

Teleaudiology Guidelines Consultation Report

Background

Audiology Australia is developing guidelines for hearing health practitioners and hearing service providers to support the safe and effective delivery of hearing services through teleaudiology.

This work is guided by [the Teleaudiology Guidelines Working Group](#) comprising representatives from the Hearing Health Sector Alliance. Members include researchers, professional associations, consumer organisations and hearing services providers.

Funded by the Australian Government, the teleaudiology guidelines project responds to recommendations of the Hearing Health Roadmap (2019) and Parliamentary inquiries which suggested teleaudiology could improve access to hearing health services, regardless of location.

The consultation process

Over several weeks, from June to August 2021, Audiology Australia consulted the hearing health sector about initial draft guidelines for delivering hearing care services by telehealth (teleaudiology).

The consultation process involved:

- individual hearing health practitioners who shared their diverse and practical experiences of teleaudiology
- more than 100 hearing health practitioners, consumers and providers (77% participation rate) at 10 focus groups
- written submissions from more than 30 organisations and individuals in Australia and overseas (50% response rate)
- over 1150 downloads of the guidelines on www.teleaudiologyguidelines.org.au

From the initial stage of planning in March, members of the Teleaudiology Guidelines Working Group generously contributed their time, perspective and expertise to help prepare the consultation draft and support the consultation process.

We thank all those individuals and organisations who shared their perspectives and expertise throughout the consultation phase to help refine the guidelines.

Feedback overview

Overall, the response to the teleaudiology guidelines concept and consultation draft was positive and encouraging.

An overwhelming majority welcomed the initiative and the opportunity to provide feedback.

Key findings from consultation feedback highlighted the:

- value of framing a pro-active role for the practitioner with a strong emphasis on client-centred care and the exercise of professional judgment
- importance of acknowledging teleaudiology is a service delivery option for providers, practitioners and clients
- benefit of keeping guidelines broad to allow room for service and technology innovation
- need to complement, not duplicate, guidance available elsewhere
- value of providing resources to support and facilitate implementation.

Some of these points are elaborated below.

Choice

Teleaudiology is a service delivery option that complements in-person services. How and when it is used should be guided by:

- the practitioner's professional judgment, skills and competencies
- the client's preferences, hearing care needs, digital literacy and capability
- the provider's business model
- access to technology and reliable infrastructure
- safety considerations and cultural responsiveness.

Streamline the guidelines

Guidelines should:

- support practitioners to exercise their professional judgment
- provide easily located content and practical considerations
- complement guidance documented elsewhere such as:
 - professional guidance eg Codes of Conduct, the Scope of Practice
 - privacy principles and data security guidelines
 - payors' requirements such as the Hearing Services Program, the Medical Benefits Scheme, Private Health Insurance and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- allow for innovation and changes in technology.

Provide resources

Access to resources will support implementation of the guidelines by providing more detailed guidance to those practitioners and providers who want and need it.

Consumers want a resource to aid their understanding and choices about their hearing services delivery.

Involving others

Teleaudiology extends the possibilities to involve others in a hearing service. Most will be involved to support the client or the practitioner. The draft guidelines need to clarify who may be involved and the terminology to describe them.

Next Steps

Audiology Australia will soon release a revised set of draft guidelines which incorporate feedback from the consultation process.

This draft will be the subject of testing with practitioners and providers over coming months. The testing process will explore the useability and clarity of the revised draft guidelines and help identify key resources to support the implementation process from mid 2022.

In tandem with the testing process, Audiology Australia will develop a consumer resource with key stakeholders.

Information about the testing process and how to get involved is available [here](#).

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