

INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA

I am the mother of a young man who has cerebral palsy as well as being born profoundly deaf. After being fitted with a cochlear implant, my son has been able to learn to live independently.

I have recently discovered that Federal funding for pensioners may not be available for my son to obtain a compulsory upgrade to his Cochlear Implant processor.

This is a tragedy for my son and another 54 individuals in Victoria who would be affected by this lack of funding. I feel strongly that it is time to make a stand and therefore I am sending you this submission on my quest to see a fair outcome for this disadvantaged group.

INTRODUCTION

Deafness can be an isolating condition. Since the improvement of hearing aids and the inception of the cochlear implant many people have been able to adjust and adapt to living independent lives.

Currently we have a situation where the Federal Government finances the needs of deaf children, up to the age of 21. Usually these individuals are finding their way through tertiary education and into the workforce, so it is a vital stage of their lives. It is devastating for them to lose support from the Federal Government when they have just begun a journey of independence.

I cannot understand why funding is not available for a group that has been given hope for a bright future and now without some financial support they are likely to be unable to continue their fulfilling opportunities within the community. I believe the Federal Government must continue to support the 55 individuals in Victoria who need compulsory upgrades of Cochlear Implant processors as pensioners. Cochlear are no longer making replacement parts for older model Cochlear Implants.

THE COSTS OF HEARING IMPAIRMENT

The cost, at a flat rate for any minor repair to Cochlear Implants is \$396

A major repair (the upgrade of processor) is \$8000

The cost of batteries is \$365 per year

All these costs for a pensioner are not viable, therefore the deaf or hearing impaired adult may be left without working hearing apparatus.

SUPPORT FOR COMPULSORY UPGRADES OF COCHLEAR IMPLANT PROCESSORS FOR PENSIONERS

I have spent much time over the last six months speaking to people, writing letters and sending emails to gain support for my son to receive funding for the necessary upgrade of his hearing apparatus. I have discovered in that time that there are other people in a similar situation to my son.

My local members' of parliament have offered their support by writing to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP and in turn to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon MP.

I have also written to the Hon Justine Elliott MP, the Federal Minister for Ageing. She has not returned my email to date.

It is hard to believe that some of these ministers do not feel that my case is worth taking time to respond to. I would have thought that any deaf/hearing impaired young man who is trying to improve his life by working part time and living independently would be applauded by his community and in turn his peers for doing something for himself.

Because of my frustration with a lack of response from these politicians, I spoke to Jon Faine on ABC radio 774 Melbourne on March 11 2010. He also spoke with Professor Richard Dowell from the Implant Clinic at RVE & E Hospital. Richard was involved in the original assessment of my son 24 years ago. Richard understands the need for intervention by the Government to provide funding for the 55 people who are pensioners, before their Cochlear Implants break down and they are left in a silent world again.

CONCLUSION

I believe that for a small outlay to fund these compulsory upgrades of Cochlear Implant processors for the pensioners affected, that the cost will be paid back threefold. It is more important, I would think, to have these individuals leading independent lives and contributing to society through their ability to hear, than by ignoring their plight and allowing them to fall back into the quiet world they started out in.

PLEASE help this group of deaf/hearing impaired individuals to continue to lead a normal life. Do not take away their hope and aspirations for the future.