

## **Selecting A Hearing Care Professional**

Congratulations on your decision to improve your communication needs. Perhaps you have previously seen a hearing care professional or this is your first time seeing one. The following information is meant to help anyone who is ready to take the first step in caring for their hearing.

According to the Alberta Aids to Daily Living (AADL) approved Hearing Aid Vendors list, there are over 180 hearing clinics in Alberta. So how do you select a hearing care professional that meets your needs? Below are some tips to help you find a hearing care professional.

### **Referral**

Your family doctor is a good start. They know your medical history, and with the information you provide them with, they can refer you to a corresponding professional

The Hard of Hearing community is also another good source of information on hearing care professionals. They can provide firsthand experience and help you prepare for your appointment. They are also there to provide support as you go through your hearing care journey.

Each hearing clinic generally has their own web site, where they list their professional's profiles. You can review them before selecting a hearing professional and clinic.

### **Location**

If you decide to get a Hearing Aid, you will be visiting the clinic often when you are first fitted. So, the location should be taken in to consideration. Can you easily get there on your own? Do their office hours fit your schedule?

### **Understand the Professions**

When getting your hearing evaluation, you are likely to see either an Audiologist or Hearing Instrument Specialist. The primary difference between an Audiologist and a Hearing Instrument specialist is their level of training and scope of practice.

An audiologist identifies and assesses disorders of the hearing and balance system of children and adults. Audiologists select, fit and dispense amplification systems such as hearing aids, and related devices' program cochlear implants' and specialize in the prevention assessment, diagnosis and management of hearing and balance disorders. They also provide instruction, rehabilitation and counseling services to enhance human communication. A graduate (doctorate or master) degree is required to practice (Canadian Academy of Audiology).

Hearing Instrument Specialist (also called Hearing Aid Practitioners or Hearing Aid Specialists) assess hearing and select, fit and dispense hearing aids and related devices for adults. They screen for disorders, provide instruction, rehabilitation and counseling in the use and care of hearing aids and related devices to enhance human communication. The nationally accepted credential for hearing aid specialists is certification by the National Board for Certification in Hearing Aid Sciences. In Alberta the profession is governed by the College of Hearing Aid Practitioners of Alberta. (MacEwan University). Their education is a two years associates degrees and they primarily rely on on-the-job training. The hearing instrument specialist is initially only as good as their trainer, although some excel in the field and become better than their trainers. They are required to maintain their competency by attending continuing education seminars on a variety of hearing care related topics.

If you are concerned about your hearing and have never had a diagnostic evaluation to determine the cause of your hearing loss, it is best that you have a diagnostic evaluation by an audiologist first. After other medical problems are ruled out and it's determined that hearing aids are the best solution for your hearing loss, you can choose to go to either a Hearing Instrument Specialist or an Audiologist. (HearingTracker.com)

Finding a hearing care professional that you feel understands your specific hearing needs (example, is your primary concern to hear better at work, over the telephone, with your family, at the theater) is a good listener, and is willing to discuss a wide variety of hearing assistance options. Having an audiologist that offers many different brands of hearing instruments widens your options.

Either professional can refer you to an ENT (Otolaryngologist) including your family doctor. An ENT is trained in medical treatment and diagnoses of problems with the ear, nose, larynx (voice box), and throat as well as the head and neck. ENT handles the medical side of hearing issues such as tumors, Meniere's and autoimmune disease. ENT training sometimes includes two years of general surgery, allowing these professionals to perform surgery on cancers and other serious conditions arising within the ear, nose and throat. When a hearing loss is sudden, or might have a treatable physical cause, like fused inner ear bones or perforated eardrum, it is best to see an ENT.

If your tinnitus bothers you too much, you can ask if the hearing care professional has any Tinnitus education or training.

### **Review your benefits**

If you have health benefits, take a quick look over them so you know what kind of benefit assistance you may have going in to the appointment.

### **Making the appointment**

The service you receive at a clinic is not limited to the hearing care professional. You should get good service/assistance from all other clinic members as well. Other clinic members are there to assist the hearing care professional provide you with the best possible care.

When contacting a hearing clinic for an appointment you should have the option to either call or email. The person responding should have clear and precise answers to your questions. (better hearing org). If you simply want information and do not want to schedule an appointment, the office should be willing to provide you with information on hearing loss and treatment options.

Each person's hearing ability is different and the technology options relevant to their needs are only understood after a complete hearing evaluation. Therefore, questions about pricing and models of hearing aids are extremely difficult to answer over the phone or email (Better hearing .org).

If you decide to make an appointment, you should not have to wait more than 2-3 weeks to see either an audiologist or hearing instrument specialist (better hearing.org).

Be sure to ask for directions to their office, parking, confirm the name of professional you will see, and ask if they mail or email you their forms for you to fill out in advance if you wish to do so. You can also ask how long the appointment will be and what the cost of the appointment is. Some clinics may offer free consultations.

Some hearing clinics offer ear wax removal or ear cleanings. If you suspect you may have ear wax buildup, ask if the hearing care professional you will be seeing is certified to remove ear wax and if that can be scheduled in before the hearing evaluation appointment. Depending on the amount of wax, some ears may be too sore to proceed with a hearing evaluation.

### **Preparing for the appointment**

Ear wax removal is often overlooked. If the hearing clinic you want to go to does not offer ear wax removal, make an appointment with your family doctor to get your ears cleaned. If there is too much ear wax hearing evaluation results will not be accurate and the evaluation will be re-scheduled.

Bring a family member or a close friend for support and to help you understand/retain information. Bring your filled-out forms if you asked for them in advance, or If you did not fill out the forms in advance be prepared to answer medical history questions. Going prepared to take notes is a good idea because you will be receiving a lot of information and you can write down the question you want to ask in advance so you don't forget to ask them.

The appointment will start with the hearing professional asking most of the questions and giving you instructions. Following the evaluation is when you can ask most of your questions.

You may want to write down what your daily activities are like and what or where you would like to hear better. This can help the hearing care professional select a hearing aid style for you.

Get a good night's rest and be ready to attend the appointment well rested and with a satisfied stomach.

### **Questions to ask during the appointment**

During the appointment, always ask for clarification if you did not understand what the professional's instructions were. If you are having trouble understanding or hearing, let the professional know as well. This will help the professional provide you with the most accurate results possible.

For information on the actual hearing evaluation go to <insert reference to website or our own information>.

Following the evaluating, the hearing professional should review all the results with you. The most important part to understand is the hearing evaluation results (your hearing levels or hearing loss). Ask what kind of hearing loss you have and if it can be treated with surgery.

You can also ask for additional information to take home to help you further understand and remember your hearing loss/levels

Ask the hearing care professional to explain what kinds of sounds you are having trouble hearing. If you suffer from Tinnitus, ask what coping strategies or technology they suggest. Do they provide hearing aids with build in Tinnitus maskers and do they have experience programing them?

Ask for a copy of your hearing evaluation results, it is a good idea to keep your own records to help you review your results at home. Overtime you may accumulate your hearing results and can see for yourself how your hearing is progressing.

Once you get an idea of what your hearing loss is like, ask what kind of hearing aid they recommend and why. If you have not already done so, tell the hearing care professional what your daily activities are like and what or where you would like to hear better. The professional should also explain the current hearing technology they recommend and why.

Ask the hearing care professional what type of follow up care you will receive. It is not uncommon to go back for multiple follow up appointments when you are first fitted with hearing aids. These appointments are meant to help you adjust to the new hearing aids, make sure the hearing aids are working for you, opportunity for the hearing care professional to make adjustments and to teach you how to care for your hearing aids.

Hearing aid technology is getting better with time but hearing aids still wear out. Ask about their warranty or additional warranty they may offer. What does their warranty cover and what does it not cover.

How long is the trial period? Most hearing clinics allow a trial period however, they may require a down payment.

How much does the hearing aid cost and do they offer payment plans?

Do they sell more than one hearing aid manufacturer's hearing aids?

Are you eligible for any funding?

By the end of the appointment you should have gotten your hearing evaluation results, explanation of the type of hearing loss you have and its severity, Tinnitus information (if applicable) hearing aid recommendation, detailed costs of hearing aid purchase, warranty information and funding eligibility.

You are not obligated to purchase hearing aids right away. A good hearing care professional will allow you to go over the information they provided you with. For assistance on hearing aid selection see our <insert title of future information source or recommended site>

### **Review your benefits and Funding eligibility**

Before moving forward and purchasing hearing aids you should review your benefits and look to see if you are eligible for funding.

If you have benefits, it's a good idea to review them to see how much they will help with the cost of the hearing evaluation and the hearing aid purchase.

Depending on your income and working status you may be eligible for funding. Some funding options are Campbell MacLaren foundation, AADL,

## **Warning Signs**

Watch out for hearing professional that claim hearing aids restore hearing. Although hearing aids help tremendously they do not restore hearing. Claims that hearing aids restore hearing give people unrealistic expectations.

If the hearing professional pushes you to purchase hearing aids on the same day, then it shows they are more interested in selling than in your needs. A good Hearing Aid Provider is not focused on selling you hearing aids but will listen, ask what your lifestyle is like, provide hearing options that fit your hearing lifestyle and help you understand your hearing evaluation/test results. You are not obligated to buy hearing aids on the same day as your appointment.

A hearing professional that encourages you to hide your hearing loss or focuses on the look of the hearing aid instead of what it can do for you, is not a good hearing care professional. A hearing care professional should not focus on hiding your hearing loss, instead they should focus on providing you with a hearing aid that best fits your needs and life style. They should also provide you with communication strategies and encourage you to assert yourself when it comes to your communication needs.

If the hearing care professional seemed to preoccupy with other issues during the appointment, chances are their behavior won't change. Go to a hearing care professional that pays attention to your needs, answers your questions and takes the time to explain your hearing loss/level.

## SUMMARY

Where to get referrals, family doctor, hard of hearing community, family and friends.

- Location is important
- Difference between Audiologist and Hearing Instrument Specialist (Hearing Aid Practitioner, Hearing Aid Specialist).
- Preparing for the appointment
- Questions to ask
- Warning signs

## REFERENCE

AADL-Vendors List <http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/AADL-Vendors-Hearing-Aid.pdf>

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