

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a 31 year old female with a profound bilateral hearing loss. I wear two hearing aids which I upgraded from an old broken down model nearly two years ago.

I was informed by Australian Hearing in 1999 when I turned 21 years old that I would no longer be given the service I was receiving prior, I did not realize the impact this would have on me, financially and emotionally. I don't feel as if I was prepared for it properly by Australian Hearing.

When I had to investigate new hearing aids nearly two years ago, the impact of the lack of support from the government agencies and private agencies really threw me. I was very stressed emotionally when I couldn't get help from Australian Hearing to be guided in the right direction to a private hearing clinic and financially when I discovered that I would need to pay at least \$8000 to \$10,000 for the right hearing aids I needed for me and my lifestyle. Alternatively, I could go cheaper and get the bottom of the range models which would not have helped me very much with my range of hearing loss. Why would I sacrifice my way of living and self esteem for a pair of cheap hearing aids?

I had been on private health cover for some time prior to getting my new hearing aids and for years I investigated covers that would help me with the cost of hearing aids and the additional costs that come with it – moulds, batteries, regular hearing tests, repairs, maintenance and servicing. My private health cover isn't worth paying a higher level of premium just to get 10% of new hearing aids covered. I was better off getting a personal loan and paying it off that way. I cannot believe what private health covers give you rebates on gym membership, new running shoes, yoga classes and so on. Why not hearing aids?

The impact I am worried about is when I have a mortgage and children. How can one expect to have "normal" life typical of that of fully functioning adults when every 4-8 years, I have to fork out \$8000 - \$10,000 on new hearing aids (quotes varied from different hearing clinics)? Most young adults have a mortgage – I would hate to have a mortgage and a personal loan to pay off my hearing aids and struggle to make ends meet with a family.

I worry every day as I get older, will I be able to afford good quality hearing aids when I have children? I want to be able to hear every sound they make and every word they say.

What I would like to see in the future is subsidies for hearing aids dependant on the level of income one earns or even a tax exemption. I would like to see private health covers introduce policies where hearing aids and its additional costs can be covered or a rebate offered on these. I would also like to see an introduction of a transition program to help young adults with hearing impairment who has been dependant on Australian Hearing prior to turning 21 years of age to find the right private hearing clinic for them.

Thank you kindly for considering my submission.

With kindest regards,

Elizabeth Eakin