

Client Services Procedure Manual

Procedure: 21.00

Subject: Hearing Loss

21.00 - Introduction

Hearing loss that arises out of and in the course of the employment will be covered by WorkplaceNL in accordance with policy EN-12. The two most common causes of employment related hearing loss are traumatic and noise-induced.

Traumatic Hearing Loss: Traumatic hearing loss may be the result of occupational acoustic trauma from a single exposure to a sudden burst of sound, such as an explosive blast. It may also result from a head injury that impacts the hearing sensors.

Noise-induced Hearing Loss: Hearing loss that develops slowly over a long period of exposure to continuous or intermittent hazardous noise levels is referred to as noise-induced hearing loss.

This procedure is intended to address claims for noise-induced hearing loss, because the adjudication process involves gathering specific documentation on such issues as work history, hazardous noise levels, duration of workplace exposure, etc. Once the entitlement decision has been made, the level of coverage for benefits and health care services will be consistent with what is in place for all other types of hearing loss claims.

Claims for other types of hearing loss addressed in policy EN-12 may not require the same type of documentation. Decisions for those claims are based on the individual facts of the case.

21.01 - Hearing Loss Claim Adjudication Process

When a claim is received for noise-induced hearing loss, the decision maker will obtain a full work history from the worker. Noise level readings will be obtained from the employer(s), where available. All available audiograms should be obtained.

Where the hearing loss claim includes tinnitus, the decision maker should ensure that the audiological assessment has confirmed the presence of tinnitus, including the severity, laterality (unilateral versus bilateral), and persistence (intermittent versus constant).

When considering a claim for hearing loss, or for a hearing loss impairment award, an audiological assessment performed by an audiologist will be required, accompanied by WorkplaceNL's Audiologist Reporting Form and an audiogram. Where a worker has left the workforce, or is no longer exposed to hazardous workplace noise, an exit audiogram performed by the employer will also be considered acceptable within the timeframe outlined in Policy EN-12.

When all available information has been received, the decision maker will refer the claim to a Medical Officer. Within 10 days of receiving the referral, the Medical Officer will determine the average hearing loss based on the compensable frequencies outlined in Policy EN-12 unless, upon review of the documentation, the cause of a worker's hearing loss is not clearly evident. In such cases, a report from an E.N.T. specialist may be required before the claim can be adjudicated. The worker will have to arrange the necessary referral through his/her family doctor.

Once all available information has been reviewed, at the discretion of the Medical Officer, the file may be referred to WorkplaceNL's Consulting Audiologist for further review.

The opinion of the Medical Officer will be referred back to the decision maker who will render a decision on entitlement and send written communication to the worker within 10 days.

21.02 - Employer Cost Allocation

The degree of responsibility of the last employer is easily assessed when there are pre-employment audiograms. Where awards are approved, the last employer is to be charged only for the amount of hearing loss incurred by a worker while in their employment. The remaining costs are to be charged to the Second Injury Relief Account (refer to Policy ES-11).

When there are no pre-employment audiograms, the last employer will be charged on the basis of a ratio by years employed. For example, if a worker has spent 20 years in noisy environments, but only 5 years were with the last employer, then the last employer would be charged only 25% of the cost – the remaining 75% would be charged to the Second Injury Relief Account.

Where a worker claims a loss of earning capacity due to industrial hearing loss, the case will be adjudicated by the decision maker for earnings loss entitlement prior to a referral to the case manager.

21.03 - Requests for Reassessments

Where a worker requests a reassessment of hearing loss, the decision maker will determine whether the worker has had continued employment exposure to hazardous noise, as reassessments for further hearing loss will only be considered where there has been continued workplace noise exposure. In such cases, a reassessment by an audiologist can take place on an annual basis.

If the reassessment is for the purpose of hearing aid adjustment or replacement, a reassessment by an audiologist can take place on an annual basis, regardless of whether there is continued workplace noise exposure.

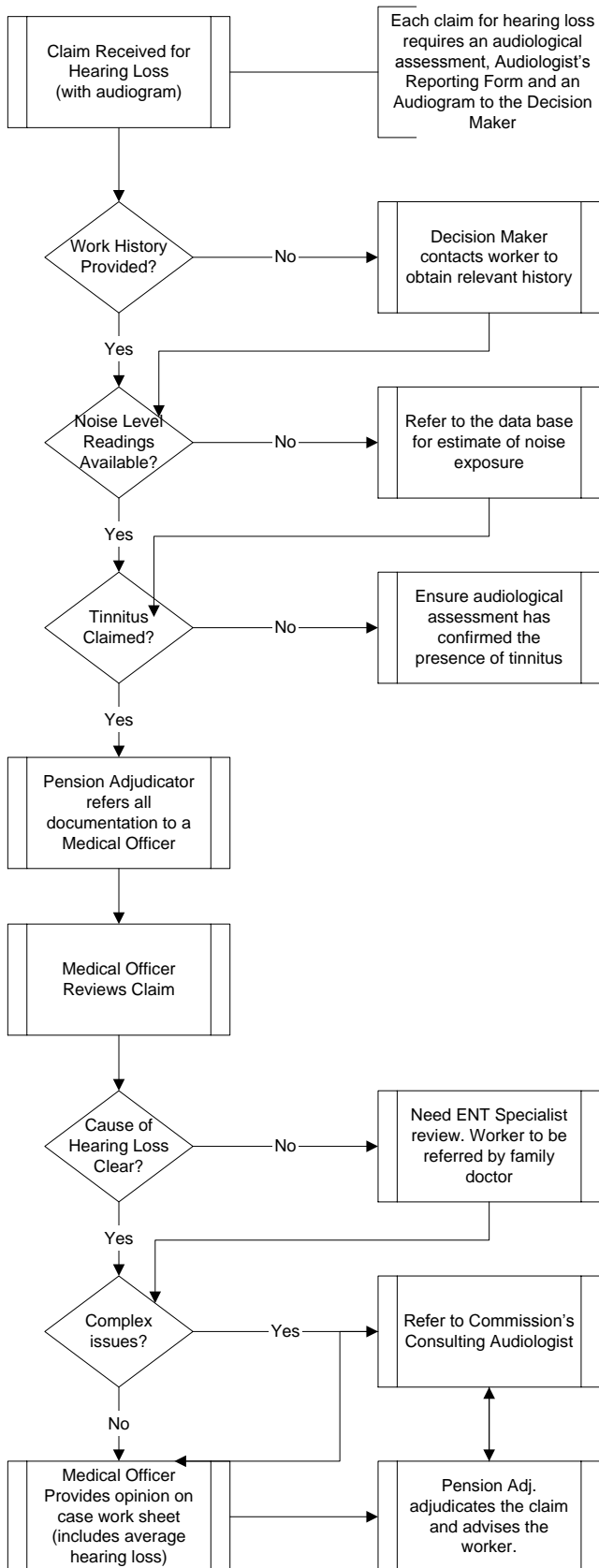
If the request does not meet either of the above criteria, coverage for reassessment will not be approved and the worker will be notified in writing of this decision.

21.04 - Exceptional Circumstances

In cases where the individual circumstances of a case are such that the provisions of this procedure cannot be applied or to do so would result in an unfair or unintended result, WorkplaceNL will decide the case based on its individual merits and justice. Such a decision will be considered for that specific case only and will not be precedent setting.

21.05 - Hearing Loss Flowchart

The following flowchart illustrates the decision making process for hearing loss claims.



Reference: *Policy EN-12 Hearing Loss*

Amendment History

<i>Original Effective Date</i>	1987 08 20
<i>Revision #1</i>	1993 11 05
<i>Revision #2</i>	1999 08 11
<i>Revision #3</i>	2004 03 16