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Better Hearing Australia Brisbane Inc

October 13, 2009

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

Dear Sir or Madam:

RE: SENATE INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA

We wish to highlight the need for more access to hearing services and programs in Australia.

Of particular concern are –

- Extent of hearing impairment in Australia. Currently one in six Australians has some form of hearing impairment and this is projected to increase to one in four by 2050. Refer <http://www.accesseconomics.com.au/publicationsreports/showreport.php?id=71&searchfor=20067searchby=year>
- Causes of hearing impairment are many and varied – noise injury, accident, illness, injury, pre-natal, post-natal, pre-lingual, post-lingual.
- The impact on individuals. Hearing loss is not immediately visible as in the case of a person in a wheelchair or a signing Deaf person. Nevertheless, the hearing impaired person has a physical disability which impacts on their ability to communicate in everyday situations.
- The impact on the Community. The impact of Hearing loss is widespread and affects family relationships, education, employment opportunities etc.

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- **Affordability of hearing aids.** While the Australian Government Hearing Scheme caters for children to 21 and pensioners, there are 40 odd years where many hearing impaired people do not qualify for assistance. Many are caught in a 'catch 22' situation, where they cannot afford hearing aids because they are not employed and they find it difficult to obtain employment because they do not have hearing aids. Refer to the abovementioned website, for more information on the massive cost to the community.
- **Access to Support services.** There is a need for counseling and mental health services for those suffering from hearing loss. This is a physical disability which has very real social implications and often contributes to feelings of isolation, followed by depression.
- **Assessment services.** Many hearing services are not covered by Medicare and, for those that do, the rebate is woefully inadequate particularly when one considers the costs of hearing aids.
- **Education and awareness programs.** Of particular concern is the damage unwittingly being done to their hearing by the 'iPod generation'. A national campaign to raise awareness of noise injury and hearing health is urgently needed.

In summary, we would urge you to give serious consideration to the abovementioned issues – issues that **currently affect one in six Australians..**

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs Sue Brown
Snr Administrator