










Siemens Hearing Instruments Australia - Response to Senate Community Affairs Committee Hearing Health Inquiry






Being able to communicate is crucial in maintaining social/work relationships and ensuring well-being, happiness and quality of life. In a society reliant on auditory communication, hearing impairment is a barrier to communication. The advanced hearing technology now available in today's hearing aids assists people in breaking down these barriers.

The Federal government's Commonwealth Hearing Services Program offers eligible Australians "fully-subsidised" (free of charge) hearing aid technology to meet their basic communication needs. People with more advanced communication needs (e.g. active social lives) are able to participate in a co-payment "top-up" system in order to access more sophisticated technology to meet their specific communication needs. Unfortunately, many working Australians and self-funded retirees receive no government subsidy for hearing aids. In many cases due to financial reasons, these individuals opt to go without hearing aids, causing challenges to communication in the workplace. As the retirement age increases, the number of individuals under such circumstances can be expected to rise.

Siemens leads the market in hearing instrument technology. The following table outlines the features presently available on the "fully-subsidised" and "top-up" ranges. The table outlines the expected benefits that can be obtained from the technologies in a typical working environment:

TECHNOLOGY	BENEFIT	FULLY-SUBSIDISED	TOP-UP
Speech & Noise Management	Improves comfort in noise. Many workplaces are noisy (e.g. noise from office equipment, roadworks etc) making communication difficult for hearing aid wearers. Siemens Speech and Noise Management technology assists communication and improves listening comfort for hearing aid wearers.		
Directional Microphone	Improves speech intelligibility in noise. Directional microphones focus on sounds coming from the front and reduce noise from the sides and back. For example, in a situation where Jane is trying to discuss a matter with Bob and there is a noisy photocopier behind him, Bob's hearing aids will focus on Jane's voice in front of him while reducing the unwanted noise of the photocopier from the back.		
Feedback Cancellation	Improves comfort by controlling feedback (whistling). The squealing of hearing aids due to feedback can be bothersome and even embarrassing for hearing aid wearers. It can also be annoying for those around them. Feedback cancellation helps to remove this potential source of frustration in the workplace.		
Telecoil & Autophone	Improves speech intelligibility on the phone. Telecoils wirelessly pick up and amplify sound from compatible telephones. This eliminates feedback and reduces background noise. Hearing aids with the autophone make using this technology easy as the telecoil is automatically activated whenever the hearing aid is in close proximity of the telephone handset		
Automatic Situation Selection	Improves speech intelligibility and comfort in dynamic environments. Automatically adjusts key hearing aid features depending on the listening environment, optimising speech intelligibility and comfort for the wearer. This reduces the need for manual program switching and allows the hearing aid wearer to be less conscious of their hearing impairment. For example, as a worker moves from a quiet area to a much busier, noisier part of the office (e.g. the lunch room), the automatic situation classifier would decrease loudness of noise and preserve speech.		

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Transient Noise Reduction	<i>Improves comfort in noise.</i> Softens impulsive noise instantaneously (such as clanging glass and crockery, slamming doors, hammering) providing increased listening comfort without adversely affecting speech intelligibility. For example, the hearing aid wearer who is an apprentice chef would be able to comfortably carry on a conversation with a co-worker in the kitchen.	
Adaptive Directional Microphone	<i>Improves speech intelligibility in noise.</i> Adaptive directional microphones search for and reduce moving noises that may interfere with speech understanding. For example, if during a meeting a loud motorbike is heard driving by, the hearing aid would attenuate this moving noise source while focusing on the target sound source to the front (e.g. the speaker).	
e2e Wireless & TruEar	<i>Maintains directionality.</i> TruEar and e2e wireless technology maintain front-to-back and left-to-right sound localisation that is normally impaired when wearing hearing aids. Identifying the direction of sound is important in terms of general communication as well as safety considerations.	
SoundLearning	<i>Improves comfort.</i> SoundLearning precisely learns the wearer's preferred settings.	
Bluetooth Wireless Connectivity	<i>Improves speech intelligibility.</i> Allows wearers to connect wirelessly to audio devices and Bluetooth-enabled phones. For example, a hearing aid wearer can hear on their Bluetooth phone directly through their hearing aids.	
SoundBrilliance	<i>Improves sound quality.</i> Enhances the perception of higher frequencies for a richer hearing experience. This is particularly beneficial for all Bluetooth audio streaming applications.	