

30 September 2009

## **Re: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia**

*To the Community Affairs References Committee:*

I would like to make a submission to the Hearing Health Inquiry.

I am a deaf young professional living and working in Australia.

The current Australian hearing health system is antiquated and not working well at all - it makes being deaf in Australia very difficult and expensive.

For example:

- my hearing loss was first discovered at age 11, and I was given hearing aids without any sort of rehabilitation or support. it took me ages to get used to them and to wear them. It was a traumatising experience as a child.
- I received free hearing aids and batteries through Australian Hearing which was a godsend.
- then suddenly at the age of 21, just when I was unemployed and studying full time at university, I was told I could no longer get any services through Australian Hearing
- I had to find a private audiologist, three of whom were not very good, and I bought hearing aids from each of them, when one would have been enough. Each hearing aid is about \$3,500 to \$4,000. One of them also convinced me to buy an FM system for \$1,500 which I have never used, because it was not correct for my hearing loss.
- One of my hearing aids broke and I had to buy a new one, as it was not covered under private health insurance
- I have been to see the Minister for Ageing about these issues, but as hearing health is under Ageing, it's not the main part of the portfolio. Hearing health gets lost in Ageing. It needs to be put over into Health.
- Hearing health is not an ageing issue, I am only 29 years old, it is a health issue. Many of my deaf friends are under 30 years old.
- When I was unemployed and a student, I had to buy new hearing aids for \$8,000, and had to get a personal loan to pay for it, and then I had to go on Centrelink payments as well, because I had trouble paying my rent.
- I have just received my first cochlear implant. I had to take out private health insurance in order to get this over 3 years at \$90 per month. None of my hearing friends pay anywhere near this amount for private health insurance.
- I had to take out special cochlear implant insurance at \$300 per year to cover my cochlear implant, when someone who has an ipod can get that covered with their home and contents insurance. I have tried to get my cochlear implant covered under home and contents, and all the big insurers refuse to cover them.
- I've had to buy a special TTY phone and special Telstra HipTop mobile phone in order to communicate with people, as these are the only two I can use being a

deaf person.

- Audiologists charge huge amounts for ear moulds when you don't need them (up to \$250), and for repairs (up to \$500), and for batteries (they cost me \$300 a year).

It is just not fair.

There is an essential inequity as to how hearing health is perceived as compared to other health issues, even though hearing loss is one of the most prevalent health issues in Australia.

According to the Access Economics Report, one in six Australians has some form of hearing impairment, and this is projected to increase to one in four by 2050 (from [Access Economics \(2006\) Listen Hear – The Economic Impact and Cost of hearing loss in Australia](#)).

I would like to see the following changes made to the way hearing health is dealt with in Australia:

1. Hearing health should be moved out from under the Federal government Ageing portfolio, and placed under the Federal Government Health portfolio, alongside eye health. It currently does not receive the attention it deserves under the Ageing portfolio.
2. Subsidised government services should be offered via 'Australian Hearing' to people between the ages of 21 and 65 if they are on a low income, unemployed, full time students, or part time students. In Australia there is currently no help for these people in affording hearing aids, implants and other hearing health services.
3. Insurance companies should cover hearing aids and cochlear implants if they are lost or broken. Currently most insurers will cover silly things like iPods, but not a cochlear implant processor, which is \$8,000 to replace, and vital for many to be able to hear.
4. Former child clients of Australian Hearing who are not unemployed, students, or on low incomes should not be suddenly cut off from services of Australian Hearing. They should be able to pay for services to stay on at Australian Hearing with their audiologist.
5. All hearing aids, cochlear implants and other hearing health aides should be able to be claimed as a tax deduction once someone starts work. Currently you can't claim expensive hearing aids as a tax deduction.

Thanks for accepting my submission.

Kind regards,  
Kate Locke

**Kate Locke**