

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Health Technician (Hearing Instrument Specialist) (HIS), GS-0640, appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. This new qualification standard establishes the Health Technician (HIS) occupation under VA's title 38 hybrid excepted service employment system in accordance with the authority established under Pub. L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010. VA Secretary has authority under 38 U.S.C. § 7402 to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in or established under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments. The new standard is effective on the date of this publication. This qualification standard will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and the [VA Publications website](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/
Guy T. Kiyokawa
Assistant Secretary
for Enterprise Integration

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Gina M. Grosso
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration/
Operations, Security and Preparedness

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic only

NOTE: This transmittal page accompanied the former VA Handbook 5005, Staffing publication. It is provided for reference to the establishment of this qualification standard.

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: Part II Appendix G73
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 18, 2022

**HEALTH TECHNICIAN (HEARING INSTRUMENT SPECIALIST)
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0640
Veterans Health Administration**

1. **COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment or placement as a Health Technician (Hearing Instrument Specialist) (HIS) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA Health Technician (HIS) in the General Schedule (GS)-0640 series. As members of the audiology service and hearing health care team, the Health Technician (HIS) possesses knowledge of basic ear anatomy and a broad knowledge of hearing aids and hearing assistive technology. The Health Technician (HIS) possesses the skills necessary to assist patients with concerns related to their hearing aids and/or hearing assistive technology, consistent with the treatment plan of the audiologist. This work may include the provision of a wide array of clinical rehabilitation services to support Veterans with disabilities reintegrate into community, employment and independent living.
2. **AUTHORITIES.**
 - a. [P.L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010;](#)
 - b. [38 U.S.C. § 7401, Appointments in Veterans Health Administration;](#)
 - c. [38 U.S.C. § 7402, Qualifications of appointees;](#)
 - d. [38 U.S.C. § 7403, Period of appointments; promotions;](#)
 - e. [38 U.S.C. § 7405, Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments;](#)
 - f. [38 U.S.C. § 7407, Administrative provisions for section 7405 and 7406 appointments.](#)
3. **DEFINITIONS.**
 - a. **Appointing Official.** The Human Resources Officer is delegated appointing authority, to process and authenticate notifications of personnel actions and authority to effect management approved employment actions on behalf of officials, employees and facilities for which service is provided.
 - b. **Approving Official.** The Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) Director, facility Director, or designee is the approving official and will determine whether

to approve or disapprove the appointment of employees in the hybrid occupations.

- c. **Journey Level.** The full performance level for this qualification standard is the GS-06 grade level.
- d. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills and abilities associated with current Health Technician (HIS) practice. Experience satisfying this requirement may be paid or non-paid employment as Health Technician (HIS) in the health care field.
- e. **Quality of Experience.** Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to Health Technician (HIS) experience at the next lower grade level of the position being filled. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.
- f. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to a full-time workweek. For example, an individual employed 20 hours per week, or on a half time basis, would receive one full-time work week of credit for each two weeks of service.

4. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. To qualify for appointment to this position, all applicants must possess the following:

- a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States (U.S.). Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7407(a).

- b. **Experience and Education.**

- (1) **Experience.** Completion of the Department of Labor Apprenticeship Program for Hearing Aid Specialists;

OR

- (2) **Education.** Successful completion of two academic years above high school that includes coursework related to the field: hearing science, human anatomy and physiology, hearing instrument science, gerontology, psychology or other general healthcare areas.

NOTE: There is no combination of education and experience which can be substituted for the basic requirements.

- c. **Licensure or Registration.** Individuals must hold a full, current and unrestricted license or registration to practice as a HIS in a state, territory, commonwealth or the District of Columbia.

- (1) **Loss of Licensure or Registration.** A Health Technician (HIS) who fails to maintain the required licensure or registration must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.
- d. **Board Certification.** Individuals must hold active board certification from the National Board for Certification in Hearing Instrument Sciences (NBC-HIS).
- (1) **Exception for Non-Board Certified Health Technician (HIS).**
- (a) Non-board certified applicants who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for appointment, may be given a temporary appointment as a graduate Health Technician (HIS) under the authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7405(c)(2)(B).
 - (b) Non-board certified individuals shall only provide care under the supervision of a licensed audiologist.
 - (c) Non-board certified individuals may only be appointed at the entry level and may not be promoted/converted until board certification is obtained.
 - (d) Temporary appointments of non-board certified Health Technician (HIS) may not be extended beyond two years or converted to a new temporary appointment.
- (2) **Failure to Obtain Certification.** In all cases, Health Technician (HIS) must actively pursue meeting requirements for board certification starting from the date of their appointment. At the time of appointment, the supervisor will provide the Health Technician (HIS) with the written requirements for board certification, including the time (i.e., two years) by which the board certification must be obtained and the consequences for not becoming board certified by the deadline. Failure to obtain board certification during the two-year period may result in termination of employment.
- (3) **Loss of Certification.** A Health Technician (HIS) who fails to maintain the required board certification must be removed from the occupation, which may also result in termination of employment.
- e. **Foreign Education.** To be creditable, education completed outside the U.S. must be deemed at least equivalent to that gained in a conventional U.S. program by a private organization specializing in the interpretation of foreign educational credentials.
- f. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019, Employee Occupational Health Service for requirements.
- g. **English Language Proficiency.** Health Technician (HIS) candidates must be proficient in spoken and written English in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7403(f).

5. GRADE DETERMINATIONS. In addition to the basic requirements outlined in paragraph 3, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.

a. Health Technician (HIS), GS-05.

- (1) **Experience.** None beyond the basic requirements.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Knowledge of basic anatomy of the head and neck.
 - (b) Knowledge of basic infection control procedures and guidelines.
 - (c) Skill in using basic computer software to complete tasks such as using email, creating spreadsheets and word processing.
 - (d) Ability to communicate orally and in writing.
 - (e) Ability to follow verbal and written instructions.
 - (f) Ability to maintain stock and supply level inventories.
- (3) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve in a Health Technician (HIS) entry level developmental position and work under the supervision and direction of a licensed audiologist. Assignments associated with this level include, but are not limited to: performing non-diagnostic otoscopy including proper bracing techniques and making appropriate referrals for abnormalities and cerumen management; rechecking air-conduction pure tone threshold testing to assist the audiologist in modifying the treatment plan during hearing aid repair appointments; providing patient care in hearing aid repair appointments, consistent with the audiologist's treatment plan; completing visual and auditory checks with listening stethoscope of hearing aids prior to and following repair of device (troubleshoots performance); processing incoming devices from patients with concerns related to their hearing aids or hearing assistive technology; preparing and charging (if required) hearing aids and assistive devices for delivery; receiving devices and restoring settings of hearing aid/hearing assistive technology after repair or replacement from manufacturer, such as Denver Logistics Center (DLC); and maintaining proper levels of mailing/shipping supplies. The Health Technician (HIS) adheres to the audiology clinic policy and standard operating procedures for infection control and cleaning, sterilization and disposition of reusable medical equipment (RME). The Health Technician (HIS) completes documentation per medical center policy for timeliness for each episode of care and codes procedures as appropriate in the patient record in preparation for co-signature by the audiologist. The Health Technician (HIS) provides instruction to patients,

family and staff on device topics including but not limited to hearing aid and hearing assistive technology care, maintenance, use and operation. The Health Technician (HIS) receives and completes incoming communications from Veterans (electronic and telephone), and facilitates follow-up based on audiologist's treatment plan to include ordering supplies through DLC.

b. **Health Technician (HIS), GS-06.**

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade.
- (2) **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Knowledge of normal and abnormal ear anatomy.
 - (b) Knowledge of hearing aids, hearing assistive technology, hearing aid manufacturers and manufacturer software.
 - (c) Skill in documenting patient procedures and patient devices.
 - (d) Skill in providing patient education for hearing aid use, to include assisting patient with hearing aid insertion, removal and hygiene (cleaning and disinfection).
 - (e) Ability to provide patient education and training regarding hearing loss and communication strategies for various listening situations.
 - (f) Ability to solve problems or make decisions regarding hearing aids, hearing assistive technology and patient care that is consistent with the documented and co-signed plan of care under the supervision of an audiologist.
 - (g) Ability to prepare patient, equipment, and/or environment for audiology procedures.
 - (h) Ability to provide triage of patient telephone calls or audiology requests.
- (3) **Assignment.** Employees at this level are at the full performance level and work under the supervision and direction of a licensed audiologist. Assignments associated with this level include, but are not limited to: completing visual and auditory checks of hearing aids and hearing assistive technology-including all hearing aid accessories, as well as, alerting devices (troubleshoots performance); registering, certifying and tracking prosthetic devices (hearing aids, hearing aid accessories and assistive devices); and assisting in set up and delivery of face-to-face and telehealth visits by preparing the equipment for patient evaluation and other audiology procedures, including, but not limited to daily biologic

listening calibration of audiometric equipment and calibration of real-ear equipment. The Health Technician (HIS) fabricates earmold impressions with proper otoscopy, orders earmolds based on plan of care through prosthetics or DLC and fits and modifies earmolds, if necessary. The Health Technician (HIS) provides patient care in hearing aid repair appointments consistent with the audiologist's treatment plan and provides counselling including, but not limited to realistic expectations, communication strategies and/or aural rehabilitation. The Health Technician (HIS) maintains a comprehensive supply and equipment tracking systems to include: monitoring stock of RME and consumable items; ensuring proper inventory levels to complete the daily tasks; prioritizing the acquisition of all supplies and equipment with regard to date of expiration; and may maintain a loaner hearing aid inventory. The Health Technician (HIS) assists patients with hearing aid connectivity including, but not limited to downloading applications (or apps), pairing devices in the app, Bluetooth ® pairing and pairing hearing aid accessories. The Health Technician (HIS) assists patients through triaging phone calls and audiology requests with regards to priority and urgency following the audiologist's plan of care.

6. DEVIATIONS.

- a. An approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an employee whose composite record of accomplishments, performance and qualifications, as well as current assignment, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade and/or assignment.
- b. The placement of individuals in grade levels or assignments not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health in VHA Central Office prior to placement in the position.
- c. Under no circumstances will the educational or credential requirement be waived for those occupations with a positive education requirement or when specific credentials are identified as necessary to meet minimum requirements, unless an exception is annotated in the qualification standard.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) (006), Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059)