

5 October 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission to Hearing Health in Australia: unjustifiable high cost of hearing aids

I am deaf. My husband is deaf. We have both been deaf for all our lives.

We are both totally reliant on hearing aids to enable us to maintain employment and enjoy social opportunities with family and friends.

We cost the government NOTHING because we use hearing aids. Without hearing aids, it is unlikely we would gain and maintain employment in the small rural town near where we live. Without hearing aids we would COST the government through unemployment/disability benefits and Auslan interpreting services.

Recently our hearing aids became so old they are not able to be repaired. Why did they become so ancient? Because we know they cost a fortune to replace so we kept the old ones as long as we could. This is in common with most people who work and use hearing aids, even though the hearing aids become out-dated and way past their use-by date.

At the local audiologist office, we discussed purchase prices. We opted for mid-range price hearing aids and wrote out a cheque for 4 hearing aids. For this, we paid \$8,000.00 in total.

We had to pay \$8,000.00 simply to be able to hear, and we can't afford \$8,000.00 because we have a drought-stricken farm and it is just another cost we simply have to shoulder. Private health insurance for hearing aids makes it very hard to claim on extra benefits, and so little is paid back we didn't even bother trying.

How do we explain to you the sheer injustice of having to pay \$8,000.00 JUST TO BE ABLE TO HEAR? How do we explain to you the anger we feel that many cosmetic surgery procedures are fully claimable through private health cover, even though they are not essential to enable the person to cope in our society? Why are hearing aids for people who are employed considered a luxury? Why does the government fully fund hearing aids for people on government benefits but penalises people like us, who work and pay our taxes despite having severe hearing losses? Why do we still have to fork out more money to cover the on-going cost of batteries, ear moulds and repairs? WHY?

All we want is for hearing aids to be provided on an equitable basis for people like us who work and pay taxes.

Janice Evans

Footnote

We are fortunate in that we know enough about hearing aids NOT to be ripped off by an audiologist trying to sell us top-of-the-range hearing aids. We have a friend who didn't know any better and actually paid \$6,000.00 for ONE hearing aid! We tried to explain to him that there is no need to pay \$6,000.00 for one hearing aid, but he still does not believe us because we are not audiologists. But in our experience, talking with people who use hearing aids, they are often led up the garden path and ripped off by private audiologists out to make as much money as they can. Has this ever been seriously investigated?