

## **LET US HEAR**

**Campaign Committee of Deafness Council NSW Inc  
for Equity and Continued Access to Services of Australian Hearing for Deaf Adults**

### **PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO A LIFETIME DISABILITY CARE AND SUPPORT SCHEME** **5 August 2010**

Let Us Hear appreciates the opportunity to put our case to the Productivity Commission. We are aware that this Productivity Commission is inquiring into all disabilities and we support the need for a united goal and to move forward together. However we can only speak for the congenitally oral deaf people who we represent. Deafness is a hidden handicap and is often trivialised as a disability by the hearing world and is sometimes treated as a stigma.

Let Us Hear is an Australia wide organization representing deaf people between 21 and 65 years who are former child clients of Australian Hearing (AH). All the services of AH stop when they turn 21. Those receiving a Disability Services Pension (DSP), who wear hearing aids, continue to be serviced by AH but those having a Cochlear Implant over 21 who are also on the DSP cannot receive free upgrades of processors. Also deaf people who are unemployed have no access to AH.

Let Us Hear was started in 1997 when a small group of parents realized the need of many hearing impaired and deaf adults who were unable to access affordable hearing aids and services in the private sector. Since then we have advocated for equity and continued access to services of AH.

From diagnosis, usually soon after birth, hearing aids or cochlear implants are fitted, and these babies immediately commence intensive training to learn language, lip reading and auditory skills. When they start school they are frequently integrated into mainstream classes with the support of a Visiting Teacher of the Deaf. During this time these children are given every educational advantage and are supported by the expert audiologists at AH until they are 21. When these services cut off, many are still completing tertiary courses or establishing themselves in the workplace.

It is obvious that these people, when they lose access to affordable hearing devices and services, are in a powerless situation. We are advocating for a whole-of-life support for these truly disabled deaf people.

**Deaf and hearing impaired people between the age of 21 and 65 need to continue to be supplied with hearing devices and accompanying services to enable them to be contributing members of our society. The ratification by the Australian Government, of the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that all people with disabilities must enjoy all human rights and outlaws discrimination in all areas of life. The Government is obliged to implement these rights.**

- Let Us Hear supports the setting up of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in order to have a lifetime of care and support for disabled people. The individual grant would be the most appropriate way to support many disabled people. However this might not be the best way for the former child clients of AH.
- As our members are former child clients of AH Let Us Hear advocates that a new disability scheme would provide continued services to AH for people over the age of 21. This would require a change of law but as AH is an already established national government service it would be quite simple for this group to plug into. This would give them “whole-of-life” free hearing devices and services.
- All former child clients who, under the current arrangements, have had no hearing services to support their disability since they were 21 should be accepted back as AH clients.
- We support using entities that are already established such as Centrelink or Medicare being responsible for the administration of the NDIS.
- It is a human right that new technology be made available to all deaf people.
- Money should be spent by the Government to educate the public about deafness and the needs of deaf and hearing impaired people.

The free supply of hearing devices and services that we have advocated would show a positive change in the high unemployment numbers and a reduction in mental health problems resulting in higher productivity. The deaf people, through much improved communication, would be empowered to enjoy a better quality of life.

#### **Quotes:**

- 1) Report of the Senate Inquiry into the Hearing Health in Australia, May 2010.  
“The single most common issue raised with the Committee during this Inquiry was the eligibility for Australian Hearing Services Program services and support, in particular the eligibility cut off age of twenty one years.”
- 2) Letter from Graeme Innes A.M. Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Commissioner October 2008 to Minister Justine Elliot, Minister for Ageing and Hearing Services, and to the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Bill Shorten.  
“I am writing to endorse the submission made by “Let Us Hear”, Committee of the Deafness Council of NSW in support of expansion of availability of services and equipment from Australian Hearing..... beyond 21 years of age, eligibility services and equipment ceases other than for a number of classes of social security beneficiaries.”
- 3) Opening Address, National Deafness Sector Summit May 2010 by the Hon Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities  
“It is certainly a case that the issue is about whether or not you get hearing aids supplied for people between 21 and 65, the issue of whether or not they are accessible.”

“Talk about bridging the gap between 21 year olds and 65 year olds and hearing aids”

“I am talking about people choosing to live and work in the community and being supported so they are functioning equally in the community.”

- 4) Letter from Dr Pat Mutton, Dr Elizabeth Peadon and Dr Ken Peacock Paediatricians, Deafness Centre, the Children’s Hospital, Westmead to Minister Justine Elliot, Minister for Ageing and Hearing Services, November 2008. “We are writing to you to support “Let Us Hear” who represents young Australians over the age of 21, who require, but cannot afford hearing aids and appropriate services, testing and audiological advice.”

Margaret Colebrook OAM

Chairperson, Let Us Hear

Website:[deafnesscouncilofnsw.org.au/what/letushear.html](http://deafnesscouncilofnsw.org.au/what/letushear.html)