

TELEAUDIOLOGY CONSUMER INFORMATION

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS TELEAUDIOLOGY?

Teleaudiology is an option for your hearing care. It's a way to receive hearing care when you and your hearing health care provider are not in the same place.

Teleaudiology describes hearing care (audiology) similar to that provided by telehealth. It may involve connecting by a video call, phone call, an email or using a software program such as an App.

2. WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER TELEAUDIOLOGY?

Teleaudiology can be a more convenient way to receive your hearing care.

Using teleaudiology allows you to have your appointment at home, work or another quiet place without having to travel. This can save you time and travel costs.

It improves access to hearing care especially for people who find it hard to get to a hearing clinic because they:

- have health or mobility issues
- have family or work responsibilities
- live in residential care or a long way from a hearing clinic.

During a crisis such as a natural disaster or pandemic, teleaudiology allows you to receive hearing care without risking the safety of you and your family.

3. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TELEAUDIOLOGY?

The advantages of teleaudiology include:

- *Improved access* – for people who find it difficult to attend appointments in-person because they have health or mobility problems, family or work responsibilities or live a long way from the nearest hearing clinic
- *Choice and flexibility* – in consultation with your hearing health care provider, you may choose to receive some hearing care in-person and some by teleaudiology
- *Enhanced care and support* – teleaudiology can increase options to involve others in your appointment such as another hearing or health care professional hearing, family members and support workers, wherever they are
- *Increased convenience* – you can receive your hearing care at home, work or elsewhere which may save you time and travel costs
- *Better follow up and continuity of care* – your hearing care continues even if you're travelling away from home or when access to hearing care in-person is restricted, such as during natural disasters or a pandemic.

Some potential disadvantages of teleaudiology include:

- *Signal interruption* – even when you have good phone or internet service, your phone or video-call may drop out
- *Availability* – not all clinics offer teleaudiology and some may use teleaudiology only for certain types of hearing care
- *Privacy risk* – as with all internet services, teleaudiology carries a risk to your privacy. Ask your provider what they have in place to protect your privacy and personal information.

4. WHAT ARE THE REASONS THAT TELEAUDIOLOGY MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR ME?

Teleaudiology may not be suitable for someone who has:

- unreliable phone or internet service
- no access to a smart phone, tablet or computer or
- no personal support to help use their phone, tablet or computer for teleaudiology.

You know your situation better than anyone, including access to and confidence with technology.

5. CAN ALL MY HEARING CARE BE CARRIED OUT BY TELEAUDIOLOGY?

As a general statement, almost all hearing care can be provided by teleaudiology. Some hearing care may still require you to visit a hearing clinic in-person, such as removal of ear wax or earmould impression taking.

Some types of hearing care may require a trained assistant to be with you to do practical tasks on behalf of the hearing health care provider.

A trained assistant describes someone with clinical skills such as another provider, a GP, nurse or allied health professional, or someone who is trained to provide technical support.

Talk to your provider about the options to receive your hearing care needs.

You and your provider may decide to use teleaudiology for some of your appointments and to meet in-person for others.

6. CAN ALL HEARING CONDITIONS BE MANAGED BY TELEAUDIOLOGY?

As a general statement, almost all hearing conditions (e.g., hearing loss, tinnitus) can be managed by teleaudiology.

7. DO ALL HEARING HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS OFFER TELEAUDIOLOGY? HOW DO I FIND OUT?

Talk to your provider to find out if teleaudiology is available.

8. HOW DOES A HEARING HEALTH CARE PROVIDER DELIVER TELEAUDIOLOGY?

A teleaudiology appointment may take place by a video-call, phone call, an email or using an App.

Video-calls are often preferred because they allow you and your hearing health care provider to see each other. Most video-call services and Apps offer live captions so you can read what your provider is saying.

In some cases, you may be able to attend a convenient location, such as a community health service, to connect to your provider with the help of a trained assistant. The trained assistant may carry out technical tasks on behalf of your provider, such as fitting your hearing device.

9. WHAT IS AN APP?

App stands for “application”. An App is a computer or software program designed for your phone, tablet, laptop or computer.

Apps perform specific tasks. For example, some Apps enable you to connect with friends, family and your hearing health care provider by voice and/or video.

An increasing number of hearing devices now have Apps which you can use to control your device from your smart phone or computer e.g., changing volume or background noise settings.

10. HOW DOES A HEARING HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ADJUST MY HEARING DEVICE FROM ANOTHER LOCATION?

An increasing number of hearing devices now have Apps which you can use to control your device from your smart phone or computer, such as changing volume or background noise settings. Your provider – with your permission – via the internet can access the hearing device App on your smart phone or computer using a computer in the hearing clinic to adjust your device.

11. WHAT DO I NEED TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TELEAUDIOLOGY APPOINTMENT?

You need:

- to be comfortable using a phone or computer or have a family member, friend or carer help you
- a quiet space with good lighting, and reliable internet and phone access
- a space that offers some privacy so you are not interrupted or overheard by other people.

This can be any place you feel comfortable – at home, work or elsewhere. You can even use teleaudiology when you are travelling.

You DO NOT need new or upgraded devices or special equipment to use teleaudiology.

Your hearing health care provider will talk to you about what is possible using your existing devices. A family member, friend, carer or support worker may be able to help you connect with your provider using their smart phone, tablet or computer.

12. I CAN'T HEAR VERY WELL ON THE PHONE SO HOW WOULD TELEAUDIOLOGY WORK FOR ME?

Teleaudiology offers many ways for you and your hearing health care provider to connect such as email or a video-call.

A video-call allows you to see your hearing health care provider. Most video call services and Apps offer live captions so you can read what your provider is saying.

13. IF I HAVE TO TAKE MY HEARING DEVICES OFF DURING A TELEAUDIOLOGY APPOINTMENT, HOW WILL I COMMUNICATE WITH MY HEARING HEALTH CARE PROVIDER?

Your provider may suggest connecting by video call so you can see each other. Most video-call services and Apps offer live captions so you can read what your provider is saying.

14. I DON'T HAVE A MOBILE PHONE - WILL THIS STOP ME HAVING A TELEAUDIOLOGY APPOINTMENT?

Your provider can call you on a landline. If you have a computer, you can connect with your provider by email or video-call.

A family member, friend, carer or support worker may be able to help you connect with your provider using their smart phone, tablet or computer.

15. DO I HAVE TO GIVE FORMAL CONSENT FOR TELEAUDIOLOGY? HOW? WHAT AM I CONSENTING TO?

Yes. You will be asked to confirm you are happy for your hearing health care provider to use teleaudiology for your appointment. This may be in writing or verbally on a phone or video-call. As your circumstances and preferences can change over time, you should be asked to consent for each teleaudiology appointment.

You should also be asked to consent to:

- another person in taking part in your appointment such as a trained assistant or another hearing or health care professional
- sharing information about you and your hearing care with another hearing or health care professional
- the use, storage and protection of your personal information.

16. IF MY HEARING HEALTH CARE PROVIDER SUGGESTS INCLUDING SOMEONE ELSE IN THE APPOINTMENT – SUCH AS A TRAINED ASSISTANT OR ANOTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONAL – WHO'S IN CHARGE?

First, it is your decision whether another person takes part in your appointment, such as a trained assistant, another health care professional or one of your family members.

Whoever joins your appointment, your hearing health care provider is still responsible for the hearing care outcomes of your appointment.

17. CAN I INVITE SOMEONE TO MY TELEAUDIOLOGY APPOINTMENT TO SUPPORT OR HELP ME?

Yes. It is a good idea to invite family members, friends and/or carers to join your appointment. They can help you during the appointment or learn how to offer you better support in daily life (such as improving their own communication skills). Family, friends or a carer in a different place (eg interstate or at work) may also join in teleaudiology appointments.

You can also include in your teleaudiology appointment:

- an interpreter – spoken language and Auslan
- a support worker, such as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker.

If you involve family members, a friend or carer in your appointment, you decide their role. For example, you may want them to provide emotional or technical support or help you communicate with your provider.

18. I FIND IT HARD TO CHANGE THE BATTERIES FOR MY DEVICE. CAN TELEAUDIOLOGY HELP WITH THAT?

On a video-call, your hearing health care provider can explain and demonstrate how to change the battery for your hearing device and/or send you links to helpful videos.

19. WHAT IF I AM UNHAPPY WITH THE TELEAUDIOLOGY EXPERIENCE?

You can stop a teleaudiology appointment at any time and request an in-person appointment instead.

You can provide feedback to your hearing health care provider about a teleaudiology or in-person appointment – by email, phone, in a letter, in-person or by survey if available.