

Resources for People Who Can't Afford Hearing Aids and Cochlear

Implants

By Paula Rosenthal

Resources for People Who Can't Afford Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants

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HearingExchange - Info on Hearing Loss <http://www.hearingexchange.com>

Hearing loss affects millions of people worldwide. It touches every demographic group, affecting the young, the aged, the wealthy, the poor and people from all ethnic backgrounds. With an accurate hearing assessment and proper fitting by an audiologist, hearing aids can offer many people with hearing loss a second chance. For those who do not gain significant benefit from hearing aids, a cochlear implant may be an option. Once aided, they may be able to effectively participate in educational, social and professional settings.

In the United States, many health insurance carriers cover eyeglasses. Unfortunately, hearing aids are not typically covered. A cochlear implant device and its surgical operation are sometimes covered. With prices ranging from \$600 for an analog hearing aid and more than \$4000 for digital, hearing aids are financially out of reach for many families. Cochlear implant surgery and equipment ranges from \$40,000 to \$50,000. Due to their high costs, some people struggle without any device or accept hearing aids that don't offer significant benefit. As a result, adults are often isolated from friends and colleagues, forced to change jobs and are unable to easily pursue further educational and professional training. For infants and young children, the impact of unaffordability can be devastating to the development of their speech and language. Without appropriate access to sounds and speech, they will have great difficulty with comprehension and learning to talk.

Results of a hearing aid insurance poll taken in March 2001 by the Listen Up web site revealed some disturbing facts and comments among its participants. Eleven percent of the adults polled were doing without hearing aids in one or both ears because of the cost. Of the 96 children in the poll, 99% had health insurance coverage, but only 16% had their hearing aid

costs covered by a private health insurance plan. One parent commented, "Our son went a very long time--about 3 years--with hearing aids that provided little or no benefit to him. We didn't have the means to purchase appropriate aids without the help of insurance..." View the complete results of this poll at <http://www.listen-up.org/poll.htm> .

If you are unable to afford hearing aids for yourself or your child or are a cochlear implant candidate and your insurance won't cover it, view the resources below to learn about funding sources that may be able to assist you. No one should be without an appropriate device that can help him hear and participate fully in his community. Remember these important tips when pursuing financial assistance:

1. Be diligent and follow up regularly.
2. Be prepared to show significant financial need.
3. Document medical and professional need.
4. Keep records of all inquiries and replies.

RESOURCES

Organizations

- Hear Now, the U.S. program of the Hearing Foundation, provides hearing aids to adults and children who are legal residents of the US, meet the financial criteria and are approved for assistance. Hear Now is an organization of last resort; all other options for service must be used before Hear Now benefit is approved. Contact Hear Now at 1-800-648-4327, by fax at 952-828-6946 or by mail at 6700 Washington Avenue S, Eden Prairie, MN 55344. (TTY number and web site are not currently available.)

- State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs - If you need a hearing aid or similar device to help you perform your job or obtain employment, contact your local state vocational rehabilitation office. Click here for listings:
<http://www.parac.org/svrp.html>

- Northwest Lions Foundation for Sight & Hearing - offers a hearing aid bank and serves the Northwest region of the U.S. Contact them at: 901 Boren Avenue, Suite 810, Seattle, WA 98104-3534, phone (206) 682-8500 or (800) 847-5786, web site <http://www.lshfoundation.org/>

Online Resources

Visit these comprehensive listings for additional sources of

financial assistance.

· Sources of Hearing Aid and Cochlear Implant Funding

<http://www.listen-up.org/haidfund.htm>

· Funding Sources <http://www.focusonhearing.org/funding.htm>

Hearing loss can have lifelong effects on children and adults. Hearing aids, cochlear implants and other assistive technology are available. Their high cost prevents many people from receiving them and can result in feelings of isolation, frustration and depression. If you know someone who needs financial assistance so they can hear, direct them to these resources that are available. It can make a significant difference in their lives both personally and professionally.

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Paula Rosenthal, J.D. is married and a mother of two young children. She, her husband and daughter are all hearing impaired. Her son has normal hearing. Paula is the founder and publisher of <http://www.HearingExchange.com>, an online community of resources and support for people with hearing loss, parents of deaf and hard of hearing children and professionals who work with them. Subscribe to HearingExchange News and any of the other free newsletters available at <http://lb.bcentral.com/ex/manage/subscriberprefs?customerid=6181>

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