



## Providing hearing aids alone is not enough After-provision services must also improve

People with hearing loss who are registered under the Universal Health Coverage scheme are eligible to receive hearing aids from hospitals free-of-charge. However, the costs associated with this policy after having received the hearing aids must still be borne by users such as hearing aid maintenance, travel for follow-up sessions, and batteries. A study about hearing aid use in people with hearing loss and subsequent services provided after distributing hearing aids under the Universal Health Coverage scheme found that almost one-third of these people discontinued usage prior to the device's life expectancy, and nearly one-fourth of them did not attend follow-up sessions. One reason for this is that the conditions for providing hearing aid services were not consistent with actual use. Therefore, service recipients are recommended to improve guidelines for providing hearing aid services such as increasing the number of service points for ease of access, providing multiple models to address actual needs instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, and updating conditions for providing services, i.e. increasing the warranty period, and subsidizing costs associated with services provision to maximize hearing aid use and benefits while preventing discontinuation of usage in the future.

How do we convince people with hearing loss to utilize their hearing aids for the entire duration of the device's life expectancy?



Increase the number of hearing aid models to more suitably address patients' needs



Increase the number of service recipients for ease of access, particularly primary care units



Improve knowledge of primary care staff about benefits which hearing loss patients can receive, e.g. how to maintain and fix hearing aids.

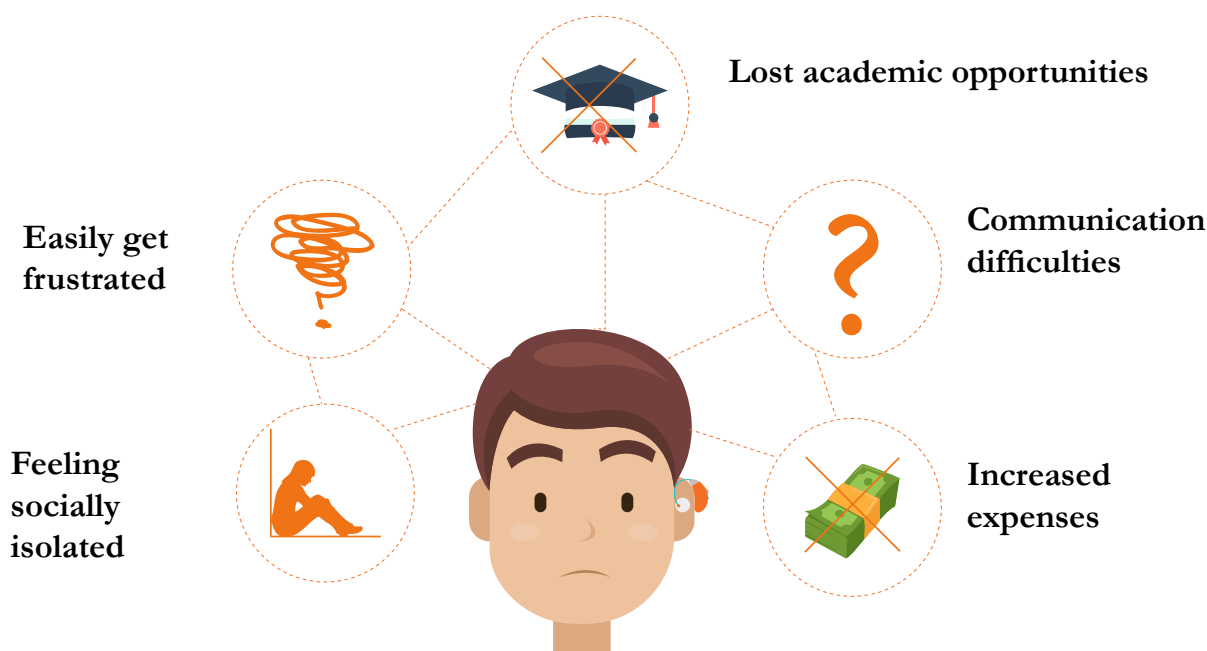


Fully subsidize battery costs, reduce the price of zinc air batteries to a maximum of 30 baht per piece, or introduce a co-payment scheme.



Extend the warranty period of hearing aids for the duration of usage (3 years)

## HEARING LOSS IS MORE SEVERE THAN WE THINK



In 2015, people with hearing loss or hearing impairments in Thailand who are registered under the Universal Health Coverage scheme comprised approximately 190,000 persons, or 17% of the total number of people with disabilities. The impacts of hearing loss are numerous and can be seen in various aspects such as communication difficulties, lost academic opportunities, a mixed range of emotions from feeling socially isolated, and increased expenses for hearing aids, to name a few. As a result, these impacts affect the economy due to the lack of education for this group of people. It also plays a role in the country's unemployment rate.

## FREE HEARING AIDS... COMES WITH ADDITIONAL EXPENSES

Using hearing aids is one way of helping people with hearing loss improve their ability to hear and communicate, resulting in a higher quality-of-life. People with hearing loss who are registered under the Universal Health Coverage scheme are eligible to receive hearing aids from any hospitals that have been certified for distribution if certain conditions are met. However, even though the hearing aids are free, the subsequent associated costs must be borne by users such as maintenance costs and travel expenses for follow-up sessions.

“The impacts of hearing loss are numerous, thereby affecting the economy due to lack of education and also playing a role in the country's unemployment rate.”

### METHOD OF STUDY

- 1) Literature review about the procedures, specifications, and conditions for providing hearing aids.
- 2) Focus groups among people with hearing loss with a total sample of 364 people from the provinces of Payao, Khon Kaen, Samut Prakarn, Chonburi, and Songkhla.
- 3) A qualitative study featuring interviews with service recipients - particularly with staff directly involved in providing hearing aid services – and people with hearing loss/hearing loss organizations and associations.

# What happens after receiving hearing aids presented by the NHSO?



**HEARING AID MODELS ARE LIMITED AND NOT FULLY SUITABLE FOR A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES.**

## NOT ENOUGH SERVICE RECIPIENTS

63% of service recipients were of the opinion that there were not enough repair service centers even though 123 locations spanning 70 provinces were designated by the NHSO in 2014. These repair centers were typically found in one provincial hospital per province. Additionally, Sub-district Health Promoting Hospital staff were also unable to provide advice about how to repair the devices.



I don't know

**1 IN 3**

did not know that the hearing aids had a warranty and as a result lost out on the opportunity to repair it for free.

## DIFFICULTY IN FINDING A REPAIR CENTER

63% of service recipients were of the opinion that there were not enough repair service centers. Sub-district Health Promoting Hospital staff were also unable to provide advice about how to repair the devices.

## DISCONTINUED USAGE PRIOR TO THE FULL DURATION

**43%** did not know the lifetime use of the hearing aid

**29%** discontinued hearing aid use

95% of the 29% above discontinued use prior to the full duration

50% of that 29% discontinued use prior to 1 year

Reasons for discontinuing usage: Background noise, uncomfortable, no batteries, lazy to use, causes headaches

**19.4** Million Bht. The economic loss from discontinuing hearing aid usage

## EARMOLD IMPRESSION COST BORNE BY USERS



The ears and ear canals of children under the age of 9 undergo frequent changes so earmold impressions must be made periodically. Currently, parents or guardians are responsible for shouldering earmold impression costs at an average of 500 baht.

## NO FOLLOW-UP ATTENDANCE

23% of hearing aid users have never gone for a follow-up session on hearing aid usage. This results in lost opportunities to determine whether they are functioning properly – including adjusting volume levels and remedying any other issues that arise during usage.

## REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING FOLLOW-UP SESSIONS

Staff did not schedule an appointment, hearing aids were functioning properly or were barely used, no time, and traveling inconvenience.

## FOLLOW-UP ATTENDANCE SUBSEQUENTLY DECREASED FOR EACH FOLLOWING SESSION

Session 1

**84%**

Session 2

**79%**

Session 3

**69%**

## HEARING AID BATTERIES ARE EXPENSIVE

47% of hearing aid users said that batteries were a financial burden.



32 baht/piece



50 baht/piece



Currently, zinc-air batteries cost 50 baht/piece and hearing aid usage for a month costs between 70-100 baht. However, users are only able to afford batteries at 32 baht/piece.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Service recipients should increase the number of different hearing aid models available to the program in order to more suitably address the needs of people with hearing loss.
2. The NHSO should extend the warranty period of the hearing aids to more than 1 year or to 3 years as this is the time period upon which a new hearing aid can be claimed.
3. The NHSO should revise conditions about hearing aid batteries, i.e. fully subsidizing their costs, reducing the price of zinc-air batteries to no more than 30 baht per piece, or introducing a co-payment system between users and service recipients.
4. The NHSO should provide free hearing aid earmold impression services for children less than 9 years of age.
5. The NHSO, together with all relevant parties, should organize workshops or create manuals which can provide benefits for people with hearing loss, e.g. a program for how to maintain and fix hearing aids for primary care staff – including both health promotion hospitals at the district level and health centers.

## AUTHOR



**Suradech Douthipsirikul**  
Researcher  
Health Intervention and Technology  
Assessment Program (HITAP)



For more information, please visit <http://www.hitap.net/en/research/164465>

This paper is a part of a research project entitled study of after hearing aid provision service and using for people with hearing loss under the universal health coverage by Suradech Douthipsirikul, Witthawat Pantumongkol, and Yot Teerawattananon.



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### Contact Information:

**Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP)**  
6 th Floor, 6 th Building, Department of Health,  
Ministry of Public Health, Tiwanon Rd., Muang,  
Nonthaburi 11000, Thailand  
Tel : +662-590-4549, +662-590-4374-5  
Fax : +662-590-4369  
E-mail : [hitap@hitap.net](mailto:hitap@hitap.net)



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