

Re: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia

To the Community Affairs References Committee (community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au):

I would like to make a submission to the Hearing Health Inquiry.

My name is Susanna Carter and I am a 24 year old woman with a severe hearing loss from Sydney.

Australian hearing health & support in Australia is appalling. Inadequate financial support available for hearing aids for those aged above 21 years means having a lifelong hearing impairment is extremely expensive.

For example:

- I was born with a hearing loss and fitted at an early age, however going to a mainstream primary and secondary school meant there was a lack of support to cope academically and socially.
- There was no education given to other hearing students to understand and accept how to deal with peers who have a hearing loss. Being the only one throughout my schooling days meant I was constantly bullied and depressed. I received free hearing aids from Australian Hearing until I was 21 years old. This support helped considerably to engage and adapt with peers and various situations.
- Suddenly at the age of 21, just when I was unemployed and studying full time at university, I was told I could no longer get any services through Australian Hearing; I developed extremely low self esteem and avoided social situations. I was constantly worried and panicky which affected those around me such as my parents and friends. When my hearing aids broke during crucial situations I felt like giving up because there was no one to turn to and no money to cover the cost of new ones. These thoughts would over crowd my studies and my work.
- Upon turning 21, I was fitted with a standard free hearing aid which did not fit my ears comfortably. My ears were left in excruciating pain, inflamed and red. Australian Hearing refused to fit me with a more comfortable type and now still wearing my old ones from before 21.
- These old aids are over 6 years old with a band aid holding one together as repair costs are just too expensive. They have broken a few times therefore it's not worth forking out another repairs cost. My job now heavily involves answering phones which is the worst possible scenario for my aids to break in.

- I had to find a private audiologist, and many charged significant consultation fees. I need to be fitted with new aids however, with each hearing aid costing \$3,500 - \$4,000 each. I'm simply not in a viable financial state to afford them.
- There are limited affordable hearing aids available on the market to fit my sensitive ears comfortably. This means only a certain size and weight is required which is usually more expensive.
- I had two operations on both ears to remove an inflamed lump caused by the pressure of the moles. These operations were expensive and cost me over \$1000.
- I need to buy new aids but they are not covered under private health insurance unlike "aromatherapy and physiotherapy" cover.
- I am still living at home and unable to move out and afford rent as well as pay for my hearing aids.
- Audiologists charge huge amounts for ear moulds when you don't need them (up to \$250), and for repairs (up to \$500), and for batteries (they cost me \$250 a year).
- Why is hearing under Ageing? I am 24 years old. Far from "Old". I do not like to be associated as having an ageing problem!!!!!! It's a health issue. It affects anyone at ANY AGE. It affected me when I was born and now more than ever.
- You must get your facts right and stop ignoring our plea for financial help. In time it will hurt your government and the Australian economy as well as us.

Hearing health is so important. We cannot function if we cannot hear. We did not ask for this. We didn't have a choice. Let us have the choices available for our benefit and yours.

According to the Access Economics Report, one in six Australians has some form of hearing impairment, and this is projected to increase to one in four by 2050 (from [Access Economics \(2006\) Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia](#)).

But what about the statistics of those who are born with a hearing loss? The figure is much lower in this case. We need your help with the following changes made available to hearing impaired working citizens like me:

1. Hearing health should be moved out from under the Federal government Ageing portfolio, and placed under the Federal Government Health portfolio, alongside eye health. It currently does not receive the attention it deserves under the Ageing portfolio.
2. Significant subsidized and affordable government services should be offered via 'Australian Hearing' to people between the ages of 21 and 65 if they are on a low income, unemployed, full time students, or part time students. In Australia there is currently no help for these people in affording hearing aids and other hearing health services.
3. Private Health cover should cover the cost or a significant amount of the cost of aids when we need them.
4. Insurance companies should cover the full cost of hearing aids and if they are lost or broken. Currently most insurers will cover silly things like iPods, but not essential hearing aids, which cost \$8,000 to replace, and vital for many to be able to hear.
5. Former child clients of Australian Hearing who are **not** unemployed, students, or on low incomes should not be suddenly cut off from services of Australian Hearing. They should be able to pay a small yearly fee for services to stay on at Australian Hearing with their audiologist and have access to support when we require them.
6. All hearing aids and other hearing health aides should be able to be claimed as a tax deduction once someone starts work. Currently you can't claim expensive hearing aids as a tax deduction.