WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE

ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTÉ
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WELTGESUNDHEITSORGANISATION
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ВСЕМИРНАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ
ЕВРОПЕЙСКОЕ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЕ БЮРО

Hearing Aid Specifications and Quality Standards **/1**
Technical briefing to WHO European Region Member States

Wednesday 26 March 2025 9:30–11:00 CET **1 March 2025**

Original: English

Scope and purpose

Background

Ear and hearing conditions are extremely common. Globally more than 1.5 billion people experience some decline in their hearing capacity during their life course, of whom at least 430 million will require suitable rehabilitation such as the use of hearing devices.[1]

Determining the assistive product and service requirements at the planning stage of a procurement process is essential to its success. Assistive Product Specifications are minimum criteria applied during a procurement process. These define the minimum requirements products should meet to ensure orders from suppliers are adequate to meet the user need. These may include or be supplemented by quality standards which ensure products meet minimum quality criteria, including safety, durability, and applicability for the environment. Specifications and standards play a key role in addressing the need for appropriate assistive products, and when used correctly, can ensure quality products are entering the market, thus protecting the end-user and ensuring value. Countries may choose to develop their own specifications and standards, or may develop specifications based on international specifications and standards including those available from the WHO,[2] the International Standards Organization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) or other relevant standards bodies.

However, on their own, specifications and standards need to be enforced and to be supported with the staff, resources, means and competencies to verify product compliance both prior to procurement, and following entry to the market. The development of national Assistive Product Specifications and quality standards addresses the need to ensure a balance between product quality and cost, while supporting the health of the assistive technology market within a country, local production and providers, and limiting unnecessary strain on government budgets.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe has been providing technical support in the procurement of assistive products, and the setting of specifications and standards for medical products in selected Member States. Technical support provided so far has focused on assistive products that

[1] World Health Organization. 2021. World Report on Hearing. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240020481

[2] World Health Organization. 2021. Assistive product specifications and how to use them. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240020283

support mobility and self-care. Given the high prevalence of hearing loss, a need was identified to provide key information specific to hearing aids.

Every year, World Hearing Day is celebrated on 3 March, an opportunity to raise awareness about access to integrated, people-centred ear and hearing services. Despite the critical role of hearing aids, only a fraction of those in need have access to them. Access to affordable and quality hearing aids is essential for promoting independence and participation in society of those with hearing loss. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is organising a technical briefing on hearing aid specifications and quality standards following World Hearing Day.

Aim

This technical briefing aims to address the barriers to accessing appropriate hearing aids by providing the knowledge required for Member States to **support informed decision making** in **selecting, evaluating and procuring quality hearing aids** in their national contexts.

Objectives

- Increase capacity for selecting and procuring quality hearing aids
- Enhance knowledge in evaluating and monitoring hearing aid quality
- Introduce WHO tools that support the procurement of quality hearing aids and/or the development and implementation of national hearing aid specifications and quality standards

Date and time

One 90-minute technical briefing will be held virtually. The briefing will take place on Wednesday 26 March 2025 from 9:30 am to 11:00 am Central European Time.

Participants

Participants will include representatives from relevant ministries of WHO European Region Member States. Each Member State is invited to nominate up to two participants for the meeting. Participants are likely to be representatives from health and social ministries and to be responsible for ear and hearing care, hearing device and / or assistive technology and more specifically for assistive technology / hearing device procurement, quality evaluation and standard setting.

Languages and accessibility

The presentations will be provided in English, and simultaneous Russian interpretation will be provided. Preparatory documents will be available in English and Russian. Closed captioning will be available during the briefing.