

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 as outlined by Policy EN-12 Hearing Loss. The two most common causes of employment-related hearing loss are traumatic and noise-induced.

Traumatic Hearing Loss: hearing loss that may be the result of occupational acoustic trauma from:

- a single exposure to a high decibel sound wave, such as an explosive blast; or
- a head injury that impacts the structures of the ear or the parts of the nervous system that transmit or interpret sound.

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

This procedure addresses claims for noise-induced hearing loss, because the adjudication process involves gathering specific documentation on issues such as work history, hazardous noise levels in the workplace, 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 and are adjudicated under the provisions of Policy EN-19 Arising Out of and In the Course of Employment.

21.01 - Hearing Loss Claim Adjudication Process

When a claim is received for noise-induced hearing loss, the decision maker will consider the work history submitted with the Form 6HL, Worker's Report of Hearing Loss. Further work history details may be obtained if required. Noise level readings will be obtained from the employer(s), where available. All available audiograms and audiologist reports may be obtained including any required health surveillance hearing tests from an employer.

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 Form

AR, Audiologist Report 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 a Form 6HL, Form AR and an audiogram has been received, the claim will be referred to a Medical Consultant. The Medical Consultant will determine the average hearing loss based on the compensable frequencies outlined in Policy EN-12.

If the cause of a worker's hearing loss is not clearly evident, then a report from an Ears-Nose-Throat (ENT) specialist may be required before the claim can be adjudicated. The worker will have to arrange the necessary referral through their health care provider.

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

The opinion of the Medical Consultant will be referred back to the decision maker who will render a decision on entitlement.

21.02 - Employer Cost Allocation

In accordance with WorkplaceNL's PRIME (Prevention, Return-to-Work, Insurance Management for Employers and Employees) Program, claims costs for occupational disease claims, including noise-induced hearing loss, are excluded from an individual employer's claims experience. These costs will be charged to all assessed employers under the collective liability of the general injury fund. Costs for claims accepted for traumatic hearing loss are charged to an individual employer's claims experience.

21.03 - Requests for Reassessments

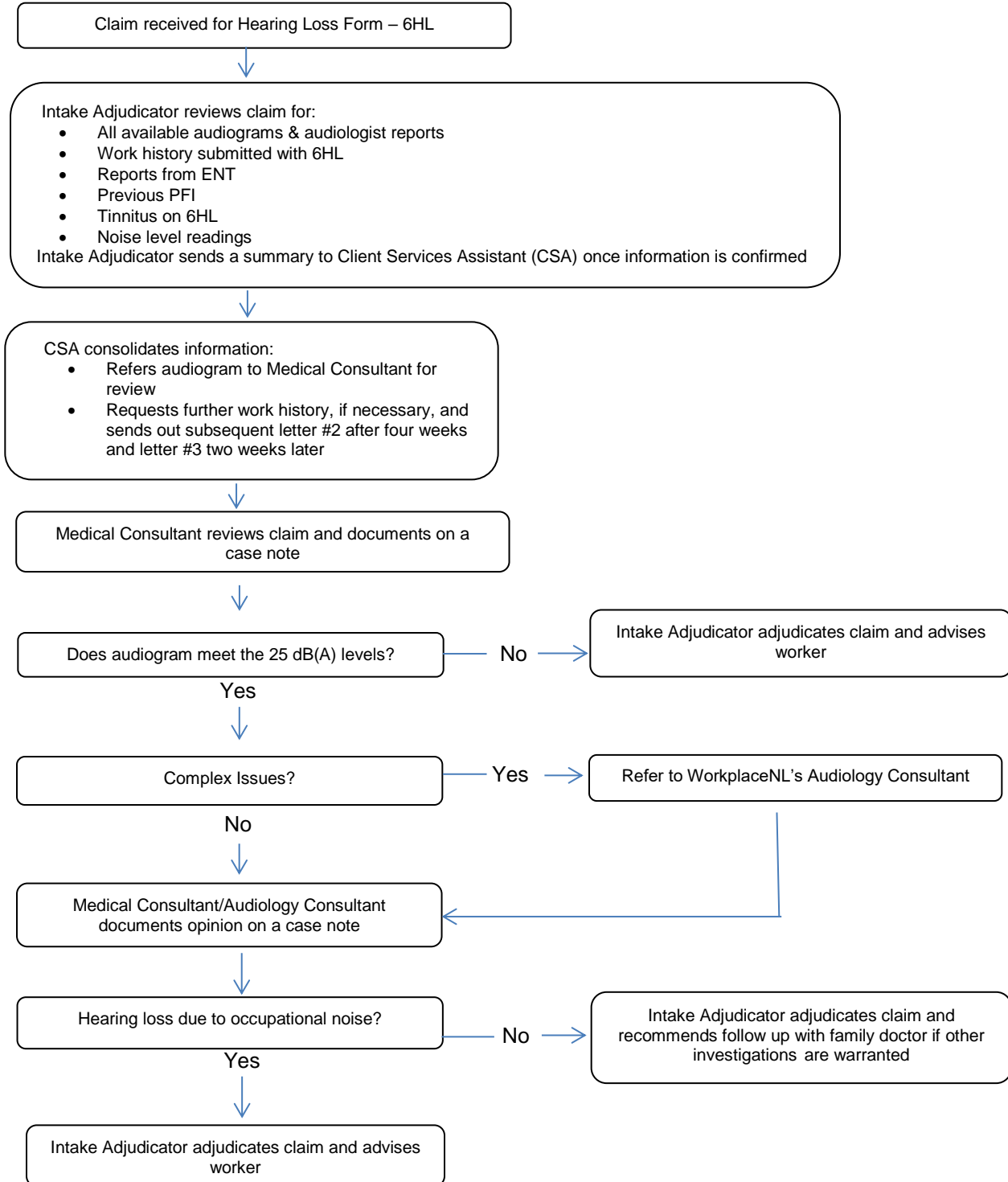
If the request does not meet the criteria for reassessment outlined in Policy EN-12 Hearing Loss, coverage for reassessment will not be approved and the worker will be notified in writing of this decision.

21.04 - Merits and Justice

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 as outlined by Policy EN-22 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:



All accepted and denied claims are investigated. All relevant evidence is considered and entitlement is based on the weight of medical evidence.

Reference:

Policies:

EN-12 Hearing Loss

PR-01 PRIME Overview

EN-22 Merits and Justice

EN-19 Arising Out of and In the Course of Employment

Amendment History

Original Effective Date 1987 08 20

Revision #3 2004 03 16

Revision #4 2019 04 23

Revision #5 2024 09 17