

To the Community Affairs References Committee

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

I am a 47 year old hearing impaired healthcare professional living and working in Australia.

I have had a profound hearing loss since my early 20's, and have relied upon hearing aids to remain active in the workforce. Last year I was implanted with a cochlear implant in my right ear, to enable me to continue in the workforce as hearing aids no longer were able to allow me to hear well enough to successfully continue my employment.

I have remained a working professional despite my hearing impairment, mainly due to the technology available to assist me to hear. But, despite always having private health insurance, the cost of purchasing and maintaining these devices is astonishing. For example, my last pair of hearing aids cost almost \$5000 each, with only a maximum rebate of \$1000 for the pair from my private health fund. This left me paying almost \$9000. I was able to access a low-cost loan to purchase these aids, but still had to repay this amount. Without these hearing aids I would not be able to work in my profession, and I am very surprised there is no government subsidy or tax rebate to allow hearing impaired people access to this technology when they are in full-time paid employment. I understand if I was a low income earner or part of a government assistance program, then I would be eligible for free hearing services, including appropriate hearing aids. In some ways it appears to me that I would actually (financially in terms of hearing technology) be better off to declare myself 'impaired' and leave the workforce on a government assistance scheme.

The cost and insertion of the cochlear implant I had was fully covered by my private health fund, and I was able to access a public program for mapping services. But if I had needed to use a private provider for mapping services that could have cost me up to \$5000 over six months, and most of these services are not covered by private health funds or Medicare rebates. I believe there is a need for review of these arrangements to make access to private services more equitable, as there can be major delays in being able to access public services in some instances.

Another major cost of hearing technology is batteries. There is no government subsidy for working people for batteries for hearing aids or cochlear implants. My cochlear implant uses batteries at a prodigious rate (the rate depends on the needs of the implantee, and varies from person to person). I currently use 3 x 675 button cell batteries every 3 days. These batteries are purchased at a cost of \$0.66 each which equates to a monthly cost of around \$20 per month every month that is not in any way subsidised by the government or rebatable through a tax offset. This cost is essential in maintaining my employment, and yet batteries are provided free for those on government programs. That does not seem fair to me, and again appears to me I would be better provided for if I chose to label myself 'impaired' and leave the workforce. Thank you for the opportunity of expressing my concerns about my hearing impairment, and the cost associated with it to remain in the workforce. I look forward to the timely release of the report from this enquiry.

Sincerely

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