

To the Community Affairs References Committee,

**RE: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia**

I would like to add my submission to the above inquiry.

At the age of 18 (currently 31), I lost a great deal of my hearing, which could not be explained by doctors. There was no support offered in helping me deal with hearing loss, which severely damaged my self confidence.

Doctors did not explain that hearing aids were available via public funding under the age of 21 so I have always been a private patient and the 'refund' of hearing aids from health insurance companies are less than half of what is paid out for the hearing aid.

Today a hearing aid can be worth over \$3000 with a rebate of only \$800 per year. This is after I pay \$790 per year for the level of cover that pays out on 'extras' like hearing aids. Most health insurance companies only cover one hearing aid per year so if a person has 2, there is the inconvenience of staggering out the buying/claiming process.

In 2001 I was a Cochlear Implant recipient and was more than pleased when the bulk of the costs were covered by my private health fund and Medicare.

As a successful recipient, I have been thankful everyday for my Cochlear Implant, which has allowed me to be more interactive at work with my co-workers and customers, including being able to use the phone.

I have not been pleased to discover that I cannot find a health fund that will cover ANY of the cost of upgrading the speech processor. These are \$8050. Any upgrades would be an improvement and help deaf people participate more easily in a hearing world.

Batteries for the Cochlear Implant can be an expensive item and any help towards costs via public funding or private health funds would be appreciated. Currently I use 3 batteries every 6 days and a packet of 4 batteries can be up to \$9, that is \$468 a year.

I would like to see the following changes made to hearing health:

1. Hearing health is neglected in its current portfolio, it should be moved from the Ageing portfolio in the Federal Government to the Health portfolio, alongside eye health.
2. Subsidised government services should be made available through Australian Hearing Services to people between the ages of 21 and 65 if they are on a low income, unemployed, full time students, or part time students.
5. Private health insurance companies should cover all or most of the cost of hearing aids and cochlear implants when they need to be upgraded every few years. For a hard of hearing person to participate as a useful member of society, it is essential to have the best technology.

6. All hearing aids, cochlear implants and other hearing health aids 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.

7. More available recycling centres for batteries to help the environment.

I thank you for your time in reading my submission.

Kind regards

Nikki Haseldine