

Bilateral Implant Funding and Asymmetric Hearing Loss



March 2015

From 1 July 2014 the Ministry of Health increased cochlear implant funding to provide bilateral implants for children under 19 years of age newly referred for a cochlear implant. Prior to 1 July 2014 the Ministry of Health only funded 1 implant for this group.

Despite the increase in funding, the Ministry of Health referral and candidacy criteria for a funded cochlear implant have not changed. This means that:

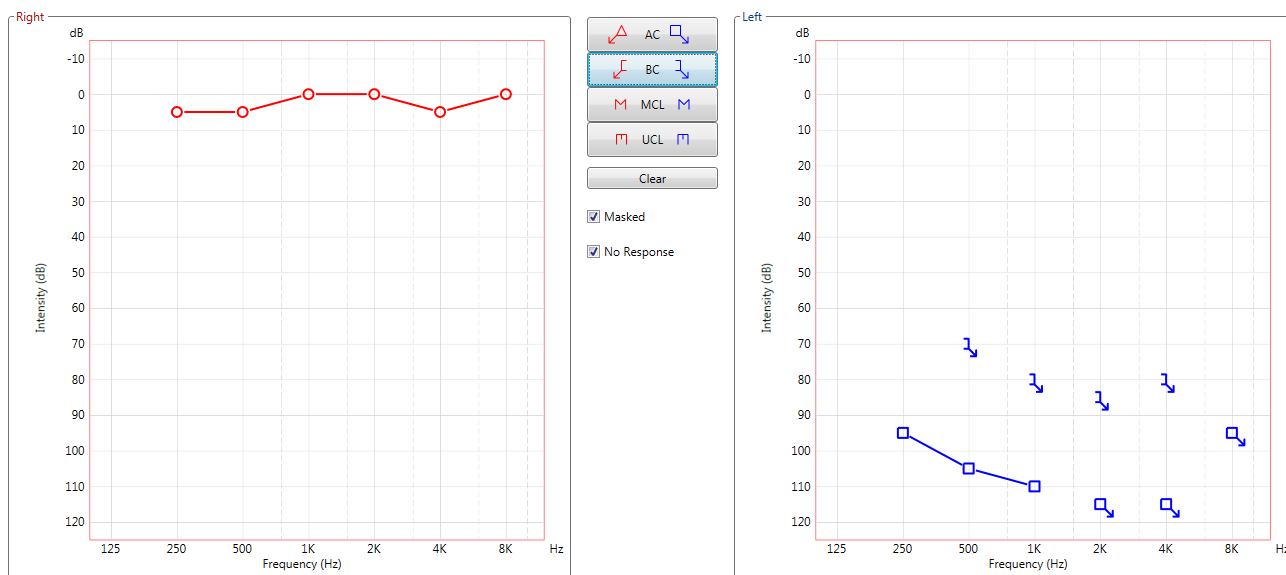
- A cochlear implant is provided on a funded basis primarily for the purpose of facilitating access to a speech signal
- Children referred for candidacy assessment should have hearing loss in the severe-profound range **in both ears** from 1 to 8 kHz*
- Children will still be assessed on a “best aided” basis, in which the better ear is in most cases the determiner of implant candidacy

*the exception to this is a diagnosis of ANSD

Asymmetric Hearing loss – Representative Examples

Since the change in funding announced by the Ministry of Health, we have received a number of referrals for children with asymmetric hearing loss, in varying degrees. Representative examples are shown below:

Example 1 – Single-Sided Deafness

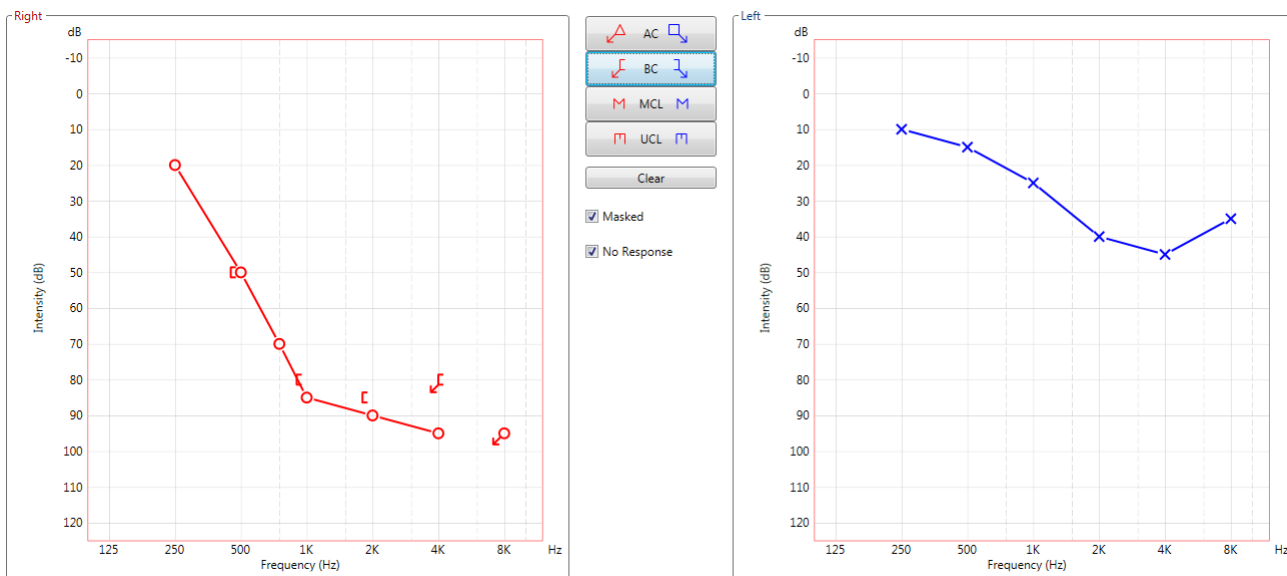


The hearing levels on the right side are normal. There is no diagnosis of ANSD. There is sufficient access to spoken language on the right side and an implant on the left side is not funded.

Example 2 – Asymmetric Hearing Loss

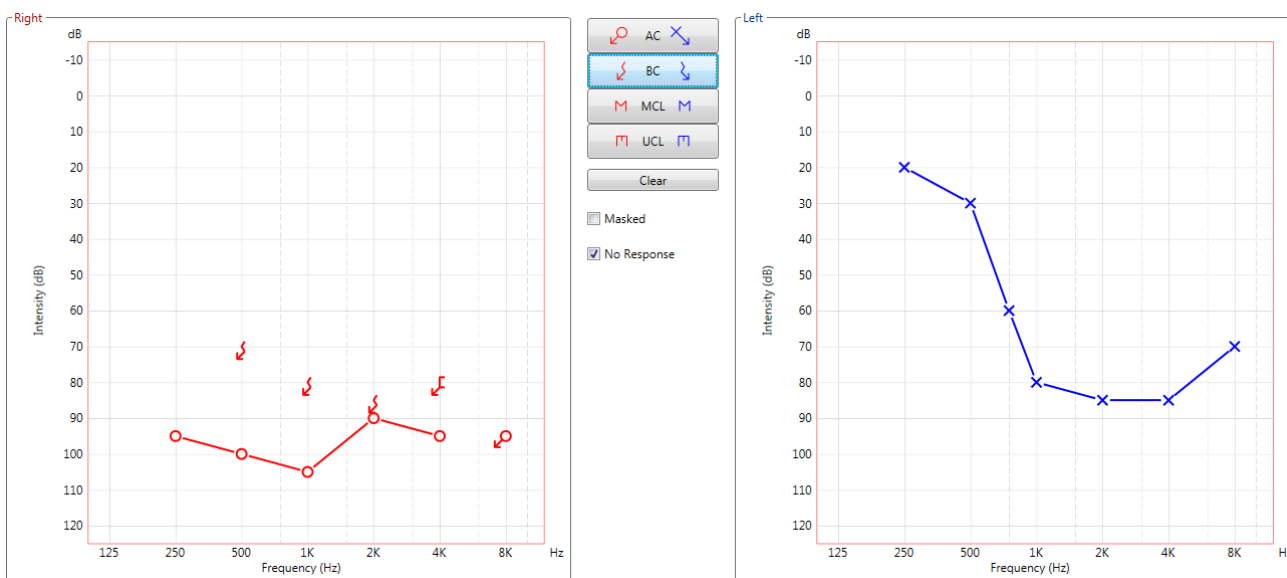
The hearing loss in both ears is amenable to a hearing aid fitting. There is no diagnosis of ANSD. With well-

fitted hearing aids the child should have access to spoken language in at least the better ear and a cochlear implant would not be funded on the right side.



Example 3 – Asymmetric Hearing Loss (Refer)

The hearing loss in both ears is in the range for referral. Despite well-fitted hearing aids the child may not have good access to spoken language in either ear. A referral for cochlear implant assessment should be considered, with a view to providing bilateral implants if indicated.



Out-of-Criteria (Non-Funded) Referrals

The programme has not to date provided cochlear implants in children (or adults) for single-sided deafness or where the individual still derives significant spoken language benefit via normal hearing and/or a hearing aid in the better ear, as per examples 1 and 2 above.

We are still reviewing the literature as to the risks, likely benefits, and suitable assessment and candidacy protocols that might apply.

Any decision to recommend implants under these circumstances would be on a non-funded basis as the

Ministry of Health does not currently fund this procedure.

Questions and Enquiries

If you have any questions about this bulletin then in the first instance please address them to Jill Mustard, Clinical Manager, at jill.mustard@scip.co.nz or Neil Heslop, General Manager, at neil.heslop@scip.co.nz phone 0800 500 405.

In cases where there is uncertainty about whether to refer, or whether a child is likely to be funded for a cochlear implant, or any other questions about cochlear implants, we welcome enquiries by phone, letter, or email.