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LET'S MAKE HEARING HEALTH A NATIONAL HEALTH PRIORITY

The lead article of the February 2004 issue of the Deafness Forum Newsletter seeks to make the case for hearing health being a national health priority. It concludes by urging readers to raise the matter with existing members of the Federal, State and Territory Parliaments, with those who aspire to become MPs, MLAs, etc., with the bureaucrats who advise our elected representatives, with the policy makers in all political parties, with journalists, newspaper editors and talk-back radio hosts, and with all other organisations that have a vested interest in the matter. A brief guide to political lobbying is attached. Any reader who would like assistance to prepare a letter to a politician or a newspaper about this is welcome to write a draft letter and send it to the Deafness Forum for comment.

Here are some points about hearing health that might be made to politicians (and aspiring politicians) in particular:

- 22% of all eligible voters are affected (plus their immediate family members),
- voters in rural and remote areas are amongst those most likely to be affected, since noise injury is a significant problem in the Australian farming community¹ and chronic ear disorders with associated hearing loss are a significant problem in the indigenous population²,
- around 4 million individual Australians are Deaf or have a hearing impairment or chronic ear disorder, and
- the numbers affected will increase significantly as the population ages.

Points about hearing health that could be made to the media and others generally include:

- deafness can lead to social isolation, mental health problems and even long-term unemployment,
- people with an acquired hearing impairment show anxiety and depressive symptoms at 4 to 5 times the rate exhibited by people with 'normal' hearing³,
- hearing impairment strikes at a fundamental aspect of an individual's humanity - the ability to communicate effectively and subtly⁴,
- hearing impairment is exceeded only by dementia as one of the top ten causes of years lost due to disability amongst older Australians⁵,
- hearing impairment contributes to cognitive dysfunction in older adults, exacerbating the symptoms of dementia⁶, and
- we live and work in acoustically unfriendly environments.

References:

1. Noise Injury Prevention Strategy for the Australian Farming Community. Farmsafe Australia. 2002.
2. Report on Commonwealth Funded Hearing Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Strategies for Future Action, 2002. (p 33).
3. Welsh J. & Purdy S. Management of Age Related Hearing Loss. Australasian Journal on Ageing. Vol. 20. Nr. 2. June 2001. (p 58).
4. Wilson D. et al. The Epidemiology of Hearing Impairment in an Australian Adult Population. International Journal of Epidemiology. 1998: (2). (p 248).
5. Welsh J. & Purdy S. Management of Age Related Hearing Loss. Australasian Journal on Ageing. Vol. 20. Nr. 2. June 2001. (p 60).
6. Ibid. (p 58.)