

**A guide to Audiology Services and Hearing Aid provision in the City
of London**



Christopher Gadsden on behalf of Healthwatch City of London

Introduction

Hearing loss affects an estimated 1 in 6 people in the UK, and the older we get, the more likely it is that our hearing will be affected - perhaps up to 70% of people who are over 70 years old.

Untreated hearing loss can contribute to the onset of dementia, making hearing health care about much more than simply being able to hear those around us. That makes it worrying that an estimated six million people in the UK would benefit from hearing aids, but only two million actually have them.

A geriatrician at Boston University, commenting on a recent study of healthy hundred-year-olds, said "I can't emphasize enough how important it is for people to optimize their ability to hear. There's a direct connection between hearing and preserving cognitive function. Being stubborn about wearing hearing aids is just silly. Hearing loss results in cognitive loss because you miss so much."

However old you are, if you suspect that your hearing is not what it should be, it is easy and free to do something about it.

[You do not have hearing aids but wonder if your hearing may not be what it was](#)

Usually, a person's family, friends or work colleagues are the first to notice that the person is not hearing everything, and the person themselves is often the last to realise.

It is said that the typical man takes six years to get around to getting hearing aids which is not ideal for them or those around them. The result of this is frequently a partner tearing their hair out, completely fed up with having to say everything twice and to shout over the roaring of the TV.

Anyone who has hearing loss is very fortunate to live in the UK where NHS hearing aids are available free of charge - even the spare batteries are free - and there is also a thriving market of private providers.

Modern digital hearing aids are amazingly small and effective, including the ones supplied free by the NHS. Privately purchased hearing aids can be smaller and have more advanced features, but people often see what the NHS can provide before looking further.

[You are concerned about your hearing for any reason](#)

If you are sure you will want to buy hearing aids privately, and not have NHS-funded ones, then you can go directly to any of the local audiology providers - listed below. If you do or might want NHS-funded hearing aids, then your first stop should be your GP, which in the City of London means the Neaman Practice.

If at any point, you would like advice, then the Sharon James of the RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People) is very happy to help at a clinic at the Neaman Practice (normally

on the third Wednesday of each month between 2pm and 4pm). For an appointment, please contact Sharon on 0293 227 6044 or 0755 106 3742 or Sharon.James@RNID.org.uk.

Your GP will be able to look for the cause of any hearing problem you have - hearing loss, tinnitus (ringing in the ears), or maybe wax build-up - and steer you in the right direction. If your GP believes that you may require NHS hearing aids, they will direct you to one of these providers:

- InHealth at Hoxton Surgery - <https://www.inhealthgroup.com/service/audiology/>
- Scrivens Limited - <https://scrivens.com/hearing/>
- Specsavers Hearcare Group Limited - <https://www.specsavers.co.uk/hearing>

Alternatively, you might require a home hearing service from:

- The Outside Clinic - <https://www.outsideclinic.co.uk>

Each of those four providers has a contract with the City & Hackney Clinical Commissioning Group authorising them to supply NHS hearing aids at no cost provided that you have been referred by a GP.

Or, of course, you can go to any high street hearing health provider for a hearing test which will almost certainly be free, but your route to NHS-funded hearing aids is through your GP, so starting with a private provider is really the route to privately-funded hearing aids.

All audiologists, whoever they work for, will always put a patient's interests first, and the correct treatment will always be recommended whether or not the provider you have chosen can provide it. Audiologists are inspected by the Care Quality Commission.

Private providers other than those listed above (and therefore do not have NHS contracts) include:

- Boots Hearing Care - <https://www.bootshearingcare.com>
- Leightons Opticians - Hearing Care - <https://www.leightons.co.uk/hearing-care>
Tel: 0207 283 4538
- Specsavers Opticians and Audiologists - <https://www.specsavers.co.uk/hearing>
Tel: 0800 077 8659
- Hearology - <https://hearologyliverpoolstreet.uk>
Tel: 020 3747 4615

Please note that this is being written while the provision of all hearing care in the City is being affected by the Covid pandemic and the best thing to do at the moment is not to make a trip until you have checked online or by telephone if a provider is open.

You already have hearing aids

If you need advice, again, the hearing clinic on the third Wednesday of each month between 2pm and 4pm at the Neaman Practice is a good starting point. You can also obtain batteries there free of charge for NHS hearing aids. For an appointment, please contact Sharon James on 0293 227 6044 or 0755 106 3742 or at Sharon.James@RNID.org.uk.

If you purchased your hearing aids privately, you can go back to the company that supplied them, or their local branch, but there is nothing to stop a person with privately purchased hearing aids going to the NHS via their GP. People who want small, concealed hearing aids often start at private centres, but it's always worth finding out what's available on the NHS.

It is also common for people who have started with NHS hearing aids to want smaller hearing aids or extra features. Some people struggle with the discomfort of even small NHS hearing aids or want extra features such as Bluetooth enabling them to use their phone or tablet or TV without disturbing others. There are several highly competent large private-sector manufacturers (who also make the NHS -supplied hearing aids) in strong competition with each other who make quite remarkable - but often expensive - hearing aids. Many, many people consider their prices well worth paying.

Case Studies

Mr T's real-life hearing aids experience - from private to NHS

Mr T had a hearing test with a private chain where it was thought that his hearing loss was due to shooting. He tried small studs (Completely In the Canal - CIC hearing aids) inside the ear which, not wanting to advertise his deafness to work colleagues, he preferred. However, they were not at all satisfactory and he eventually bought the same type but a different make from another private hearing chain. He persevered with these for a few years but didn't find they did much good.

Frustrated, he decided to try the NHS and was referred by the Neaman Practice to the clinic in Hoxton who fitted NHS hearing aids. They were uncomfortable, but the alternative he was offered were even bigger, so he persevered. They remain uncomfortable, but they are effective.

For repairs, he has been to Hoxton and Islington and says the service has been pretty good, except for one occasion when an appointment was cancelled without his being informed. He rates his NHS experience as generally quite good, and the NHS hearing aids have proved the best so far, though with a noisy background they are not good because the background noise is also increased.

Mr G's real-life hearing aids experience - from NHS to private

Mr G eventually heeded his wife's pleading and was referred by his GP to an NHS clinic who prescribed NHS behind the ear (BTE) hearing aids which were effective but uncomfortable. He wore them for work but took them out as soon as he could because of the discomfort

which did not please his wife. He is full of praise for the NHS and the audiologist who looked after him, but the discomfort persisted, and he decided he would have to look to the private sector.

Mr G recalls his shock as he started to look for a private hearing aid provider, and he found himself in a jungle with amazingly high prices and comparisons difficult. However, he was fitted with a pair of much smaller BTE hearing aids which were comfortable to wear. Their performance was no better than the NHS ones, but the comfort meant that he could wear them for a full day.

Comfort and appearance were improved by these hearing aids being of the receiver in the ear type (RITE) where a very thin tube goes into the ear, rather than using a large earmould as the NHS ones did.

He is now on a new generation of hearing aids which have the additional benefit of Bluetooth, meaning that he can listen to an iPad or iPhone without disturbing anyone else.

Mr G remains amazed by how much it costs to buy private hearing aids just to get smaller ones than the NHS supplies, and amazed also at how uncomfortable hearing aids can be that are too large. However, at the end of the day, whereas he felt his early hearing aids were helpful, the new ones he has make him feel as though he has got his hearing back.

[Mr W's real-life hearing aids experience - from NHS to private](#)

Mr W's hearing was badly damaged at 16 years old by being allowed to be too close to a machine gun. Nonetheless, he had a 30-year non-flying career in the RAF after which he joined the civil service. He says now that he probably already needed hearing aids by then, but he didn't actually get any for another ten years.

He finally went to the NHS whom he found extremely helpful, and they provided him with hearing aids which he thinks were primitive but effective. Another ten years passed, and he was given more advanced NHS hearing aids, but he was fortunate enough to see an advertisement advising people whose hearing had been damaged by the military could have access to private hearing aids funded by the military.

Mr W after trying a few private audiologists, finally found a very satisfactory one who was not part of a national chain and recommended what turned out to be excellent high-end hearing aids for which Mr W was recompensed. Interestingly, he still uses his NHS hearing aids when he is in a venue with a "loop" system which sends the audio straight to his hearing aids. His private ones do not have that facility.

Types of hearing aids

Behind the ear hearing aids (BTE)

Behind the ear hearing aids are the most common type. They're made up of a small plastic device that sits behind your ear. This is attached with a tube to a piece of plastic that fits in your ear (an earmould) or a soft tip that goes into the opening of your ear (an open fitting).

BTE hearing aids are one of the easiest types to use and are suitable for most people with hearing loss and are available in a range of colours.

Receiver in the ear hearing aids (RITE)

Receiver in the ear hearing aids are similar to BTE hearing aids. The main difference is that with RITE hearing aids, the part of the hearing aid that sits behind the ear is smaller and is connected by a thin wire to a speaker placed inside the opening of the ear. RITE hearing aids are less visible than BTE hearing aids and are suitable for most people with hearing loss, but they can be more fiddly to use than BTE hearing aids.

In the ear hearing aids (ITE)

In the ear hearing aids fill the area just outside the opening of your ear. They cannot be seen from behind, unlike BTE or RITE hearing aids, but they are visible from the side. ITE hearing aids are suitable for most people with hearing loss, although they can be trickier to use than BTE or RITE hearing aids.

In the canal hearing aids (ITC)

In the canal (ITC) hearing aids are similar to ITE aids but are a bit smaller and just fill the opening of the ear. They're less visible than many other types of hearing aid but can be trickier to use and are not usually powerful enough for people with severe hearing loss.

Completely in the canal and invisible in the canal hearing aids (CIC and IIC)

Completely in the canal and invisible in the canal hearing aids are the smallest types available. They fit further into the opening of your ear than ITC hearing aids and are barely visible.

These hearing aids are not usually powerful enough for people with severe hearing loss. They're also quite fiddly and some can only be put in and taken out by a hearing aid specialist.

CROS/BiCROS hearing aids

CROS and BiCROS hearing aids can help if you've lost hearing in one ear. They come as a pair. The hearing aid in the ear with hearing loss picks up sound and sends it to a hearing aid

in your good ear. This can be done wirelessly or through a wire around the back of your neck.

Body worn hearing aids

Body worn hearing aids are made up of a small box connected to earphones. The box can be clipped to your clothes or put inside a pocket. This type of hearing aid may be best if you have severe hearing loss and need a powerful hearing aid, or if you find the controls on smaller hearing aids tricky to use.