

SENATE INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH SUBMISSION

NAME : Lynnden Beaumont

HEARING HEALTH SITUATION : Totally deaf (see below)

WHY AM I WRITING THIS SUBMISSION?

I write to urge all members of the inquiry to study all submissions very carefully because I have come to know through my experience, just how unaware and ill informed the community is when it comes to hearing disabilities, and how devastating this 'invisible' curse is.

MY BACKGROUND

Until a few years ago, I had perfect hearing, had never really had anything very specifically to do with hearing loss, and had never even thought about what it would be like to have no hearing.

Following two separate, but identical unidentified illnesses six months apart, I suddenly and dramatically lost all hearing in both ears.

I was a Primary School principal, so after the loss of hearing in one ear, went back to my work, suddenly realising how tough life is when you can only hear in one ear, and how much adaption and frustration one experiences with a hearing impairment.

After losing the hearing of my other ear, it became obvious that you can't run a school and have no hearing – no communication, limited relationships and impossible to continue to teach.

Although I was able to have a cochlear implant relatively soon after, it was, unfortunately a failure in my case.

So, at age 55, I suddenly had to face a life of no sound.

My life-long profession and passion was gone, I could not communicate with my family and friends and have never known what most of my grand children sound like, let alone, what they say to me, apart from the odd words picked up by lip reading.

Information access, relationships, entertainment, meetings, church services and feeling a being a valuable part of the community, virtually ceased immediately. In my case, these were exacerbated by the fact that my loss of hearing also meant a loss of balance, so sport and any confidence in movement were no longer part of my life.

So life became an incredibly steep and exhausting learning curve as I tried to keep positive and come to terms with living a silent world.

I soon realised just how tough life is for those without hearing, and those with a hearing impairment.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

I also soon realised that there are millions of others in our country with hearing loss, and whilst they may not be as severe as mine, they remain 'invisible' in their disability – invisible to society and unfortunately, invisible to politicians and governments who don't yet see them as 'high profile'.

Anyone with a mobility problem or blindness, is immediately visible in our community, and people are easily aware of their needs and difficulties (and so they are well catered for!).

That's not the case with deafness or hearing loss.

No one sees it, so no one knows!.. and people are made to think that it's something to be ashamed of. (Just think about the audiology industry and how they emphasise the need for hearing aids to be 'invisible' or 'discreet', so no one needs to be 'embarrassed'!).

You walk down the street and none of the thousands you pass have any idea you are deaf or have a hearing impairment (until you perhaps don't hear that siren or realise that someone is screaming out.)

In my case, it's even 'worse'.

With most people who have been deaf or significantly hearing impaired for many years, their speech 'gives them away' as to some disability (although so often it's cruelly or thoughtlessly interpreted as an intellectual disability).

For me, with still excellent powers of speech, people don't think I'm really deaf at all, and that makes it all the more frustrating.

So, I continue to try to be positive and learn about others in my situation, and I am staggered to find that nearly 20% of the whole population has some form of hearing disability. I believe that the prediction is that by 2050, nearly one quarter of our population will have this affliction. And it may well in fact turn out to be much worse. Whilst we can perhaps accept that up to 75% of our oldest Australians suffer from hearing loss, our society must surely be aghast at the number of our young people doing permanent and irreversible damage to their hearing through abuse of iPods and similar devices. What future for them, and who will alert them?

I'm sure others will be able to quote you the facts regarding hearing loss in Australia and that it is far more prevalent than almost all 'high profile' illnesses and disabilities, but when so much can be done to prevent hearing loss, the logic and benefits of prevention rather than treatment, makes so much common sense – but we aren't acting because it's not a priority.

I know that Australia's peak body for deafness and hearing impairment, Deafness Forum Australia, has made a submission to the inquiry, and I beg you to please read it, carefully and thoroughly, as I know they have canvassed widely and thoroughly for the evidence they present.

I have deliberately not tried to tackle all angles of the issue as other specific groups will do that. I merely want to tell you my personal story.

I know I'm just one Australian citizen, and my story, though perhaps sad, can easily be ignored, but on behalf of the millions of other Australians who have a hearing disability, I urge you to study the evidence and then help come up with the necessary recommendations to provide the support that is needed.

And finally, can I ask you please to do one thing?

When your favourite program comes on TV, turn the sound off or right down.

OR

When you go to the cinema or theatre to see that show you have been looking forward to, use ear plugs or muffs to stifle or block out the sound.

NOW you'll personally be able appreciate what it's like !!

I hope that you will be able to make a difference for the millions of deaf and hearing impaired people of our country.

Thank you.

Lynnden Beaumont