

## **Position Paper: Advice regarding Internet Based Hearing Aid Sales**

October 2012

The New Zealand Audiological Society (NZAS) is aware that individuals are able to purchase hearing devices on the internet and are approaching Audiologists to provide fitting services for these devices. Many audiologists are declining such requests on the basis that the hearing aid is, in most situations, not clinically appropriate for the individual. The NZAS does not support purchasing new or second hand hearing aids over the internet or the fitting of such aids to individuals. The reasons for this are outlined below.

1. Hearing aids are a medical device that must be prescribed and fitted by a hearing care professional with an appropriate trial and return option should they not be successfully accepted by the individual.
2. The prescription of hearing aids requires a face to face consultation between a hearing care professional and the individual.

### **Considerations for Purchases of Hearing Devices without Clinical Support:**

- Hearing aids purchased over the internet may not be appropriate for an individual's hearing loss and needs.
- Purchasing hearing aids over the internet may lead to failure to identify surgically or medically treatable hearing loss.
- Hearing aids can permanently damage hearing when worn and fitted without the input of a hearing care professional
- Hearing aids purchased over the internet are unlikely to be
  - a) covered under warranty by the manufacturer,
  - b) able to be returned for credit should they be an inappropriate model,
  - c) provided with any rehabilitation services and follow up care.
- The Ministry of Health Subsidy (which covers both Ministry of Health and ACC funding schemes) does not apply to any hearing aid purchased over the internet (see clause BB8 (4) of the Hearing Aid Services Notice). The subsidy is only able to be claimed when the hearing aids are purchased and fitted in New Zealand through an Audiologist who is a full member of the New Zealand Audiological Society.

The New Zealand Audiological Society encourages individuals to see a member of the New Zealand Audiological Society to have a diagnostic hearing assessment and a hearing needs assessment to determine the most appropriate solution for their needs. This will ensure appropriate long term follow up care and rehabilitation services are offered as part of the diagnosis of hearing loss and subsequent fitting of hearing aids. This also avoids the risks associated with purchasing hearing aids without appropriate clinical support.