



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate Select Committee on Health Third Interim
Report:

Australian Hearing: too important to privatise

July 2018

Senate Select Committee on Health Third Interim Report: Australian Hearing: too important to privatise

Recommendation 1

Based on the evidence and the concerns outlined by stakeholders, the committee recommends that Australian Hearing should not be privatised.

Following consideration of the future ownership of Australian Hearing Services, the Government has decided to retain full ownership and control of the entity.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the government provide clarity around the work already done on the transition of the Hearing Services Program to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Any 'blueprint' or implementation plan should be made public as soon as it is finalised, so as to reassure stakeholders that the quality services provided by Australian Hearing continue to be available in order to ensure that hearing impaired Australians can live the life they deserve.

The Government has published a high-level [Hearing Services Program-NDIS Transition Plan](#) on the Hearing Services Program website, as well as regular updates for the work undertaken so far. Relevant agencies are working together to update and further refine the Transition Plan ahead of full scheme roll out.

For more information please visit the Hearing Services Program website [NDIS page](#).

Government Senator's Dissenting Report

Recommendation 1

Coalition Senators note that further consultation is underway with the hearing community about the findings of the scoping study into Australian hearing before making any decisions on future ownership.

The report itself quotes the Department of Finance's summary of the findings of the scoping study:

The concerns raised by stakeholders during the scoping study process are closely related to issues being considered as part of the introduction of the NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme]. Regardless of the future ownership of Australian Hearing, these issues will need to be addressed as part of the NDIS transition planning.

Following consideration of the future ownership of Australian Hearing Services, the Government has decided to retain full ownership and control of the entity.

Recommendation 2

Coalition Senators note that the Government has provided ample information and clarity about the work done on the transition of the Hearing Services Program.

As part of the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), it was agreed to transition clients of state and Commonwealth funded programs that provide support to people with disability to the NDIS. One of these programs is the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (the Program), which will be transitioned in part to the NDIS by 2019-20. Moving eligible clients to the NDIS will mean they have more choice and control over the services they need. Interim arrangements are in place to allow NDIS clients to access the Program, while existing program clients continue to receive services in the usual way.

To assist the transition, the Department of Health has:

- Provided information to existing service providers regarding the interim arrangements.
- Placed a number of fact sheets including Questions and Answers on the website www.hearingservices.gov.au.
- In partnership with the Department of Finance and Department of Social Services, held 3 information sessions in June 2015 that targeted those who had been involved in the Scoping Study process. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation and summary of the information sessions is available on the website.
- Conducted an open registration process for those interested or who may be impacted by the transition to attend a Transition Workshop. The Workshops were conducted in August and September 2015 in partnership with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and Department of Social Services.

- Visited NDIS trial sites in ACT, SA and WA to hear feedback from planners and participants.
- Met with key advocacy groups to discuss in further detail specific concerns.
- Sent letters to those clients who may be eligible for the NDIS to inform them about the transition arrangements.
- Reviewed submissions and considered feedback from the information sessions from various groups and individuals detailing their concerns and/or views about the transition which has identified important packages of work to be undertaken to support the transition.

It was clear from the information sessions and workshops that stakeholders have various concerns about changes to the existing system and what these will mean for the experience and service provided to clients, particularly for infants and young children. Concerns and issues raised by stakeholders will be considered in transition planning and can be summarised in the following key themes:

- Maintaining current speed of access to paediatric services and the quality of those services, including appropriately trained and qualified clinical staff
- Monitoring the application of the NDIS access criteria and provision for any Hearing Services Program clients who are ineligible for the NDIS
- Ensuring that NDIA planners have appropriate information about reasonable and necessary supports for hearing loss
- Maintaining a national clinical data collection for all clients receiving government funded hearing services
- Ensuring that any new arrangements continue to provide for the monitoring of children at risk of permanent hearing loss
- Maintaining access to expert advice on the appropriateness of hearing equipment in schools
- Preserving access to services for clients in rural and remote areas
- Ensuring that there is active engagement with key stakeholders

Stakeholders involved in the consultations to date include representatives from existing contracted service providers, hearing practitioners, parents of children with hearing loss, early intervention service providers, hearing loss and early intervention services advocacy groups for both adults and children, representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy groups, representatives from rural and remote service delivery agencies, researchers, device manufacturers, and representatives from hearing resource centres.

The broad mix of stakeholders has enabled wide ranging discussion regarding service delivery considerations, including for rural and remote clients and the unique challenges faced in these areas, as well as to draw on the experience of those who have used the current hearing program and their perceptions of change with some services moving to the NDIS.

The Department of Health has published a high-level Hearing Services Program-NDIS Transition Plan. Communication strategies will be developed by the Department of Health and the National Disability Insurance Agency to support the program of work outlined in the [transition plan](#).

The Department of Health continues to work closely with the NDIA to develop a consistent communication plan for the transition of hearing services in the lead up to 1 July 2019.

Recommendation 3

Coalition Senators recommend the Government continue the methodical, transparent process of transitioning hearing services to the NDIS.

In September 2017 the NDIA released its access guidance, with improved focus on early intervention consistent with the Hearing Services Program for NDIS participants up to the age of 26, together with operational guidelines which help to inform how transition will occur.

The Department of Health is working closely with the NDIA to finalise arrangements for eligible Hearing Service Program clients to transition to the NDIS, with existing clients being covered by in kind arrangements.

