

4th October, 2009

To the Community Affairs References Committee:

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

I am a profoundly deaf 27 year old born and living in Sydney, Australia.

Being deaf in Australia is not easy as the current Australian hearing health system is not working well at all and the system is inefficient.

I was born with my deafness, was diagnosed at age one, and fitted with a set of hearing aids a few months after.

As a child, before I was able to make decisions for myself, my mother sought the services and guidance from Australian Hearing. My mother thought they were fantastic and helpful. When I became old enough to acknowledge and appreciate the services of Australian Hearing, I felt my audiologist was my mentor, and is still a good friend today, but moved to Canberra. So far, I have not found a private audiologist whom I could have confidence in that has full understanding of my hearing loss.

At age 21, I was no longer able to get any services through Australian Hearing. This was a huge inconvenience, as it meant that I was faced with regular expenses no other person my age was faced with.

This includes batteries which cost at least \$300 a year, annual hearing tests at \$90, and new ear moulds which adds up to \$200 a year. I have been lucky to have reliable hearing aids which needed no repairs in recent years, but I have many, many deaf and hearing impaired friends who have been paying up to \$500 for repairs!

New hearing aids are not covered under private health insurance, which is discouraging me from getting a spare set of hearing aids if my current ones fail. So if something happens to my hearing aids today, I will be without hearing until I am forced to buy a new set of aids which will cost \$3,500 to \$4000 each.

Since my teenage years, the quality of services of Australian Hearing has progressively deteriorated. Today the services can be described as very poor, as I can observe through my 17 year sister, who also has profound deafness.

My sister has received the cochlear implant 2 years ago, and has found it to be hugely beneficial over hearing aids. Even though I know it will be equally beneficial for me also, I am discouraged from getting it, because it will mean I will need special cochlear implant insurance at \$300 per year. I already have private health insurance and I feel that the premium I already pay is more than enough. The general yearly expenses of batteries, maintenance, etc. are higher for cochlear implants than for my hearing aids.

A large part of my life is involved with the deaf and hearing impaired community and I have met and made friends with many young people in Sydney who are up to the age of 32. The proportion of those born deaf to those who acquired deafness through their youth is about half-half.

It is obvious to me that Hearing Health is not a Ageing issue, it is a Health issue. Hearing Loss is one of the most prevalent health issues in Australia, and neglected, so it needs to be addressed.

There is an 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.

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.

Sincerely,

Lily Kordic