
Vision or hearing impairment

Summary

- There are many government services and for people living with or caring for someone with vision or hearing impairments.
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How much your vision or hearing impairment affects your everyday life will depend on the severity of your condition. Some people are able to live without any effect on their mobility or ability to communicate, while those with severe blindness or profound hearing loss may require support to live independently in the community. There are many government services available to people living with or caring for someone with vision or hearing impairments.

Caring for someone with vision or hearing loss

Caring for a family member with a severe vision or hearing impairment can be a challenging experience. It is important to seek advice and get help in your local community when you need it.

See our section on [Carers, caring and respite care services](#).

Services for people with vision impairment

Vision loss can affect people of all ages, but approximately two thirds of those who are vision impaired are over the age of 65. There are many types of vision impairment and each has a different effect on a person's ability to see and on their mobility. Support and advice is available to help people who are blind or have vision loss live independently and adapt to life with vision impairment.

Learn more about [living with vision loss](#).

Occupational therapy for vision loss

Occupational therapy for children and adults with vision impairment offers new strategies and alternative ways to complete your daily activities. An occupational therapist may teach, modify or suggest other practical changes to the home and work environments to improve safety and help a person live a more independent life.

Learn more about [occupational therapy for vision loss](#).

Guide dogs

Guide dogs are specially bred and trained to help people who are blind or vision impaired to regain their independence. However, some people who would benefit from using a guide dog shy away from the idea because they (or their family members) believe many misconceptions and cannot imagine what it would be like to live with a guide dog.

Learn more about [living with a guide dog](#).

Conditions that cause vision loss

There are a number of conditions that can lead to vision loss or vision impairment that may be the result of an accident or injury.

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is usually caused by high pressure inside the eye as a result of a blockage in the eye's drainage system. It can lead to irreversible vision loss and blindness. Early detection and treatment can prevent vision loss in most cases.

Read more about [glaucoma](#).

Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that damages blood vessels inside the retina at the back of the eye. Regular eye exams will reduce the risk of vision loss and blindness caused by diabetic retinopathy.

Learn more about [diabetic retinopathy](#).

Neurological vision impairment

Vision impairment or vision loss resulting from an acquired brain injury is caused by damage to the areas of the brain that are responsible for sight and coordinating eye movements. There are many causes that include stroke, brain tumour, head injury and infections such as meningitis.

Learn more about [neurological vision impairment](#).

Age-related macular degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is a type of vision loss where there is a distortion or absence of the central field of vision.

Learn more about [age-related macular degeneration](#).

Retinitis pigmentosa

Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is the collective name for a range of genetic (hereditary) diseases that damage the retinal rod or cone cells and cause vision to fade.

Learn more about [retinitis pigmentosa](#).

Optic neuritis

Optic neuritis is inflammation of the optic nerve that causes blurred, grey and dim vision. The symptoms can range from mild to severe, depending on the extent of the inflammation.

Learn more about [optic neuritis](#).

Services for people with hearing loss

There are a number of services available across Victoria for people who have hearing loss. Talk to your doctor or hearing specialist about services available in your local area or contact one of the service providers listed below.

Office of Hearing Services

If you have a Pensioner Concession Card, Veterans' Affairs Gold Card or White Card (with hearing loss conditions) or a Health Care Card given for Sickness Allowance, you are eligible for free hearing services through the Australian Department of Health's Office of Hearing Services. Services include:

- a hearing assessment
- information and support
- a hearing device (if required).

Call 1800 500 726 or 1800 500 496 (TTY) or visit the [**Office of Hearing Services website**](#) to check your eligibility and apply for assistance. Before you visit a hearing services provider, you will need a medical certificate from your doctor to confirm that there are no medical reasons to prevent you getting a hearing device.

Better Hearing Australia

Better Hearing Australia offers independent advice, screening, education, testing and information about hearing technology. Most consultations are free of charge. Call the Hearing Advice Line on 1300 242 842 or 1300 242 842 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) to make general enquiries and appointments.

For more information visit the [**Better Hearing Australia website**](#).

Australian Hearing

Australian Hearing provides government-funded hearing services for children and young adults under 26 years of

age, as well as for Indigenous adults over 50 and adults with complex hearing needs. Services include community clinics and mobile hearing services, as well as assessment, fitting and rehabilitation programs.

Call 1300 412 512 or visit the [Australian Hearing website](#) for more information.

Cochlear Implant Clinic

Cochlear implants are also known as the 'Bionic Ear'. The Cochlear Implant Clinic at the Royal Eye and Ear Hospital in Melbourne helps children and adults with severe hearing loss through cochlear implants. The surgery, as well as pre- and post-operative care, is conducted by audiologists, ear, nose and throat specialists, and speech pathologists.

Visit the [Eye and Ear Hospital website](#) for more information.

Support for deaf children

Raising a deaf child can be a challenging process. It can take time to find the right schools, navigate the different stages of life and connect with local support groups. Visit the [Aussie Deaf Kids website](#) for online support, resources and education information.

Hearing loss

One in every six Australians lives with some degree of hearing loss. Though hearing loss occurs in all age groups, older people are most commonly affected. Symptoms of hearing loss vary depending on the severity and type of the condition.

Causes of deafness

Deafness can range from mild to profound and is caused by many different events including injury, disease and genetic defects. The two main types of deafness are conductive deafness and nerve deafness.

Learn more about the [causes of deafness](#).

Ways to protect your hearing

Once hearing is damaged, it often cannot be restored so it is important to be aware of what can damage your hearing.

Learn ways to [protect your hearing](#).

Hearing tests

A ringing sensation in the ears (tinnitus), or people complaining that you talk too loudly are signs you may need to have your hearing checked.

Learn more about [hearing tests](#).

How hearing loss affects people

Many people with hearing loss experience a drop in self-esteem and confidence because of their impaired ability to communicate.

Learn more about how [hearing affects people](#).

Communication in the workplace

If you are not sure how to best communicate with a colleague who is deaf or has a hearing impairment, ask them. If you are deaf or are living with a hearing impairment it is a good idea to tell people you are working with.

Learn more about [hearing loss in the workplace](#).

Lipreading

Lipreading is the art of being able to see speech sounds. It is often called speechreading because people use other clues, such as facial expressions, gestures and surroundings, to help them understand what is being said.

Learn more about [lipreading](#).

Hearing problems in children

The earlier that hearing loss is identified in children, the better for the child's language, learning and overall development. If you have any doubt at all about your baby or child's hearing, have them tested.

Learn more about [hearing problems in children](#).

Tinnitus

Tinnitus cannot be cured, but it can be managed with some lifestyle changes. Approximately 17 to 20 per cent of Australians suffer from some degree of tinnitus, varying from mild to severe.

Learn more about [tinnitus](#).

Reduced tolerance to sound

People who suffer from reduced tolerance to sound often find that ordinary noises seem to be too loud, while loud noises can cause discomfort and pain. Damage to the inner ear from ageing or exposure to loud noise is the most common cause.

Learn more about [reduced sound tolerance](#).

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your community health centre
- Better Hearing Australia, call (03) 9510 1577, TTY (03) 9510 3499, fax (03) 9510 6076
- Ear, nose and throat specialist

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