

The Hearing Aid Manufacturers and Distributors Association of Australia (HAMADAA) Submission to the Senate Community Reference Committee Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia

HAMADAA welcomes the current inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia and appreciate the opportunity to being invited to provide input to its deliberations.

Background:

According to the Access Economic Report on Hearing Loss released in 2006, Australia will experience increasing numbers of hearing impaired members of the population over time. Their projections show a sharp increase in prevalence from 17 percent of the population in 2005 to almost 27 percent in 2050 and it is predicted that 8 million Australians will be suffering from some degree of hearing loss by 2050. It is also important to note that the report also showed that nearly half of the people with hearing loss are of working age (15-64 years), and there was an estimated 158,876 people not employed in 2005 due to hearing loss. Access to assistive hearing technology for this age demographic will become increasingly important if the Government wishes to decrease the financial burden of this lost productivity.

Current Australian Hearing Aid Market:

Approximately 350,000 hearing aid devices are provided annually within the Australian market. 75% or 260,000 devices are fitted within the Office of Hearing Services (OHS) scheme by Australian Hearing and private Audiology clinics under contract to OHS. An additional 90,000 devices are provided through sales to OHS clients topping up and private clients.

Office of Hearing Services Scheme:

Considered to be a world class and has contributed in gaining one of the highest levels of hearing aid fitting to diagnosed hearing impaired patients from within the developed countries. Within the Deed of Standing Offer, manufacturers and OHS have negotiated to provide the latest in hearing aid technology to the hearing impaired and at a price to ensure the long term sustainability of both industry and scheme. It should also be noted that freedom of choice in service provider and hearing technology combined with the ability to co-contribute to the cost of a more highly specified device have been additional cornerstones in assisting this long term sustainability. This co-contribution model was introduced as a solution to allow the government access to the latest hearing technology at a price that was extremely competitive internationally and would allow the program to be financed effectively. In practice these co-contribution sales subsidise the OHS scheme and have been vital in allowing both Manufacturers and Retailer Providers with the ability to maintain services to OHS clients over time. HAMADAA is committed to working with the Office as clearly in this case, public and private cooperation has ensured a dynamic and service oriented provision of hearing health care to the Australian community.

The Future: Deed Negotiation

Due to the increasing pace of technology innovation and competitiveness within the hearing industry HAMADAA members are now replacing complete product lines within an 18 month time-frame. We believe this technology pace will ensure that OHS will constantly be provided with the latest hearing device technology as manufacturers seek to retain market share and as self imposed product phase out times shorten. We therefore will be proposing that the current re-negotiation of specifications for devices provided under the Deed be discontinued in favour of self regulation by the manufacturers with OHS maintaining a watchdog role to ensure minimum standards are maintained.

About HAMADAA

Members:

9 of the 10 major global hearing aid manufacturer Group Companies are members of HAMADAA. They include Phonak, Unitron, Oticon, GN Resound, Starkey, Sonic Innovations, WIDEX, Bernafon and Interton. The current supplier to Australian Hearing, Siemens Hearing Instruments has declined the offer at this time of membership to the group.

Objects of the Association:

The objects for which the Association is established are:

- To promote the advancement of research into and development of hearing aid technology.
- To increase public awareness of available hearing aid technology for the hearing impaired.
- To promote the importance and high standing of the hearing aid manufacturing and distribution industry to Government and the Public.

Activities of the Association:

The activities of the Association are:

- The compilation and distribution of statistical, technical and other information pertaining to the hearing aid manufacturing and distribution industry.
- The promotion of the use of hearing aid instruments and related technology to the public, government agencies and private groups seeking to assist the hearing impaired.
- The publication from time to time of appropriate technical and other information for the enhancement of knowledge and public awareness of the work of the domestic and international hearing aid industries.