

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

3.13 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health in collaboration with key stakeholders consider the data that is currently available through the Research Centres, and the data that is necessary to identify the areas of current and prospective need. It should then consider where there are gaps, the need and the benefit of filling these gaps, and how this information could best be gathered.

3.14 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health assess the need, the practicality and the likely cost of gathering further data through the Australian Bureau of Statistics. In particular, the committee recommends that the Department of Health carefully consider Speech Pathology Australia's proposals to gather more specific data on communication disabilities through:

- the National Census;
- the Disability Services National Minimum Data Set; and
- Nationally Consistent Data Collection on School Students with Disability tool.

Recommendation 2

5.77 The committee recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders, investigate the current service delivery model for speech pathology services in aged care residential homes in Australia. The federal government should seek information on:

- the capacity—in terms of both skills and resources—of nursing staff within a residential aged-care facility to screen for communication and swallowing disorders;
- the number of speech pathologists directly employed by an aged care residential centre; and
- the number of residential aged care facilities that opt to contract out private speech pathology services, and of these, the number of cases—in a calendar or financial year—where a private speech pathologist has been contracted.

5.78 On the basis of this evidence, the committee recommends that the federal government form a view as to whether these practices are compliant with aged care Accreditation Standards. The findings should be considered as part of the federal government's ongoing aged care reforms.

Recommendation 3

5.89 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health work with the most relevant stakeholders to make an assessment of the financial cost, timeframe and research benefits of a project that maps language support services across Australia against the Australian Early Development Index information about vulnerable communities.

5.90 Pending an assessment of this proposal, the committee recommends that the federal government consider funding a project along the lines proposed. The findings of this research should inform future policy decisions to fund public speech pathology services in Australia. The findings should also guide private practitioners as to those locations where their services are most likely to be needed.

Recommendation 4

5.93 The committee recommends that the federal government provide funding and/or support for an appropriate research institute to conduct a thorough and systematic audit of the adequacy, strengths and limitations of existing speech and language services for children in Australia. The audit should consult with children's health and education providers, including but not limited to early childhood education and care centres, primary schools, secondary schools, speech and language therapists and special needs coordinators.

5.94 The committee recommends that this research proceed as soon as possible. The research would provide a foundation for the federal Department of Health to conduct its work into paediatric speech and language disorders.

Recommendation 5

6.22 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health work with the National Disability Insurance Agency to develop a position paper on the likely impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) on speech pathology services in Australia. The paper should consider:

- the possible impact of the NDIS on the demand for speech pathology services in Australia, and the likely drivers of this demand;
- the need for greater numbers of trained speech pathologists as a result of increased demand for speech pathologist services arising from the introduction of the NDIS;
- the need for the speech pathology profession to develop telehealth practices to cater for NDIS participants requiring speech pathology services; and
- concerns that the withdrawal of State funding for speech pathology services in anticipation of the NDIS may leave some people worse off if they are ineligible to become an NDIS participant.

The position paper should be circulated to key stakeholders for consideration and comment and to assist in decision making.

Recommendation 6

6.43 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health develop a strategy aimed at broadening the opportunities for speech pathology students to undertake clinical placements that satisfy the profession's Competency-based Occupational Standards. The strategy should be developed in consultation with:

- the relevant heads of Department from each of the 15 Australian universities offering speech pathology courses; and**
- Speech Pathology Australia and a broad cross-section of its membership.**

Recommendation 7

6.51 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health investigate the evidence of geographical and demographic clustering of speech pathology services in Australia. This investigation should look at:

- the number of new graduates in speech pathology moving directly into the public health care system;**
- the proportion of new graduates moving into regional and remote areas of Australia;**
- the proportion of new graduates from regional universities (such as Charles Sturt) opting to remain in a regional area to practice; and**
- the attitudes of those graduates who work in a regional or remote area of Australia following the completion of their studies, including:**
 - the reason why they opted to work in a regional or remote location; and**
 - whether they intend to remain working in that location; and**
- the attitudes of those graduates who work in metropolitan areas following the completion of their studies as to:**
 - the reason why they opted to work in a metropolitan location; and**
 - the attractiveness of various financial incentives to encourage them to relocate to a regional or remote area.**

6.52 The committee recommends that this investigation should be considered in the context of:

- the findings of the project to map language support services across Australia against the Australian Early Development Index (recommendation 3); and**

- the findings of the proposed audit of the adequacy, strengths and limitations of existing speech and language services for children in Australia (recommendation 4).

Recommendation 8

6.68 The committee recommends that the federal Department of Health, in collaboration with state and territory governments, Speech Pathology Australia, and other key stakeholders, prepare a position paper on the most appropriate model of service provision for speech pathologists working in:

- early childhood intervention services;
- the education system;
- the justice system;
- the health system; and
- the residential aged-care environment.

Recommendation 9

6.73 The committee recommends that the federal government commission a cost-benefit analysis of:

- the current level of funding for public speech pathology positions. This should include:
 - the impact on individuals of existing waiting lists;
 - the limited provision of speech pathologists in the education, aged care and youth justice settings;
 - the impact on individuals where services are not available;
 - the impact of limited clinical placements and job opportunities for the speech pathology profession; and
 - the impact on the Australian community of underfunding these services.
- the various service delivery models proposed by the federal Department of Health (see recommendation 8).

Recommendation 10

7.12 The committee recommends that the federal government working with state and territory governments, consider the costs to the individual and to society of failing to intervene in a timely and effective way to address speech and language disorders in Australia and address these issues in the development of relevant policies and programs.

7.13 The committee recommends that the federal government work with state and territory governments and stakeholders to ensure that parents and carers have access to information about the significance of speech and language disorders and the services that they can access to address them.

