

A hearing aid you install yourself

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Melbourne researchers have invented a small, smart, self-managed hearing aid that outperforms most conventional hearing aids for less than half the price.

It uses technology first developed for Australia's bionic ear, and is so simple to set up that most users can buy one over the internet and fit it themselves. That brings the cost down to between \$1,000 and \$1500, or less than \$3000 for a pair.

The user can then easily fine-tune it and even switch the settings to suit the home, work, or the pub.

The new technology was launched in Melbourne today by the inventor of

one of its core technologies, Dr Peter Blamey, founder of Australia Hears and Deputy Director of the Bionic Ear Institute.

“Australia’s bionic ear has already brought hearing to hundreds of thousands of deaf children and adults worldwide. Now, our hearing aid uses technology from the bionic ear to bring better hearing to the millions of Australians with [hearing loss](#) who have been put off by the cost, complexity and stigma of conventional [hearing aids](#),” he said.

The new hearing aids are the culmination of nearly twelve years of research and development supported at key stages by the Australian government.

“In 1998 we created digital technology for the bionic ear that allows the user to boost or reduce key frequencies so that all the important sound frequencies for hearing are at a comfortable level,” says Peter.

“We realised that this technology (known as ADRO) could help not only people who are deaf, but anyone with hearing loss and we created a company, Dynamic Hearing, to commercialise it. It turned out there were applications in headsets and mobile phones as well as hearing aids. To date, most of the hearing aids using ADRO have only been available overseas,” says Peter.

“But we wanted this technology to make a difference for Australian’s with hearing loss,” says Australian Hears co-founder and audiologist Elaine Saunders.

“So we created a new business, and a new business model for hearing aids, to make the technology available to the millions of Australians who suffer hearing loss,” she says.

“This is the hearing aid for the iTunes generation. It’s small, smart and it

works.”

“We have a generation of middle-aged Australians whose quality of life has already been affected by hearing loss due to loud music or occupational noise,” she says. “You may not think you need a hearing aid, but ask your partner or friends.”

The hearing aid is easy to purchase online – it comes out of the box already adjusted, based on a hearing test or by six simple questions answered online. Then, if you want, you can play with your hearing aid – fine-tuning it and even creating settings for the pub, the family visit or work.

Independent Brisbane audiologist Steve Grayson-Riley has trialled and added the Australia Hears hearing aids to his range. When he first tried one he was surprised how easy it was to use and tune.

“They are just as good as hearing aids costing much more,” he says. “And they give control back to the wearer. For many people that’s important, and it was what I was looking for when I first studied audiology.”

Now, with the help of a Victorian government grant, Peter and his colleagues are designing the next version which will be prototyped using an advanced manufacturing facility at RMIT and may then be made in Melbourne.

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