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**New Zealand
Audiological Society**

Press Release

Audiological Society ensures hearing aid consumers protected

Auckland, June 24, 2015: The New Zealand Audiological Society (NZAS) through their code of ethics and robust complaints process, strives to ensure people are well served when they seek audiological services, purchase hearing instruments and support from their members.

The NZAS was incorporated in 1976 and it is a self-governing body representing more than 300 Audiologists in New Zealand. The Society has a Constitution, an elected Executive Council, a Code of Ethics, and an independent complaints procedure. Members of the Society are required to uphold the Society's Code of Ethics.¹

The NZAS is concerned about the recent media coverage which indicated that War Veterans and older New Zealanders may be at risk of purchasing hearing devices and services that are neither required nor suitable. The NZAS considers the conduct described in the media as unacceptable and asks that the people mentioned in the article contact them as soon as possible so that a formal enquiry can take place.

The public needs to be aware that in New Zealand there is no restriction on who may sell hearing aids. Therefore some complaints are not about audiological services received from a member of the NZAS, but about a person who is not a member of the society.

The NZAS urges members of the public seeking audiological services to always ask their audiological provider if they are a member of the New Zealand Audiological Society. The NZAS publishes on their website (www.audiology.org.nz) details of all their current practicing members. Public can also look for the qualification "MNZAS CCC" after their name.

The public is also protected through the Health and Disability Act and can take a complaint to the Health and Disability Commissioner at any time.

¹ NZAS Code of Ethics, available at <http://www.audiology.org.nz/code-of-ethics.aspx>.

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The NZAS has sought registration of the profession of audiology a number of times since 1974. The NZAS has and will continue to lobby the Ministry of Health to restrict the sale of hearing aids, which are classed as medical devices, to ensure that only qualified and appropriately credentialled professionals may sell them as is the case in other countries. The Society would welcome the public's support in this effort.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

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Background information.

Code of Ethics: The NZAS Code of Ethics is patient-centric and requires its members to ensure that they hold paramount the rights, needs and dignity of the people they serve professionally.

The Code of Ethics also requires its members to provide the highest standard of independent professional services. The Society has assumed a responsibility to serve important social interests, requiring an independence from the effects of commercial pressures.²

Of particular relevance are the following Rules of the Code of Ethics:

- **Rule 4.1:** Members must maintain professional independence at all times. This means acting in the best interests of the people they serve, free from all potential, apparent, or actual financial conflicts of interest, however they arise or are structured. Accordingly, audiologists must have the freedom and discretion to present appropriate options to the people they serve and then, if appropriate, make recommendations on whatever brand or model of hearing aid and other related accessories will best meet the person's needs. It is then up to the person to make a choice as to which, if any, they select.
- **Rule 4.2:** Audiologists dispensing hearing aids must disclose all potential, apparent or actual financial conflicts of interest, however they arise or are structured.
- **Rule 4.3:** Members who are employers of audiologists, and/or members who are employees of audiological clinics, must ensure that any employment agreement recognises this obligation of professional independence.
- **Rule 4.4:** Members must not accept compensation in any form from a manufacturer or supplier of professionally related products for recommending any particular product.

Complaints procedure: The Society also has a robust and well-established **complaints procedure**.³ The Complaints Board is charged by the Executive Council of the Society with the responsibility to interpret, administer, and enforce the Society's Code of Ethics. The Complaints Board is an independent Board made up of a lawyer, a consumer representative and two professional advisors.

The Complaints Board can receive complaints from any person, whether that is an audiologist, a consumer, or a support person. The Complaints Board can also commence investigations where a complaint has not been made.

After investigating a complaint (or after concluding an investigation of its own), the Complaints Board can recommend the Executive Council of the Society should issue sanctions or penalties, including suspension or revocation of membership of the Society.

² NZAS Code of Ethics, available at <http://www.audiology.org.nz/code-of-ethics.aspx>.

³ The complaints procedure can be viewed online here: <http://www.audiology.org.nz/Userfiles/file/Complaints%20Board%20Procedure.pdf>