

Mr Gerry McInally
Committee Secretary
Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the
National Disability Insurance Scheme
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr McInally

I am pleased to advise that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has completed a review of guidance for determining access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people with a hearing impairment (HI). The pertinent revised guidance is shown below:

9.5.2 Early intervention for hearing impairment for people aged 0-25

The NDIA will be satisfied that a person meets the early intervention requirements without further assessment when the person:

- *is aged between birth and 25 years of age; and*
- *has confirmed results from a specialist audiological assessment (including electrophysiological testing when required) consistent with auditory neuropathy OR hearing loss ≥ 25 decibels in either ear at 2 or more adjacent frequencies, which is likely to be permanent or long term; and*
- *the hearing loss of the person necessitates the use of personal amplification.*

This streamlined access approach for early intervention acknowledges a rich body of evidence that recognises that early intervention support up to and including the age of 25 is critical for people with hearing impairment as the developing brain requires consistent and quality sound input and other support over that period to develop normally and ameliorate the risk of lifelong disability.

This same body of evidence suggests that brain development and language capability have been achieved by the age of 26. Therefore, adults aged 26 years and over are not immediately accepted to be likely to benefit from the same early intervention approach because there is no requirement to support the development of the auditory pathways. Adults aged 26 years and over with hearing impairment will therefore be assessed normally, on a case by case basis, having regard to the availability of all relevant evidence.”

The effect of this change is that prospective participants who are aged 0-25 (inclusive) who meet the audiometric criteria will meet the early intervention requirements without further assessment.

In addition, the following text will be removed from List D, Section 4:

Deafness/hearing loss – a 45 decibels or greater hearing impairment in the better ear, based on a 4 frequency pure tone average (using 500, 1000, 2000 and 4000Hz)”

An Additional Section entitled ‘Additional guidance for hearing impairments’ has been added at 8.3.3:

8.3.3. Additional guidance for hearing impairments

Hearing impairments may result in reduced functional capacity to undertake communication, social interaction, learning and self-management activities. Generally, the NDIA will be satisfied that hearing impairments of ≥ 65 decibels in the better ear (pure tone average of 500Hz, 1000Hz, 2000Hz and 4000Hz) result in substantially reduced functional capacity to perform one or more activities. This audiometric criterion reflects the lower limit of what is likely to constitute a substantially reduced functional capacity to undertake relevant activities.

Hearing impairments < 65 dB decibels in the better ear (pure tone average of 500Hz, 1000Hz, 2000Hz and 4000Hz) in conjunction with other permanent impairments (for example vision or cognitive impairments), or where there is evidence of significantly poorer than expected speech detection and discrimination outcomes, may also be considered to result in substantially reduced functional capacity to undertake relevant activities.”

As discussed with you recently, the NDIA is continuing to develop the reference packages for early intervention supports for children aged 0-6 years. As this will involve further actuarial modelling, final advice for the Committee is not yet available; however will be ready toward the end of this calendar year, and will be provided to the Committee.

The NDIA trusts that this information is helpful to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS in its considerations about hearing services and thank you for the opportunity to provide it. Please do not hesitate to contact me if the NDIA can provide any further information to assist the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Rundle PSM
A/Deputy Chief Executive Officer

31 August 2017