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The Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia

The Australian College of Audiology (*ACAud*) welcomes the Senate inquiry into hearing health in Australia. *ACAud* represents over 400 providers of hearing services to the Australian people. We are the only organization representing Audiometrists, Audiologists, and Service Providers.

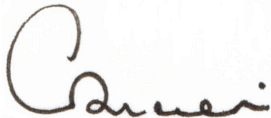
While the delivery of hearing services in Australia may be considered to be one of the best in the world, there is room for improvement. In our submission we would like the Senate inquiry to consider the following points:

- 1) *ACAud* would like to see universal hearing services provided to all Australians. It is a fact that many low-income hearing impaired Australians cannot afford hearing services and simply go without help. This often leads to lower economic and social outcomes as people are isolated by their hearing impairment. A means test or some form of co-payment may help to ease the financial burden to the Commonwealth Government by such a proposal.
- 2) There needs to be less government interference in the provision of hearing services to the Office of Hearing Services (OHS) voucher clients. Red-tape and the burden of complying with out-dated government regulations results in less time spent with clients. Often compliance is based on issues that have no meaningful, positive outcomes for the client.
- 3) Australian Hearing has a world-wide reputation in the provision of services to children. In addition, Australian Hearing provides a vital service to community service obligation clients. However, Australian Hearing also competes directly with the private sector for voucher clients. As an Australian Government agency, Australian Hearing has a marked advantage in the marketplace when competing with the private sector. *ACAud* would not like to see Australian Hearing opened up to non-voucher clients as this would create an unequal competitive situation and will result in the closure of many private sector providers. It would be better for the hard of hearing community if Australian Hearing focussed their energies and funding towards Community Service Obligations.

- 4) The role of Audiometrists in the delivery of hearing services to Australians is a long and distinguished one. Recently, there have been suggestions that Audiometrists should be restricted in practice or even eliminated from the OHS system. Suggestions of this sort will result in reduced services for all Australians and, in particular, the voucher clients and will only benefit a small group of non-Audiometrists.
- 5) It seems strange that we strive to undo the damage that noise does yet at the same time apply GST to devices that protect from such damage occurring, perhaps the removal of GST from all forms of hearing protection would be beneficial.
- 6) Rural and remote areas suffer from a lack of services, incentives should be put in place to encourage provision of services in these areas.
- 7) The Australian Government is encouraging the aged population to be cared for in their own homes on an extended basis to relieve the burden on government funded care. This aged and fragile section of the community is one that often requires hearing assistance but is unable to easily attend clinics. Again, some form of incentive could be put in place to encourage extension of services in this area.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our response to the senate inquiry into hearing health.

Sincerely,



Gayle Dicerri
President