date that the item was returned;
* the reason for the return;
* the amount of credit due to VR;
* the customer’s name;
* the case identification number; and
* descriptions of subsequent actions that were taken (that is, if the hearing aids were returned to the contractor, exchanged, or replaced).