

**Bills Committee on
Occupational Deafness (Compensation)(Amendment) Bill 2002**

The Administration's Response -

Reimbursement ceilings for hearing assistive devices

Introduction

This paper provides the response of the Administration to the views of some Members of the Bills Committee on the stipulation of reimbursement ceilings for expenses incurred in purchasing, repairing and replacing hearing assistive devices.

Background

2. At the meeting held on 27 January 2003, some Members requested the Administration to remove the ceilings of the reimbursable amount, while others opined that the ceiling at \$6,000 for the initial purchase of hearing assistive devices and the overall ceiling of \$15,000 per applicant should be raised. On the other hand, views supporting the stipulation of reimbursement ceilings and the reimbursement amounts as proposed in the Occupational Deafness (Compensation) (Amendment) Bill 2002 (the Bill) were also expressed. The Administration was requested to re-consider the stipulation of reimbursement ceilings.

Views of the Labour Advisory Board (LAB)

3. In the light of Member's views, we have consulted the LAB on the proposed reimbursement ceilings. The LAB members considered that the more expensive hearing aids might not be the most suitable ones for individual applicant, and that the recommendation of qualified professionals is a prerequisite only for the purchase of hearing aids, while the expenses on other types of hearing assistive devices and the accessories as well as the maintenance of these devices are not subject to such a requirement. Furthermore, the reimbursement of expenses for hearing assistive devices will be a new item

under the Occupational Deafness (Compensation) Ordinance and will be the collective liability of all employers, irrespective of trade and industry. The LAB maintained that the reimbursement ceilings must be kept as the removal of such ceilings would mean an open-ended liability for the Occupational Deafness Compensation Board.

4. In the same meeting, the LAB also considered the expert advice that the inductive loop system and an inductive coil installed inside a telephone set used in conjunction with the “T” switch of hearing aids can effectively drive out the disturbance of interfering noise generated from the environment. We have learnt from audiologists that a telephone set with built-in inductive coil is around \$1,000 and the installation of an inductive loop within a given space costs around \$1,000 to \$2,000.

5. Having considered the latest information concerning the inductive coil and loop, the views expressed by audiologists and after deliberation, the majority of the LAB members agreed to raise the reimbursable ceiling for the initial purchase from \$6,000 to \$9,000 and the aggregate amount of reimbursement per applicant from \$15,000 to \$18,000.

The Administration’s views

6. It has been our policy that the Administration will not take on a labour policy proposal that is not agreed by the LAB. The LAB is the most well-established consultative body on labour matters with equal representation of employers and employees in Hong Kong.

7. Accordingly, the Administration does not intend to remove the stipulation for reimbursement ceilings for expenses incurred for the purchase, repair and replacement of hearing assistive devices. However, we are prepared to raise the reimbursement ceiling for the initial purchase to \$9,000 and to raise the overall ceiling per person to \$18,000.