

Wednesday 7th October 2009.

To the Federal Government Senate Inquiry on deafness:

I am glad the Australian Federal Government is looking into this critical area of hearing loss which affects so many (one in six) Australians of all ages. The cost of hearing aids in the age bracket between 18 to 65 is prohibitive and as far as I understand it this cost is not tax deductible. The cost of batteries is not tax deductible either. In countless cases people would be unable to work if they did not wear hearing aids. They are tools essential for the job. Working people pay tax. I believe that there is a 400% profit on hearing aids. This seems exorbitant.

Apart from hearing aids, essential assistive devices are expensive. These should have a tax deductible allowance for working people and be at a minimal cost to those who are on pensions.

All facilities caring for the elderly ought to have hearing loops and assistive devices as a matter of course to make the quality of life acceptable for them. Staff in such facilities ought to be adequately trained in how to help those with hearing loss and need to be able to identify the problems associated with hearing loss. Hearing loss can be mistaken for dementia and is often the cause of depression in elderly, as well as younger, people. Hearing loss is very debilitating and isolating for those who endure it.

The cost of cochlear implants needs investigation, especially since so many young (I do not know the statistics) are being identified with deafness at an early age. I understand that costs are borne by the health department for children and teenagers but what happens as they become young adults? The ongoing costs for such people are expensive and the same is true for the elderly with cochlear implants. People need to be thoroughly informed about such costs and to be aware of what the ongoing assistance may or may not entail.

Hearing loss is a disability which is abysmally neglected. This may be because people in the past have been too reticent to make their frustrations and hardships public.

The loss of hearing is often referred to as the 'Hidden Disability' and because people look normal the community at large, including government, does not appreciate the enormous difficulties deaf people suffer. If one is vision impaired or has to use a wheel chair the public is fairly sympathetic. People with hearing loss have a tremendous number of difficulties and the public needs to be made aware of them. Access to commercial areas, public entertainment, communications at airports and travel venues should be made accessible to the hearing impaired as a matter of course, just as wheel chair ramps are for those who have difficulty in walking.

As a hearing impaired person I know that:

if the Government were to ease the cost burden for the hearing impaired, make communication more accessible for them and develop public education and awareness about hearing loss, it would be doing an enormous service to its voting public.

From: Shona Fennell.