



Ms Naomi Bleeser
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

12th May 2010

Yeerongpilly Early Childhood Development Program Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia

Dear Ms Bleeser

I am writing to you to request that the comments in this letter are considered in conjunction with submissions that have been accepted to the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health and the committee's discussions that arise from these proposals.

Yeerongpilly Early Childhood Development Program (YECDP) is an Education Queensland early intervention service for children with a diagnosed hearing loss between birth and six years of age. The focus of the centre and the program is to develop the children's communication (speech, listening and language) skills in collaboration with parents / carers. YECDP liaises regularly with staff from Australian Hearing (Mt Gravatt, Brisbane and Brisbane City) and the cochlear implant clinics at the Mater Children's Hospital and Royal Children's Hospital in Brisbane regarding the management of children's amplification devices and their communication development progress with these devices.

In Brisbane, the newborn hearing screening program, Healthy Hearing, is having a significant impact on numbers of children requiring the services of Australian Hearing, hospital audiological departments, ENT departments and early intervention services. The numbers have increased significantly and so it is important that all follow-up services are being continuously reviewed, increased and maintained to ensure that needs of all families and their children are met.

Comments relating to the terms of reference were collected from the school community (parents and staff) for this inquiry. The following comments relate to the third term of reference:

The adequacy of access to hearing services, including assessment and support services and hearing technologies.

- Children's moulds are taking two weeks or more to be made and sent to parents once the impressions are taken. For young children, and in particular babies, this means that the children are without their hearing aids for at least two weeks which is unsuitable when parents are involved in supporting the implementation of an auditory program for their children. It is critical that babies and young children have access to good amplification continuously not intermittently. Babies' ears grow quickly when they are young and as a result require frequent impressions for new moulds. Delays in obtaining new moulds impacts significantly on their developing speech and language.
- Hearing aids sent in for repair take over two weeks to be returned to the children leaving them without amplified access to sound. This impacts significantly on the children's developing communication skills (auditory, speech and language) and often on their behaviour due to the inconsistency of what they are able to hear.
- The wait times at Australian Hearing for recall appointments for toddlers have lengthened due to the priority given to fitting babies diagnosed with a hearing loss under the newborn screening program.

- Access to Australian Hearing for initial hearing assessments - only children who have been diagnosed with a hearing loss through the newborn screening program are able to access Australian Hearing. Parents have to use a private provider for a hearing assessment or wait up to 18 months for a hearing assessment through the public hospitals (Mater and Royal Children's Brisbane).
- Access to public hospitals' ENT departments for appointments and management of middle ear pathologies (e.g. removal of wax and insertion of grommets) involves long waiting times. Ongoing middle ear infections can have the same detrimental impact as a permanent hearing loss and can worsen an existing permanent hearing loss.

Thank you for the opportunity to include the comments of our school community into the Senate inquiry of Hearing Health. I am happy to respond to any queries you may have regarding this letter.

Yours sincerely

Marina Lye
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Yeerongpilly Early Childhood Development Program