



We Share

# Quota Club of The Leisure Coast Inc.

35TH DISTRICT

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

Dear Sir/Madam

## INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA

As an introduction, Quota International is one of the world's oldest international service organisations, celebrating its ninetieth anniversary in 2009. Quota International of the Leisure Coast Inc has been part of this network for more than 50 years, serving our local community in a variety of ways as well as supporting projects nationally and internationally.

The service mission of Quota International focuses on the speech and hearing impaired and disadvantaged women and children. Many Quota clubs provide scholarships for hearing impaired or for students planning careers related to speech and hearing.

We would like to submit the following to the Committee.

- a) The extent, causes and costs of hearing impairment in Australia;

Once a person is over 21 years of age they receive no assistance for batteries, check-ups with an audiologist (at times it is very difficult to find one) and the cost of new hearing aids. These are very expensive with the refund from health insurance providers minimal but the premium high. It is a daunting process balancing what is best suited against what is affordable.

We would also like to raise the question of affordability of hearing aids for those not on the pension. Low income earners find these appliances unaffordable even though they are in the workforce. Therefore nothing is done to improve their quality of life. The likelihood of isolation, misunderstandings and discriminations increase dramatically.

- b) The implications of hearing impairment for individuals and the community;

The lack of public awareness of hearing impairment at times leads to isolation of the person with the impairment. The lack of suitable environments for the hearing impaired within the business community is of great concern, i.e. loops and good lighting. Employers are mostly still uneducated about the simple things required to make it easier for the hearing impaired to work i.e. volume control on phone.

Hearing loss is an invisible disability. If a hearing impaired person needs emergency medical assistance or is hospitalised without their hearing aids, there would be difficulty in communication. This is especially highlighted with change of staff who are not aware of the hearing loss.

- c) The adequacy of access to hearing services, including assessment and support services, and hearing technologies;

One of our members has two children with hearing impairment. They are Andrew, aged 26 and Nicole, 17 years old. Even though Australian Hearing has held details of Andrew since he was 2 years old, finding a trained local audiologist has been difficult since turning 21. Therefore, the transition from a known environment was, and is, difficult and a huge problem.

The family are dreading Nicole turning 21 when she will lose Australian Hearing support and being her service provider. Our member states 'I am willing to pay for the service to continue after they are 21, just wish I had the choice to stay or move-on.'

- d) The adequacy of current hearing health and research programs, including education and awareness programs; and

Australia needs to invest more into equal access for the deaf and hearing impaired. Our suggestions include installation of loops, soundfields systems, have interpreters for all public events and on television (especially the news with subtitles on all programs and commercials).

Every establishment needs to be educated against hard surfaces, poor lighting and noisy backgrounds. These all make it hard to hear, see signing and generally communicate which makes way for a discriminative environment.

We need awareness promotions not just targeting the elderly, but the young deaf or hearing impaired person as well. Both groups live lives with discrimination and lack of awareness.

Education is the key on how to communicate/talk to the hearing impaired. By directing this education to our youth, there will be understanding and less discrimination towards fellow hearing impaired students. The younger we start, the more effective the program. We should teach Auslan at school as a second language; ensure our schools, classrooms and school halls are all fitted with soundfield systems etc; and deaf sports could be integrated with other sports in the media.

The access to services or information on where people can seek advice and guidance as to what they should do or who they can turn to for assistance is critical. We need a comprehensive government hearing services program.

We have new born screening for hearing problems but recently, more and more children are being identified during term 3 or 4 of the first year at school as having visual or hearing difficulties. For one reason or another, parents are not identifying hearing or visual symptoms and seeking medical assistance. Teachers are identifying these children because of poor language development compared to other children in the class and urging parents to seek medical attention. Specialised teachers are then needed to devise an individual plan for each child to bridge the gap in their development.

Remember when we were children and the nurse came to school and checked our hearing? By bringing back school screening for kindergarten to year 2 students, hearing conductive losses will be identified and actioned by informing parents sooner rather than later. Eye sight screening should also be included in this so corrective action may be taken. At this young age, any loss in hearing or sight impacts upon their basic skills development. Kindergarten to year 2 students are also prone to ear infections which may result in hearing loss.

Another aspect requiring attention is the difficulty caused in a relationship with a person not hearing well and not doing anything about it.

- e) Specific issues affecting Indigenous communities:

Sensitivity is needed and cultural awareness to address otitis media, deafness and hearing impairment. Better medical care is required and access to services, especially for remote areas.

f) Other Concerns:

More research is needed urgently into the mental health of the deaf and hearing impaired. They are often isolated at school, being the only one who wears hearing aids or have hearing parents who truly do not understand what their child is experiencing. How can they know what the children are hearing and how hard they have to work to be understood and to fit into a hearing world?

Hearing people would not tolerate not being able to hear properly when at the picture theatre, watching television or even at a concert. Why don't we put in place things to make it easier for the deaf and hearing impaired?

Yours faithfully  
For Quota International of the Leisure Coast Inc

*Glenda Greenwood*

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President