



HCIA Member Organisations

AudioClinic

AudioClinic is one of Australia's leading providers of quality hearing healthcare with an extensive clinic network in over 230 locations nationally and is part of the William Demant Group, which is one of the leading hearing healthcare organisations globally. Over the past 45 years our professional and caring team of experts have restored the joys of hearing to over 100,000 Australians. AudioClinic is committed to improving people's lives and believes in continuous care and support, offering free hearing tests through all its clinics, as a service to local communities across Australia.

Bay Audio

Bay Audio is one of Australia's leading providers of hearing devices with 34 stores located in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and more than 20 visiting sites. Bay's success has been built on contemporary products across a diverse range of brands. As an active member of their local communities, Bay Audio has a strong sense of corporate and social responsibility to make a difference at every level to people's lives.

Connect Hearing

Connect Hearing is dedicated to helping Australians manage their hearing impairment through comprehensive hearing assessments and aftercare, innovative digital hearing instruments and other helpful listening devices, delivered via a national network of over 130 permanent and day clinics. In addition, Connect Hearing is the national Australian provider of the revolutionary, new 'set and forget' Lyric™ hearing aid – the world's first and only fully invisible, soft, extended wear hearing aid; allowing wearers to sleep, shower and exercise with their aids, and without the hassle of changing batteries.

HearingLife Australia

HearingLife was founded in Adelaide more than 70 years ago. It now has a network of clinics across Australia and has expanded into the USA. In addition to its professional services and range of top quality hearing solutions, HearingLife maintains excellent relationships with Australian Universities, through the provision of teaching services in the field of Audiology.

National Hearing Care

National Hearing Care (NHC) is Australia's leading independent provider of hearing healthcare services with more than 130 permanently staffed clinics throughout metropolitan and regional Australia. NHC invests heavily in hearing care across Australia in a number of ways: through expanding its reach and client access, such that today over 35% of NHC's locations are based in regional areas; through the training and development of audiology students, operating the largest clinical placement program in the country. NHC is part of the Amplifon Group who is represented in 19 countries and is the largest provider of hearing healthcare in the world.

The Neurosensory Unit

Neurosensory delivers complete hearing healthcare, with over 30 years experience in all audiology services. Neurosensory is aligned with 28 Ear Nose Throat (ENT) surgeons, who liaise closely with Neurosensory clinicians to ensure every client receives the most comprehensive care. At Neurosensory all testing procedures are thorough, to ensure accuracy in diagnosis as part of our commitment to supporting the medical community and delivering the best clinical outcomes for our clients. Neurosensory also offers an extensive range of hearing solutions, including hearing aids, Cochlear and Baha implants, tinnitus treatments and hearing protection.

bloom Hearing Specialists

bloom combines years of audiology understanding with a natural curiosity in finding the right solutions to individual hearing loss. They are part of a global company, Widex, with more than 260 permanent and visiting sites across Australia. Their parent company is a family-owned hearing aid manufacturer which has an uncompromising approach to innovation which has led to such advances as the world's first fully digital in-the-ear hearing aid, as well as their own revolutionary wireless technology. Widex is committed to finding not just the right solutions but the most natural solutions to hearing loss. That is why they emphasise the importance of design, technology and the environment. Widex has a new environmentally-friendly headquarters, complete with solar cells and an on-site windmill, making them the first CO2 neutral hearing aid manufacturer.

Hearing Loss in Australia is a major health issue affecting productivity and leading to social isolation

The ability to communicate, to speak and listen to others is fundamental to participation in work, education, social activities and the community at large.

A loss of hearing fundamentally changes the ability of a person to communicate and thus limits the way they are able to interact with society. This can lead to isolation and have profound social and economic consequences for both the individual and society. Recent studies suggest that people who experience significant untreated hearing loss as they age, may also be at higher risk of developing dementia.

One in six Australians suffer from some degree of hearing loss. By 2050, this will increase to one in four.

Although the forecast increased prevalence of hearing loss is largely driven by our ageing population – over one third of all people with hearing loss acquire their hearing impairment through preventable means. This issue needs to be addressed as does the issue of access to the Hearing Services Program.

HCIA well understands the budgetary challenges faced by Government and knows that not everything can be done at once – however Government could elect to target those Australians who are most financially disadvantaged or those who are closest to retirement age. As a country, if we are serious about lifting productivity and are serious about keeping older workers in the workforce, then this is an issue crying out for attention.

A report published on Hearing Loss in Australia* found of the more than 3 ½ million Australians with hearing loss (that is about 2 ½ thousand for each Federal electorate) nearly half were of working age, that is 16 to 64 years;

If you are between 45 and 65 years of age and have hearing loss your chances of being employed are 20% lower if you are a man and 16% lower if you are a woman; and

The DIRECT financial cost of hearing loss was calculated to be \$11.5b, the largest component of this being productivity loss.

We all know that hearing loss interferes with a person's ability to lead a healthy and productive life and any health issue that places limitations on productivity and healthy ageing must be of concern to government and the community at large. It is certainly of concern to HCIA and its members.

* Listen HEAR! 2006, a report by Access Economics and CRC HEAR

Hearing Loss costs Australia \$11.5b annually in lost productivity and other impacts*

Hearing Care Industry Association
Suite 2 | Level 2
24 Bay Street
Double Bay | NSW 2028
T | +612 9327 8836
F | +612 9327 8995
Email@hcia.com.au
www.hcia.com.au



The Federal Government Program

The Australian Hearing Services Program was established in 1947 in response to the high rate of hearing loss in returning WW2 Veterans. In 1996 the Hearing Services Program was substantially expanded. The provision of hearing services was opened up to competition. Prior to this, Australian Hearing had been a monopoly provider of subsidised services and regulated itself. Given that Australian Hearing was to be operating in a competitive environment, it was not appropriate that it also regulate the industry. Thus the Office of Hearing Services (OHS) was established and under the Hearing Services Program eligible Australians are provided with assessment and hearing aid provision and maintenance. Eligible Australians are now defined as young people under the age of 26 or adults on an aged, disability or veteran's pension.

In the fifteen years since the legislation originally commenced, the industry has changed to the point that it is unrecognisable today from what existed 15 years ago. When the OHS commenced in 1997, it was accrediting 120 individual providers - today over 80% of hearing devices are fitted by HCIA members and by Australian Hearing.

HCIA has made a considerable investment in developing its own accreditation standards and code of conduct for its clinics around the country. In addition, professional bodies have sound qualifications and recognition procedures and continuous development processes in place. Australians receive good quality hearing health care and good quality devices are supplied to those who need them.

According to a recent report by Dillon, Hickson and Lloyd, the non-use rate of devices have markedly decreased since 2006 (from 25% to 13%) and "need" is the major determinant of benefit, although hearing loss (moderate or greater) also plays a significant part and top up hearing aids lead to a small, but significant increase in benefit.

*Outcomes of the Government Hearing Program – July 2012

Gaps in the Federal Government Program

There is no doubt that the Commonwealth Hearing Services Program is an outstanding program that provides a world class service to eligible clients; young people under the age of 26 or adults on an age, disability or veteran's pension.

However, this leaves many people who have a hearing impairment and are of working age, without any funding or access to services and technologies that will enable them to communicate and get into or stay in the workforce.

Hearing impaired adults on low incomes who are not eligible for the Commonwealth's Hearing Services Program are usually unable to afford the often costly hearing health services or hearing aids. This is due to a combination of factors such as the exclusion of audiological services from rebates under Medicare (unlike a similar sensory impairment in vision impairment); limited rebates from Private Health Insurers, the cost of the aid, and the cost of the fitting and ongoing rehabilitation.

Hearing impaired adults unable to afford hearing health services can suffer severely disadvantaged lives. Their ability to participate in training or employment can be limited, and their family and social life can be severely disrupted. This places them at high risk of developing health and interpersonal problems arising from communication difficulties and social isolation. Hearing Loss is more prevalent than cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma, cancer and mental health - and they are all national health priorities. Let us not ignore the plight of hearing impaired Australians.

Hearing health should become a national health priority.

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Policy Options in Hearing Healthcare

- Extend the eligibility for the Australian Government Hearing Services Program to all Australians, subject to eligibility and a means test (this was accepted in principle by the Government when it responded to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Report on Hearing Health).
- If this is not possible, HCIA would respectfully suggest lowering the age of entry to the program to 45 years. Employment rates for people with hearing impairment between the ages of 45 and 64 are up to 20% lower than for people without hearing loss. Lost earnings are the biggest single cost of hearing impairment to Australians, around \$6.7b per year.
- The average age of people accessing hearing services under the OHS program is 79 years old, yet half the people in Australia with hearing loss are under the age of 65.
- HCIA believes that if Australia wants to move to world's best practice, it should consider uncoupling access to hearing services and the pension age, so that people in the 45 to 64 age group, could access hearing services at a time when they are highly motivated to do so and thus remain productive for as long as they can.

Hearing Impairment has a substantial and unrecognised effect on workforce productivity

About the Hearing Care Industry Association (HCIA)

HCIA represents hearing healthcare providers in Australia. Its aim is to provide a unified voice to all stakeholders, including Government, the bureaucracy, the media, other professional bodies and the public. HCIA works closely with the professional bodies and with key consumer groups in order to achieve the best outcomes for hearing impaired Australians.

Between them, HCIA member companies care for many thousands of Australians from more than 440 locations across the country. They lead teams of clinicians and client service officers to provide Australians with excellence in hearing care. The clinicians are industry trained and Government accredited specialists in hearing care and they work with the latest hearing technology.

They employ more than 500 professionals between them. Many of them form part of international groups which deliver hearing services to clients in many countries outside Australia.

HCIA members are accredited and contracted by the Office of Hearing Services to deliver hearing services through its voucher program and to provide hearing health to private clients.

Chart at right: Listen HEAR! 2006, a report by Access Economics and CRC HEAR

