



FACT SHEET FOR AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers comprehensive care services to Veterans with hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance. Auditory system disabilities (including hearing loss and tinnitus) are among the most common service-related disabilities in every period of service since WWII. VA is the largest employer of audiologists in the United States, employing over 1100 audiologists. Consistent with the VA mission, Audiology is involved with training and research.

WHO ARE AUDIOLOGISTS?

Audiologists are healthcare professionals trained to identify, diagnose, treat and monitor disorders of the auditory and vestibular systems. Most audiologists are trained with a doctoral degree (e.g., AuD, PhD). All VA audiologists are required to maintain a state license.

SITES OF CARE

Audiology Services are found in over 400 sites of care in the VA health care system including medical centers, outpatient clinics (OPCs) and community based outpatient clinics (CBOCs).

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR AUDIOLOGY CARE?

All Veterans enrolled in VA's health care system are eligible for comprehensive audiology diagnostic evaluations. Specific eligibility rules apply to hearing aid services.



(Photo courtesy of VA)

AUDIOLOGY SERVICES

VA audiologists provide a range of clinic services to our Nation's Veterans and Servicemembers. Services include:

- Hearing screenings
- Diagnostic hearing evaluations
- Hearing aid fittings
- Aural Rehabilitation
- Vestibular Assessment
- Vestibular Rehabilitation
- Tinnitus Assessment
- Tinnitus Rehabilitation
- Ototoxic monitoring

AUDITORY DISORDERS AND REHABILITATION

Hearing loss is one of the top three service-connected disabilities among Veterans and impacts approximately 45% of adults over the age of 65 in the general population. The most common type of hearing loss among Veterans is high frequency sensorineural hearing loss that varies in severity from mild to profound. This type of hearing loss is generally caused by noise exposure, age or both and causes difficulty distinguishing sounds or understanding speech. The most

common treatment for this hearing loss is hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. Audiologists work with Veterans and their families to improve communication by using advanced technologies and extensive counseling.

BEST TECHNOLOGY ANYWHERE

Through national contracting with the Denver Acquisition and Logistics Center (DALC), the VA is able to provide state of the art technology to Veterans with hearing loss. Devices include:

- Hearing Aids
- FM Systems
- Cochlear Implants
- Bone-anchored Hearing Aids
- Tinnitus Maskers/Sound Generators
- Assistive/Alerting Devices



(Photo courtesy of D. Michael Moody)

For more information, visit www.rehab.va.gov
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Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services

Audiology

VESTIBULAR DISORDERS AND REHABILITATION

Problems with dizziness and balance are common among Veterans and are often symptoms of underlying medical conditions. Dizziness problems may be related to part of the inner ear known as the vestibular system. These problems typically cause difficulties with balance. Balance is complex and relies on input from the vestibular, visual, and somatosensory systems. Audiologists perform tests to assess balance function when the following symptoms are present:

- Rapid, involuntary eye movement (nystagmus)
- Room spinning sensation (vertigo)
- Complaints of dizziness
- Difficulty walking

Audiologists work with physical therapists to develop individualized treatment plans to minimize, recover balance, and improve daily functional activities.

TINNITUS MANAGEMENT

Tinnitus is the medical term for the perception of sound in the ears or head when no external noise is present. The sound can be intermittent or constant, range is severity from mild to severe, and is often described as a ringing, roaring or humming sound. Although the cause of tinnitus is unknown, there are likely sources that trigger or worsen tinnitus:

- Hearing loss
- Noise exposure
- Injury to head or neck
- Stress
- Excessive ear wax
- Ototoxicity

Currently there is no cure for tinnitus; however, there are treatment options. The most common treatments include education, sound therapy (including hearing aids), and counseling/psychotherapy. Progressive Tinnitus Management (PTM) is a tiered strategy used within the VA that starts with education and then continues to utilize more of the involved aforementioned strategies based on the individual needs of the Veteran.

AUDIOLOGY TELEHEALTH

Through the use of Clinical Video Telehealth, audiology services are provided at some CBOCs by connecting patients with providers at the medical center. Services available through telehealth include hearing evaluations, hearing aid fittings and follow-ups, auditory rehabilitation and tinnitus management. The VA Audiology and Speech Pathology National Program Office is also exploring ways to provide services directly into the Veteran's home through computer technologies and mobile device applications.

TRAINING FUTURE AUDIOLOGISTS

Audiology clinics across the country hold academic affiliations with universities to provide training in our state of the art medical centers. The Office of Academic Affairs supports this training by funding student traineeships. Funds are awarded to sites that offer a broad range of audiology services and have demonstrated the provision of high quality hearing healthcare.

AUDIOLOGY RESEARCH

VA supports research focusing on auditory and vestibular functions through a variety of competitive research grants available to principle investigators. Additionally, there are two primary centers for research funded through Rehabilitation Research and Development:

- National Center for Rehabilitative Auditory Research (NCRAR) located at the VAMC, Portland, OR
- Auditory Vestibular Research Enhancement Award Program (AVREAP) located at the VAMC, Mountain Home, TN

For more information contact the Audiology clinic at your facility.

