

As a 71-year old pensioner, I am dismayed by the cost of hearing aids.

I was slightly deaf as a child and young adult, but had a very significant loss in 1981 due to otosclerosis. My paternal grandmother was so deaf she couldn't hear us when we were little. I also inherited my mother's very narrow ear canals.

In 1981, I had surgery which was aborted by the surgeon after he had made the incision and found he was not confident he could get a prosthesis in through the narrow ear canal which was also obstructed by bone which had grown from the skull. After a month of recuperation, I was fitted with my first hearing aid, which fortunately allowed me to continue working as a teacher of English to immigrant and refugee secondary students for another twenty-two years and to pay income tax.

I was taken aback in subsequent years when audiologists explained that I would need new hearing aids even though I had had no further loss of hearing. Hearing aids seem to have a life span of only five years at best and prices in Australia are significantly higher than overseas. When in Bangkok in 2005-2011, I found new hearing aids cost \$1000 - \$1500 less than in Melbourne. This applied to the same international brands.

My audiologist has suggested that I will need to replace my hearing aids next year. The pair I have now cost me \$5000 with the government subsidy. The audiologist explained to me when I got them that the hearing aids the cost of which could be completely government-subsidised were three generations out of date and the least powerful of three levels. I selected the middle ones on the basis of price as I couldn't afford the latest and most powerful.

I have to make do with my current hearing aids with their limitations. Eg when my partner speaks to me from behind me at the other end of our open-plan living room and kitchen, I can't make out his words and I have to ask him to come closer and speak face to face. I often can't hear people speaking to me on my volume-boosted landline telephone. I tend to hear what people are saying better on my mobile phone in loudspeaker mode, though I don't always hear it ring.

Even with my hearing aid, I still need the closed-captions when watching programs on television. I can't make out the dialogue at the cinema even when trying to use telecoil, so I prefer to watch foreign films with English subtitles.

I've stopped going to public spoken-word occasions such as drama and talks and many community events because I too often can't hear the speakers. I often can't hear when I try to listen to podcasts or YouTube videos online. I want to be able to participate in and contribute to community organisations. I do not feel confident that I would any longer be able to take on voluntary or paid work.

Events are often held in acoustically difficult rooms. Many groups do not plan to have microphones. Very often where organisers are thoughtful enough to provide microphones, many people including presenters and audience members asking questions or contributing to discussion do not know how to use them.

A problem with hearing-aid technology is that aids are still not humidity-proof and need frequent replacement of ruined components.

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