

JOINT POSITION STATEMENT

Direct-to-Consumer Sale of Hearing Aids

By: Speech-Language and Audiology Canada and the Canadian Academy of Audiology

It is the position of Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC) and the Canadian Academy of Audiology (CAA) that the direct-to-consumer sale of hearing aids seriously compromises consumer safety, satisfaction and successful use of these devices.

There are a growing number of retailers and manufacturers selling or attempting to sell hearing aids and other amplification devices directly to consumers. The direct-to-consumer sale of hearing aids advertises low cost devices, offering this affordability often by eliminating the need to see a qualified hearing health professional, the audiologist. While there are currently several different direct-to-consumer sales models, the importance and necessity for safe and competent hearing health care services, as provided by the audiologist, is ignored.

A complete assessment by an audiologist is an essential first step to obtaining accurate diagnostic information on the degree and type of hearing loss. The audiologist can determine whether a hearing aid is appropriate or whether additional medical attention is needed. There may be underlying causes for the hearing loss that need to be ruled out before a hearing aid is considered appropriate. If a hearing aid is appropriate, the audiologist is best suited to guide the consumer through the appropriate selection, fitting, evaluation, verification and adaptation stages of treatment.

Hearing loss is more than an inconvenience. Even a mild hearing loss can have serious social, health and economic consequences. Often those experiencing hearing loss withdraw themselves from their usual social activities because communication becomes strained. This isolation impacts relationships and the social connection needed to maintain good mental health. Work and income can also be seriously impacted. The importance of hearing health should not be minimized or compromised. Audiologists are hearing health professionals who identify, diagnose and manage difficulties with hearing function, the hearing structures of the ear, the neural pathways and/or the brain centres related to hearing across the lifespan. Audiologists also serve people with tinnitus (ringing in the ears) and help those with challenges related to vestibular and balance disorders.

References

- ASHA. Retailers for Hearing Aids, Personal Sound Amplification Products, and Apps: <http://www.asha.org/Advocacy/Retailers-for-Hearing-Aids-Personal-Sound-Amplification-Products-and-Apps.htm> [Last retrieved April 7, 2016, 2016].
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- Speech-Language and Audiology Canada. (2014). [infographic]. *The cost of untreated hearing loss versus the value of hearing aids*. Retrieved from http://sac-oac.ca/sites/default/files/resources/Hearing-Aids-Infographic-English_0.pdf

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