

I would like to make the following submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for the INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA.

My Name is Leonard George Ulrich

I am 72 Years of age and was born in West Ham England; I came to Australia in 1966 with my wife and two children.

Hearing loss runs in my mother's family and back in the 1950s seeing my Uncles in that day and how they struggled to hear, I wondered then how my life might be. My own hearing loss commenced when I was 15 years of age and the British Government ignored that loss until I failed my National Service medical when I was 18 years of age. I was then issued with a hearing aid and I was continuously supplied with aids and hearing loss advice through the NHS until I left Great Britain in 1966 at the age of 28.

I was firstly employed at Blayney in NSW as a Boning Room foreman, I then moved to Email Ltd at Orange and after three years became a full time Trade Union Official for The Australasian Society of Engineers based at an office at Orange NSW. You all would well know that my work involved many conferences with individual and groups of members, individual and groups of employers and many Arbitration Court Hearings in Sydney and in Country Districts.

With a young family I was faced with the prospect of keeping my hearing loss under control. I was in MBF and even then it was hard to be in any position to purchase up to date hearing aids or even attend an Ear Nose and throat Specialist.

With six children the position became much harder and aids were costing me back in the 70s in excess of \$1000 and because of the then technology and my profound hearing loss Body Aides were my only choice. I should have had two but could only afford one. In 1985, having made a number of mistakes during a hearing at Sydney it was apparent that I should resign; I was 49 years of age. The medics were astounded that I had worked for so long. It was devastating to me and my wife as we knew that only the Disability Support Pension was in view for the future.

In the years prior I had purchased Hearing Aids from OPSM and Angus and Coote. In the country NSW after service following the purchase was non existent.

I was awarded the Disability Support Pension in 1985 and immediately became a client of NAL or National Acoustics Laboratories or as it is now Australian Hearing. I was stunned to find that two behind the ear (BTE) for my profound hearing loss were fitted within weeks. Something the outside, as then, private industry said was not available.

I have had access through Australian Hearing, if I can put it that way ever since. I have experienced what the young people experience now, and that is, that here in this bountiful land of Australia once they reach the age of 21 the government says to them you no longer need our assistance, so not only does the current system take away their rights to be supplied with hearing aids it also removes the audiologist services of advice and care which when you have a disability is so important.

### **DOES THE GOVERNMENT REALLY THINK THAT CHILDREN'S HEARING LOSS MIRACULOUSLY GOES AWAY AT AN AGE?**

Honestly I don't think they think like that, but really I just don't know what their reasoning is. Since I went through my experiences then I have worked tirelessly for those persons with Hearing loss both through the SHHH Organization and in volunteer research for Cochlear Ltd. Yes, I do now have a Cochlear Implant and am still trying to do my bit. In my case all was not lost, but I do understand how depression can set in and the will not to do anything for oneself because you cannot hear.

Surely we need to keep all the hearing impaired at work and if they are children we need to do all we can to make sure that the lack of being able to purchase a hearing aid is NOT the factor that takes them out of the workforce and onto unemployment. Surely the unemployment path is more costly a path to any government

Please, assist the Hearing Impaired right through their life from Birth to Death. Let us, as Australians be proud to see those with a disability ALWAYS have that chance to be part of the workforce.

Leonard G. Ulrich 5<sup>th</sup> October 2009