

# Audiology support for Philippine call centre employees

BY JOYCE RODVIE SAGUN

Call centre employees face unique challenges that impact their hearing health. BPO companies are implementing initiatives in the Philippines to safeguard their auditory wellbeing.

**T**he Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry in the Philippines is a dynamic and rapidly growing sector. Within this industry, call centre workers comprise a significant portion of the workforce. According to the IT & Business Process Association of the Philippines (IBPAP), the Philippine BPO Industry, which includes call centres, has experienced significant growth in recent years. In 2022, the industry surpassed expectations by contributing over 1.4 million direct jobs and generating \$29.1 billion in revenue [1]. This growth highlights the importance of prioritising the health and wellbeing of call centre workers, including their ear and hearing health.

Call centre work often requires extended periods of active communication and listening, which can impact workers' hearing health in the long term [2]. To promote the welfare of call centre employees, BPO companies and call centres have implemented several measures to support their hearing healthcare needs [3]. The following are some initiatives and strategies adopted by these companies to protect their workforce's ear and hearing health.

## Audiological screenings and assessments

Audiological screenings and assessments are essential components of both pre-employment and ongoing health evaluations for call centre personnel. During the initial screening, candidates undergo an active listening assessment, which aids in determining their suitability for voice queue programmes. Although this assessment does not exclusively focus on fulfilling specific hearing requirements, it provides valuable insights into a candidate's potential to participate in a voice-centric role.

## Educational programmes on hearing health

Call centres conduct educational programmes emphasising the significance



*Elyssa Lapitan, a call centre employee in Manila. She epitomises the Philippine call centre workforce in urgent need of hearing protection through comprehensive hearing conservation programmes.*

of ear and hearing health to enhance awareness and prevent the onset of occupational noise-induced hearing loss. During these programmes, employees are trained on the proper use of headsets, including enabling active noise-cancelling features, and encouraged to take regular breaks to mitigate hearing fatigue. Moreover, companies provide training on maintaining overall wellbeing, underscoring the importance of using appropriate hearing protection measures. These measures are essential in reducing the risk of hearing damage caused by prolonged exposure to high-decibel noise levels, which can have significant long-term consequences on an individual's hearing health and quality of life.

## Access to hearing aids and assistive devices

Companies recognise the diverse hearing healthcare needs of their employees and provide them with access to hearing aids and other assistive devices. Additionally, they supply suitable hearing protection equipment, such as noise-cancelling headsets, emphasising consistent usage. Call centres ensure the equipment is comfortable to use, thereby mitigating any potential factors contributing to hearing issues.

## Work environment modifications

Efforts towards minimising noise exposure within the workplace are given utmost priority, with workspaces designed to segregate voice and non-voice programmes. Proper layout planning is implemented to reduce noise levels in operational areas, fostering a conducive working environment that supports auditory wellbeing. Such measures contribute to maintaining a healthy and productive work environment, with the added benefit of reducing the risk of hearing damage among the workforce.

## Partnerships with healthcare providers

Although annual physical check-ups do not typically include audiological assessments, several companies are exploring partnerships with healthcare providers, particularly otolaryngologists and audiologists, to address hearing-related issues comprehensively. To proactively promote employee wellbeing, plans are being considered to incorporate hearing tests as part of routine check-ups. This approach reflects the recognition of the importance of hearing health and the potential impact it can have on overall health and productivity. By including hearing assessments in regular check-ups, businesses can demonstrate their commitment to the wellbeing of their employees and offer early intervention and treatment for hearing problems.

## Challenges, trends, and innovations

Call centres are confronting numerous challenges and adopting innovative solutions to optimise employee wellbeing and operational efficiency. One such initiative involves promoting chat as an alternative medium for customer support, which aims to reduce dependency on voice services while improving productivity. In addition, implementing omnichannel solutions streamlines processes, allowing agents to concentrate on providing intricate resolutions while automated systems

## AUDIOLOGY

handle routine inquiries. By leveraging such measures, call centres can enhance their overall performance, improving customer satisfaction and their bottom line.

To improve communication quality and work performance, companies are also implementing processes for periodic asset requests to upgrade to high-quality business headsets with advanced features. This ensures superior sound quality and clarity, enhancing overall communication effectiveness.

### Call to action

While call centres in the Philippines have made significant strides in highlighting the ear hearing health of their workforce, there remains ample room for enhancement and refinement. To fortify audiological support programmes, companies should consider implementing comprehensive measures, such as:

1. Pre-employment hearing assessments should become a standard procedure to ensure candidates are suited for voice-centric roles and establish a baseline for monitoring their auditory health throughout their tenure. Regular check-ups should follow, allowing for early detection of any changes and prompt intervention if necessary.

2. A robust Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) should be established to safeguard hearing health. This SOP should provide employees with clear guidelines on the proper use of equipment, the importance of taking breaks and avenues for seeking support or accommodations.
3. Accommodations such as captioning services, visual alerts, and designated quiet areas should be implemented to create a more inclusive workplace. These measures can foster an environment where all employees can thrive regardless of their hearing abilities.
4. To alleviate financial barriers and ensure that employees have access to the necessary tools for maintaining their ear and hearing health, companies can offer provisions for audiological assessments and hearing devices through insurance or other means.

Indeed, audiological support plays a crucial role in safeguarding the wellbeing of call centre workers in the Philippines. Companies can create environments that prioritise ear and hearing health while optimising operational excellence by implementing comprehensive programmes, fostering awareness, and embracing innovative solutions. These efforts support employees' ear and hearing health, foster a sense of community, and demonstrate a commitment

to employee wellbeing. By adopting these recommendations, call centres in the Philippines can become leaders in promoting the health and happiness of their workforce.

### References

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