

# independence and ethics

By Dirk de Moore - Audiologist, Bendigo Hearing Clinic

This year has seen an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into the Hearing Aid Industry, as well as considerable media coverage of the industry. As an audiologist with over 30 years of experience in the field, I felt it appropriate to address some of these issues and provide advice for consumers.

The ACCC highlighted extensive practices within the hearing aid industry which it considered unacceptable. These included:

- Examples of significant overpricing of hearing aids;
- Clinicians being paid additional financial incentives to sell more expensive models; and
- Many hearing aid outlets owned and operated by manufacturers or distribution chains where this is not made transparent to the consumer.

The ACCC argued that these factors could influence the price, type and brand of hearing aid that a clinician recommends to you. Sadly, much of what has been reported has been correct. However, these practices are not unique to the hearing aid industry. I'm sure experienced medical practitioners, dentists and many other health professionals like me, lament the trend towards corporatisation of the medical model where profit

driven motives may take precedence over what is in a patient's best interest.

With the Commonwealth Governments scheme for pensioners and veterans, many clinics set sales targets for their clinicians to 'top-up' eligible clients from free to more expensive hearing aids. Even the Commonwealth Government's own clinics offer public sector audiologists added financial inducement to 'top-up' pensioners and DVA card holders.

Audiology Australia, the peak professional body for audiologists responded to the ACCC report by saying, "Audiology Australia's Code of Conduct requires that members must make recommendations to clients based on clinical assessment and the client's needs, not on the basis of financial gain on the part of the member. In addition, Audiology Australia members must not engage in any form of misinformation or misrepresentation in relation to the hearing services or devices they provide."

## Advice

If considering a trial or purchase of a hearing aid:

- Ask if the clinic is independent of both hearing aid manufacturers and distribution chains.



- Ask if the clinician will receive any form of financial commission. (Under professional codes of conduct they must disclose this if asked.)
- Don't feel pressured to make a decision. Take your time and consider your options.
- Compare prices. Like other consumer products there are hearing aids which cover a range of technical features and pricing levels. But remember, at the end of the day it is a successful outcome you are looking for.
- And make sure you are offered a trial period with return option to ensure the product you select is suitable.

**A hearing aid fitted by a qualified, experienced and ethical clinician can significantly improve your quality of life. For more information contact Bendigo Hearing Clinic on 5442 5800 or visit [bendigohearingclinic.com.au](http://bendigohearingclinic.com.au) or visit public and resources sections of the Audiology Australia website [audiology.asn.au](http://audiology.asn.au) for position papers and media releases on these matters.**

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