

Hearing Aid Provision
Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee
September 2020

Background

In 2015, following an extensive engagement exercise with the public, patients and other stakeholders, NHS North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) at its public Board meeting approved a commissioning policy that sets out the eligibility criteria for NHS funded hearing aids for adults with hearing loss.

The policy was developed following the consideration of a wide range of clinical evidence by the CCG's Clinical Priorities Advisory Group (CPAG). In addition and as part of a comprehensive engagement process whilst developing its proposals, the CCG invited stakeholders to submit any further evidence that the CCG may not have considered, which was also reviewed by CPAG in arriving at its recommendations.

Current Policy

Following the approval of the policy, providers of hearing aid services were issued with a contract variation and the policy was implemented in 1 October 2015. Key criteria from the policy are outlined below.

If the hearing test shows that the patient has a hearing loss which is diagnosed as moderate (41-55 decibels) and if their hearing can be shown to affect their everyday life (functional impact) they will be eligible to receive an NHS funded hearing aid.

If an individual is diagnosed with a mild hearing loss (less than 41 decibels) following an audiogram conducted by an audiologist they will not be eligible or able to have an NHS funded hearing aid.

A hearing loss of 56 decibels or more as diagnosed by an audiologist as a result of an audiology assessment will not be affected by this policy.

This policy will only affect adults aged 18 and above with age related hearing loss. It will not affect babies, children or teenagers up to 17 years of age or anyone who has worn hearing aids since childhood. An individual who already has an NHS hearing aid will not be affected by this policy until they reach the end of their 3 year pathway. At which point, they will be re-assessed. If patients are re-assessed and do not meet the eligibility criteria they will not receive NHS-funded replacement hearing aids or consumables i.e. batteries. These patients will not have their hearing aids taken off them even if they are assessed as no longer being eligible for replacement hearing aids.

This policy will not affect the following groups:

- Patients under the age of 18
- Patients with hearing loss since childhood
- Patients with a confirmed diagnosis of dementia
- Patients with learning disability
- Patients with auditory processing disorder
- Patients with severe multiple sensory disability

- Patients with tinnitus
- Patients with sudden onset hearing loss

This policy does not include occupational hearing loss or its related legal processes.

Policy Review

The provision of hearing aids across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was reviewed following the release of a Cochrane review in 2017 and release of NICE Guideline NG98 - Hearing Loss in Adults: Assessment and Management in 2018.

In 2019, following a review of the clinical evidence at the CCGs CPAG, all six Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent CCGs at their respective Governing Board meetings approved the recommendation to undertake a formal consultation for a number of areas including the provision of hearing aids for non-complex audiology.

Engagement and consultation

In January 2020, the six Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent CCGs began their initial phase of the Difficult Decisions engagement and consultation process regarding five areas of care, which includes hearing aids

The CCGs launched this engagement exercise to gather the views of patients, the public and other interested stakeholders. The CCGs will use the feedback from this engagement process to develop their consultation options. These would then be scored through a recognised options appraisal process and discussed with the public through a formal consultation process. There are no proposals at this stage and no decisions will be made until the full engagement and consultation process is complete.

The initial engagement exercise concluded on 01 March 2020 and the CCGs expected to launch the formal consultation in September 2020 once the options development and appraisal process was complete.

In response to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, all local health services focussed on supporting the frontline. As a result, some work programmes were placed on hold and this included the Difficult Decisions engagement.

Any proposals the CCG develop for this area requires direct input from our clinicians but we needed to ensure this resource was focussed where it was most needed during the pandemic. In addition, at a time when national guidance is advising people to self-isolate and/or socially distance, it would not have been inappropriate for the CCG to arrange any face-to-face workshops and public events.

The CCGs cannot give an estimate of when this work will continue however this is currently under review and the CCG will resume this work when it is safe to do so.