

*My Way.*

# A Legacy of Advocacy in Australian Politics



**Bill Shorten, Minister for the NDIS and a former federal Labor leader has announced his impending departure from Australian politics after a 17-year career.**

In February, Minister Shorten will become the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra. There, he will influence the next generation through education.

The Prime Minister and others of the political class acknowledged Shorten's significant contributions, noting his tireless advocacy for a fairer Australia.

During his time in Parliament, Shorten's influence in disability rights and social equity was to be profound. He said there was still more work to be done, but he was proud of everything he had achieved.

"Labor is at its best when we are the party of ambition and compassion when we use the power of politics to stand up for those who were denied power by the circumstances of their birth," he said.

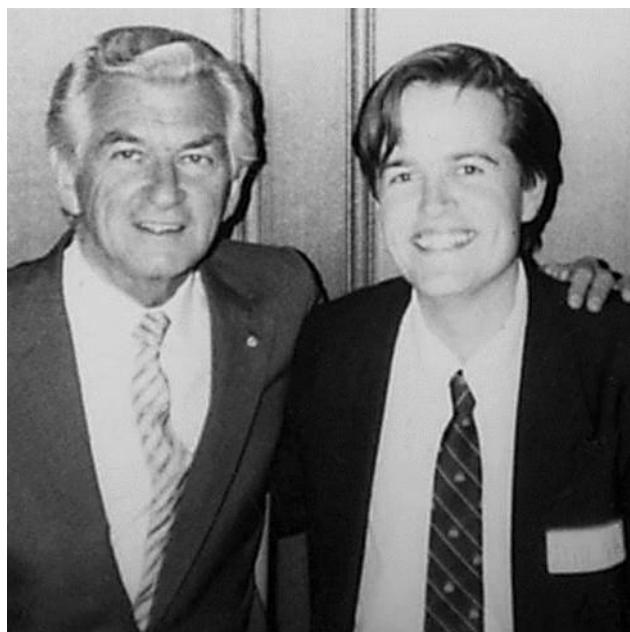
While he received criticism over how he guided the current sweeping changes to the NDIS, it is difficult to think of anyone else who could have handled the job better. Even though he had his detractors, he did what he thought was right and stayed the course.

Shorten wasn't afraid to call out some hard truths about the NDIS in the face of criticism and was unwavering in his commitment to the original vision of the Scheme – a vision he knew well as one of its architects more than a decade ago.

Deafness Forum Australia Chair David Brady said the transformation of the NDIS is complex and incredibly demanding, requiring a thoughtful and determined approach, qualities that Bill Shorten consistently demonstrates.

"He showed true grit in his handling of the NDIS portfolio.

"Bill Shorten will leave the parliament next year with big shoes to fill."



Shorten invoked Frank Sinatra when reflecting on his career: "Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention. I did what I had to do but much more than this, I did it my way"

May he enjoy health and wellbeing, renewed connections with his family, and satisfaction from a job he gave his all to.

## Fear, Hope and All Things In-Between.

**The National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1) Bill 2024 has been passed by the Federal Parliament. It will become law in October. This follows months of negotiations between the Federal Government, the Coalition, States, and Territories.**

The news was overshadowed to a degree by the announcement last week that NDIS Minister Bill Shorten would retire from federal politics. He will remain the Minister for NDIS until February, when he will take up a role as vice-chancellor of the University of Canberra.

On his plans for the NDIS in the coming months, Shorten said “I will use every minute left in this job to secure the future of the scheme and ensure it continues to empower with choice and control and give Australians with disability the chance to fulfil their potential”.

### **Bill’s Bill**

The passing of the Bill surprised many, given the criticism it attracted in Parliament and the media. It was met with a range of emotions, including fear, anxiety, dismay, and hope.

The Government can now focus on the fine detail of how the changes will operate – a process we expect to take several months at least.

It is an important time for the disability community as it collectively grapples with the broad swathe of changes, to understand what

they will mean in a practical sense for both current participants and for those who apply for entry to the Scheme in the future. But at the same time, there are still so many unknowns.

The NDIS was always intended for people with disability with the highest support needs. It was designed to sit within a broader support system so that Australians with disability who were not eligible for the NDIS could still get their needs met. However, the reality is that these supports do not exist or are hard to find.

So, the State and Territory governments agreed to introduce what are called Foundational Supports. These, in theory, will fill any gaps in supports and services that the NDIS will no longer fund. They should provide critical support for those who don’t meet the new criteria for eligibility for the NDIS. However, the Federal Government, States, and Territories haven’t yet settled on their interpretation of what will be funded and delivered. We expect that the types of Foundational Support offered will vary based on state borders.

### **Current Individual Plans**

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the organisation that runs the NDIS, has assured us that participant plans will remain unchanged until they are due for scheduled reassessments. However, we have learned that some plan managers have been discussing the implications of the changes with participants and potentially factoring these changes into their decision-making. If this is true, they will be out of step with the NDIA’s commitment to ‘business as usual’ until the changes become law in the coming weeks.

## **What changes can participants and applicants expect to happen straight away?**

National Disability Insurance Scheme law will come into effect in October. Some changes to the Scheme will apply immediately, while others will only become effective after more details are worked out.

Our priority will be to ensure that the interests of people who are deaf or have hearing loss are prioritised, and that no one who is deaf or has hearing loss is worse off because of the reforms.

Changes we know will apply as soon as the Bill becomes law include:

### **Different pathways**

If a person applies to the NDIS, the NDIA will tell them if they've met the disability requirements, the early intervention requirements, or both. This change will be effective as soon as the law commences.

It will no longer be assumed that a child will transfer to the NDIS once they reach the age cut-off. Unless the NDIA has determined that a child is eligible for the NDIS separately, a child who receives Early Intervention Support will not automatically transfer over to the mainstream NDIS once they are too old for this program.

We don't know how this will work for children who are already on the Early Intervention Scheme and will try to learn more about this change and what families will need to do if their child requires ongoing support. If these children need to be reassessed, we'd want the process to be as straightforward as possible, and for the NDIA to fund any necessary reports or assessments.

### **Clear guidance on eligibility**

There will be clearer information for potential participants and existing participants who have their eligibility reassessed on whether they meet the eligibility requirements for the NDIS and Early Intervention Pathway. This change is supposed to make it easier for people to know whether to apply to the Scheme in the first place

and is presumably aimed at preventing people from appealing decisions around eligibility. This is a change to watch, as it will come into effect as soon as the law commences, and could have negative consequences for existing participants, including children, who are currently receiving Early Intervention Supports.

### **Limits on making new access requests**

The processes of making access requests after a participant has been removed from the Scheme will change. The ex-participant will have to request a review of the decision and wait until the review is completed before reapplying for access to the Scheme. We want to know that the NDIA is committed to fast turnarounds for reviews to ensure that anyone who is removed from the Scheme can make an informed decision on their next steps as soon as possible.

### **Defined rules on supports**

The NDIA will be stricter on the types of supports that participants will be able to receive under their plans, with a greater emphasis on ensuring the supports directly relate to their disability-related needs.

There will likely be increased scrutiny of participants' supports both in the initial planning meeting and in subsequent plan reviews. Again, this is a rule that will apply as soon as the new law is in force and may have significant consequences for participants who have plan reviews soon.

### **The NDIA will have greater power to determine participants' plan types**

As soon as the law passes, the NDIA will have greater powers to determine participant's plan types. If the NDIA considers that an individual who either self-manages or uses a plan manager will not spend their NDIS funds properly, the NDIA will have the power to switch the participant's management type. This includes making the participant's plan agency-managed.

### **Plans will have a total funding amount**

New plans will have a total funding amount, and participants will be expected to keep within this

prescribed limit and spend their funding in an approved timeframe. Funding limits will not apply to existing plans, but participants will eventually be required to transfer over to new framework plans where funding limits will apply.

We don't know how much time the participant will have to spend their plan funds, and what happens if there is a reason why they can't – if they can't access a particular support because it's not available in their area, etc.

### **Some plan variations to be made without needing to create a new plan**

A glimmer of a silver lining is that once the new law commences, participants who have the new framework plans will be able to request variations to parts of their plans, including funding amounts and funding periods, without triggering the need to redo the plan altogether.

### **The NDIA will be able to seek information to determine a participant's ongoing eligibility for the scheme**

Readers may recall that this was one aspect of the Scheme that we thought could be highly problematic. Clear parameters are absent for when this power could be applied. While the Government did agree to set some limitations on the powers of the NDIS CEO, we still don't at this stage know what triggers would be to activate this power.

Under these new provisions, the CEO will be able to request that a participant provide additional information or be reassessed to determine their ongoing eligibility. Participants will generally have 90 days to do so. We understand that the NDIA will fund any additional reports or assessments requested and that participants will be able to obtain this information from their usual treating professionals.

### **A new claims and payments framework**

A new claims and payments framework will apply to provide clarity on how claims should be made. This change will impact all participants and providers as soon as the law commences. We understand that for the first twelve months, the

NDIA will honour all claims made for supports provided before the law came into effect.

### **The introduction of prescribed lists of NDIS supports and exclusions**

Details are still in limbo for one of the more controversial changes: new, prescriptive lists that set out what participants can and cannot access with their plans. We've had an opportunity to review these lists and expressed our concern to the NDIA and the Department of Social Services that the lists fail to capture the essential support needs of our community members.

We are also concerned that there is no easy mechanism for participants to request supports that fall outside the lists, or to access supports that are expressly prohibited. There has been significant pushback on the lists from many sections of the disability community and Disability Representative Organisations, with calls for the NDIA to adopt a fairer, principles-based approach.

The NDIA appears to be listening and taking our concerns seriously. It will soon release a report of its findings from the recent public consultation on the draft lists, and we'll be sure to provide a further update once we know more. Being in this 'holding space' is difficult and stressful, and we acknowledge how challenging this will be for many of you.

Deafness Forum Australia's mission throughout the reform process is to ensure that no one is worse off because of these changes.

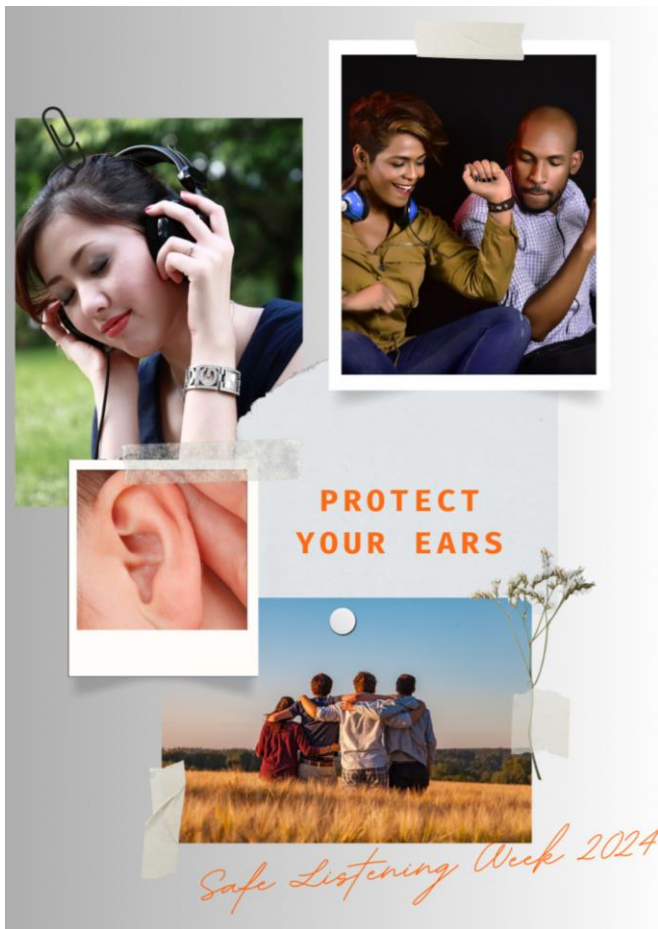
You can support us in this process by participating in consultations and other calls for comment. We will be putting out requests for your contributions in the coming months. Your expertise and insights as Scheme participants are essential in illustrating the human impacts of the NDIS reform process.

### **More National Advocacy and Policy work**

Visit Hayley's Journal,

<https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/hayleys-posts/>





# A Recap of Safe Listening Week

Safe Listening Week was held during the last week of August. It put the spotlight on hearing health. Our Facebook page became a hub of activity, brimming with interactive content designed to educate and inspire.

## Why Safe Listening Matters

Protecting our hearing is a crucial aspect of overall health that impacts people of all ages, both now and in the future. While 1 in 6 Australians already live with hearing loss, there's an opportunity to prevent further cases and support the hearing health of future generations. Projections indicate that by 2050, hearing loss could impact 1 in 4 Australians. This potential increase highlights the need for proactive measures to safeguard hearing health across all age groups.

## Key Activities

Throughout Safe Listening Week, we shared practical tips, pieces of wisdom, and engaging activities aimed at raising awareness about the importance of protecting our hearing.

We also launched new [Fact Sheets](#) for secondary students in farming communities created with the National Centre for Farmer Health to address the risk of noise-induced hearing loss. Youth in farming and agricultural communities where exposure to sounds such as, loud machinery and firearms, are at an increased risk of noise-induced hearing loss. These resources aim to educate and promote safe listening habits among youth.

## Community Engagement

About 4,000 people engaged in our activities, helping to spread the awareness about safe listening practices. We're grateful to all who engaged in some way as well as our members and partner organisations for their support in promoting the event.

## Ongoing Resources

Missed Safe Listening Week? Don't worry, you can still access all the resources on our [Facebook](#) page, including:

- Practical safe listening tips
- Informative videos
- Inspirational words of wisdom
- [Self-assessment tools](#)

We also invite you to check out the new Safe Listening Student [Fact Sheets](#) and put your knowledge to the test with our [quiz](#).

## Looking Ahead

We value your input. After exploring Safe Listening Week Facebook content, please share your feedback via our online [form](#) or send us an [email](#). Your suggestions will help improve next year's event.

Safe Listening Week supports the [National Preventative Health Strategy](#) and aligns with the WHO's '[Make Listening Safe](#)' initiative, reinforcing our commitment to promoting hearing health.

# Button Battery Dangers Persist.

**Thirty-five children worldwide have died from swallowing or inserting button batteries, including three in Australia. Despite mandatory safety standards introduced by the Australian government in 2022, there have been 110 product recalls.**

More than 60 children had precautionary X-rays after a button battery scare last week at a Queensland daycare centre. Remnants of a toy were found at the daycare's playground with button batteries nearby. All children who were assessed had clear X-ray results.



Evy has twice inserted a button battery into her ear, removing them from her hearing aid, leading to hospitalisation.

Button batteries are found in many household items, from hearing devices and car key fobs to remote controls. When swallowed or inserted, these batteries can cause severe injuries, such as burns in the oesophagus, windpipe, and even the major artery from the heart. Some children face lifelong complications, requiring multiple surgeries.



The Australian government introduced mandatory safety and information standards for button batteries 2022. Despite this, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has regularly recalled products and taken compliance actions.

Manufacturers need to redesign these batteries to prevent chemical reactions when ingested. KidSafe Queensland's Dr Ruth Barker criticised the battery companies for not doing enough to ensure safety, even after decades of knowing the risks.

While some measures have been introduced, such as child-proof packaging and bitter coatings, more is needed. Recent standards exempt hearing aids, which still pose a risk, prompting calls for further action to protect vulnerable people like Evy.

From Call for button battery redesign after new study reveals horrific injuries and fatalities by ABC Specialist Reporting Team's [Alison Branley](#) and national consumer affairs reporter [Michael Atkin](#).

# Science in Auslan.

Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation supported the first science-themed AuslanX event for the greater Sydney Deaf community during National Science Week.

“This was an important step for us to further our science outreach to under-represented groups in the community,” said Rod Dowler, National Education and Engagement Manager.

AuslanX is a public lecture series organised by Deaf people to showcase Deaf presenters and their area of expertise, all presented in the sign language of the Australian Deaf community, Auslan.

Two accomplished Auslan educators, David Parker and Christopher Makin, worked with ANSTO on content for a series of science lectures.



ANSTO operates much of Australia's landmark infrastructure including one of the world's most modern nuclear research reactors, OPAL; a comprehensive suite of neutron beam instruments at the Australian Centre for Neutron Scattering; the Australian Synchrotron; the National Deuterium Facility and the Centre for Accelerator Science.



## Hearing Services Program: Insights and Discussion

Join us for the launch of our new discussion paper on the Hearing Services Program.

We'll explore the current state of the program, reflect on past reviews, and discuss potential future directions.

This is a great chance to connect with key stakeholders, share your thoughts, and help enhance hearing health services.

Whether you work in the field or have a personal interest, your input will help shape the future of hearing services in Australia.

Be part of this important conversation and help drive progress in hearing health.

### Event Details:

Monday, 30 September

1pm – 2 pm (AEST) online

Captions & AUSLAN Interpreter will be provided.

Register [here](#).



# Welcome to Our Newest Member!

We are thrilled to announce that Deafblind West Australians (DBWA) has become a member of Deafness Forum Australia. This collaboration comes at a crucial time as we navigate significant changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the broader disability support landscape.

Founded in 1993, the organisation is peer-led, advocating for the rights and access of individuals living with deafblindness in Western Australia. It works in partnership with Deafblind Australia and Deafblind Victoria, playing a vital role in advocating for national recognition of the rights of people with deafblindness.

The organisation also launched DBWA Connect in 2021, an initiative focused on assistive technology, access, inclusion, and social connection. This drop-in centre continues to serve the community effectively.

Located at The Rise in Maylands, the drop-in centre serves as a vibrant hub for community interaction and support. Open every other Wednesday from 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM, the centre provides a range of activities designed to foster connections and enhance skills.



DBWA Connect focuses on assistive technology and crafts, games, guest speakers, and information sharing sessions that cater specifically to the needs of deafblind individuals. One of the standout features is the availability of Auslan interpreters who are present to assist with communication, ensuring

Basic Auslan lessons are offered, promoting language skills which are crucial for effective communication within the deafblind community.

The program also prioritises community building, allowing participants to form supportive networks with others facing similar challenges. DBWA organises social outings alongside the regular DBWA Connect sessions, broadening the scope of activities and experiences available to participants.

Deafness Forum looks forward to a fruitful partnership with [Deafblind West Australians](#), enhancing our collective efforts to support and advocate for the deafblind community across Australia.



## **Telethon Speech and Hearing has announced that its CEO, Mark Fitzpatrick, will leave the organisation at the end of the year.**

Under Fitzpatrick's seven-year leadership, Telethon Speech and Hearing, now known as TSH, expanded its programs and launched new partnerships, significantly enhancing its support for children with hearing, speech, or language needs in Western Australia.

"Mark's visionary leadership has been pivotal in our mission", TSH's Board Chair, Dr. Alec O'Connell said. "His efforts have solidified our foundation, ensuring that TSH continues to lead in providing essential support to families and communities."

Deafness Forum's chair David Brady acknowledged Mark as a key sector leader and a passionate advocate for children and families living with hearing challenges.

"We have always respected Mark's acumen and dedication and enjoyed collaborating with him. His influence extends throughout the hearing health sector."



## **David Brady, Chair of Deafness Forum Australia, met with Shelly Chadha, the World Health Organization's Technical Lead for Ear and Hearing Care.**

Shelly's visit to Australia – she is based in Geneva – provided a valuable opportunity for the Deafness Forum to reinforce its relationship with the WHO and World Hearing Forum.

During their meeting, David and Shelly discussed the ongoing global efforts to promote safe listening practices. David briefed Shelly on Australia's Safe Listening Week in August, a campaign that aligns with WHO's global Safe Listening initiative. The week is focused on raising awareness about the importance of protecting hearing in everyday life.

The meeting confirmed the strong partnership between Deafness Forum Australia and the WHO, emphasising their shared commitment to advancing ear and hearing care on both national and international levels. By supporting initiatives like Safe Listening Week in Australia, Deafness Forum Australia continues to play a crucial role in promoting hearing health and preventing hearing loss.



# Music and Emotion.

**Music is an important part of life for many people. It can evoke a wide range of emotions, including sadness, happiness, anger, tension, relief and excitement. People with hearing loss and people with cochlear implants have reduced abilities to discriminate some of the features of musical sounds that may be involved in evoking emotions.**

Music is vital in nearly all societies, enriching social interactions, providing pleasure, and expressing a broad spectrum of emotions such as sadness, happiness, anger, and excitement. The relationship between music and emotions is partly shaped by cultural influences and specific musical structures, like the tonal scale. For example, in Western music, the major mode is often associated with happiness. In contrast, the minor mode is linked to sadness, although young children may not fully recognise this distinction. Musical features such as a fast tempo and dynamic variations can evoke similar emotional responses across different cultures, conveying feelings of happiness, excitement, or calmness.

For people with average hearing, perceiving emotions in music is generally effortless. However, approximately 20% of adults

experience hearing loss. Hearing loss is commonly assessed using a pure-tone audiogram, which measures the lowest sound level detectable at different frequencies. While hearing aids can partially counter the loss of sensitivity, they do not fully restore the ability to discern the acoustic features crucial for perceiving emotions in music.



Around 1% of adults have severe hearing loss and gain limited benefit from hearing aids, often requiring a cochlear implant. Cochlear implants are highly effective in improving speech comprehension but are less successful in conveying certain acoustic elements critical for music perception, such as fundamental frequency, which is linked to perceived pitch. This limitation can hinder the emotional experience of music. However, many cochlear implant users still enjoy listening to and performing music.

### **Research Needs and Open Issues**

Most studies on how individuals with hearing difficulties perceive emotion in music have focused on manipulating mode and tempo, but these represent only a small fraction of the factors that influence emotion perception.

To understand how hearing loss impacts emotional responses to music, further research is needed to investigate additional features, such as variations in tempo, the manipulation of silent intervals between notes, and spectral changes over time.

A key issue is whether certain aspects of the signal processing used in hearing aids and cochlear implants might unintentionally impair emotion perception in music. While these devices improve audibility, their processing techniques - such as multi-channel compression - might distort the acoustic cues essential for conveying emotion. Understanding how these signal-processing methods affect emotion perception is crucial for optimising hearing devices to better serve individuals with hearing difficulties.

Moderate-to-severe hearing loss significantly impairs the ability to perceive emotion in music, with more pronounced effects in individuals with congenital hearing loss than those with acquired hearing loss. While hearing aids provide some relief, they are not entirely effective. People with hearing loss tend to perceive emotion more accurately in music with a single clear melodic line, likely because it enables a clearer perception of pitch.

Both children and adults with cochlear implants can recognise basic emotions in music, such as happiness or sadness, but they often rely on easily perceived aspects like tempo rather than fundamental frequency or harmony. Early exposure to music may improve the ability of cochlear implant users to perceive emotion, but further research is needed to clarify the role of early musical experience.



# International Week of Deaf People: Celebrating Unity and Advocacy



The global Deaf community celebrates the International Week of Deaf People during the last full week of September, culminating with the International Day of the Deaf on the final Sunday.

The week serves as a focal point for raising awareness about the Deaf community's rights, culture, and achievements.

It's a time when Deaf communities worldwide engage in activities that draw participation from a broad spectrum of supporters, including families, professionals, governmental bodies, and sign language interpreters, to foster understanding and celebrate the rich culture of the Deaf.



**INTERNATIONAL WEEK  
OF DEAF PEOPLE**



**INTERNATIONAL DAY  
OF SIGN LANGUAGES**

The International Week of Deaf People has evolved since its inception, emphasising the significance of sign languages in promoting the rights of Deaf people.

International Week of Deaf People highlights the importance of communication accessibility and the need for societal inclusivity, fostering a better understanding between Deaf and hearing communities.



**DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA**

**oneinsix**



Our next **National Deafness Sector Summit** will not be the typical image of people in suits, sitting through hours of presentations in a sprawling convention centre.

Instead, we are planning a dynamic gathering where a small number of motivated people will come together to engage in meaningful conversations about pressing topical issues. People will share insights, brainstorm solutions, and collectively agree on actions to implement back in their offices.

Join us as we redefine what a Summit can be - an opportunity for connection, collaboration, and impactful change.

### When & Where

Friday 15 November 2024. Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, Rushcutters Bay, Sydney.

### Theme

Prevention is the foundation of good health. Our goal is to reduce the risk of acquiring hearing loss and tinnitus.

### Evening Banquet

Stay on for a special dinner to celebrate the extraordinary, selfless achievements of our Chair, David Brady, who retires in November.

### RSVP

If you are keen to contribute to this National Deafness Sector Summit, and want to be sure of a seat at the table, [contact our CEO Steve](#).



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## New information resources for students with disability

The Australian Government Department of Education has published new information resources on the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* for students with disability and their parents and caregivers. These resources were co-designed with people with disability. They can be found on the Department's website at [www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005](http://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005).

- *Getting started* – for culturally and linguistically diverse parents and caregivers new to disability and the Australian education system.
- *How to advocate* – helps school and tertiary students with disabilities to build self-advocacy skills and provides guidance on how to raise and resolve concerns with education providers.
- *Steps to raise concerns and resolve a complaint with your school* – supports parents and caregivers of students with disabilities to raise, escalate and resolve concerns with their school.
- *A day at school* – a video about the rights of students with disabilities at school and reasonable adjustments.
- *Be a disability ally* – a video exploring the rights of students with disability to join in with every part of school life and how to be an ally to students with disability.

The resources are available in English, Arabic, Auslan, Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Farsi, Hindi, Khmer, Korean, Vietnamese.

A resource aimed at supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is in development for an expected release in Term 4.

# Improved services on the way for the National Relay Service

The National Relay Service is an essential phone service that supports Australians who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment.

The Government will create a Communications Accessibility Consultative Committee to bring together key organisations representing people with disability, such as the Deafness Forum Australia, Vision 2020 Australia and the Australian Disability Network.

This new Committee will inform the implementation of Recommendation 6.1 of the Disability Royal Commission, which advocates for developing a national plan to promote accessible information and communications. It will provide a forum where the experiences, perspectives and concerns of Australians with disability can assist the Government to identify broader communications accessibility issues.

## One in Six special feature on Auslan

The One in Six newsletter is on the lookout for articles for a special feature on Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

This feature might cover access to quality Auslan services, affordability impacted by the NDIS, a shortage of interpreters, and preservation of the language and culture within the Deaf community.

Got a story to tell? Contact us in the next week via [hello@deafnessforum.org.au](mailto:hello@deafnessforum.org.au)



## The Australian Government 'Community Service Obligations Program' helps over 60,000 babies, children and adults with hearing loss each year.

These services are delivered by Hearing Australia's audiologists at 190 hearing centres, thousands of home visits, and visits to many metropolitan, regional and remote community locations across Australia.

Hearing Australia has delivered the Program for more than 25 years. It recently signed a new five-year Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care to continue to deliver the program.

"Through the Program we provide expert hearing care to babies, children and young people, adults with complex needs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with permanent hearing loss", Hearing Australia's Sally-Anne Regan said.

"In 2023-24 we maintained an 88% satisfaction rate among our Program clients. But we're always looking to improve so we can reach more people and continue to deliver great outcomes for all our clients. And key to our success is the ongoing collaboration with our many partners to provide hearing care to people when and where they need it."

# Bridging Hearing Health Across Symposiums



**Deafness Forum Australia had the opportunity last month to attend two important symposiums.**

The [National Centre for Farmer Health's 'Farmer Health Symposium 2024'](#) and [CHARGE Syndrome Australasia's 'CHARGE Syndrome Symposium: Interdisciplinary care of a complex rare disease.'](#)

Though these events focused on different communities, they both highlighted key health and wellbeing issues.

**The Farmer Health Symposium** brought attention to the unique challenges faced by farmers. It stressed the need for culturally sensitive and tailored approaches. Farming communities often have a stoic culture, with a preference for directness and a reluctance to seek medical help. Key concerns include an aging population with age-related health issues and high-stress work environments that can impact

mental health. Additionally, farmers are at risk of noise-induced hearing loss due to the loud equipment they frequently use.



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**The CHARGE Syndrome Symposium** explored the complexities of CHARGE Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that is a leading cause of congenital deafblindness. The event highlighted the need for a multidisciplinary approach and underscored the crucial role of families as advocates and educators. Misdiagnosis and misunderstanding of the condition point to the need for increased awareness and early intervention.



Both symposiums reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary care and innovative solutions in hearing health. By connecting these insights, we aim to foster better collaboration and enhance support systems across diverse communities. Our ongoing focus will be on improving preventative measures and strengthening health services to effectively address hearing loss.





## How Hearing Aids Improve Conversations.

A new study looks at how hearing loss and the use of hearing aids affect conversations between people with hearing impairment and those with average hearing. By combining data from this study and a previous one, the researchers explored how the speech levels of both individuals relate to the degree of hearing loss in the person with impaired hearing.

When people with hearing loss don't use hearing aids, they tend to be slower and more inconsistent when taking turns in conversation. This can make conversations less interactive. Both people in the conversation often speak louder when someone with hearing loss isn't using a hearing aid.

Interestingly, the average hearing person tends to adjust their speech to match the level of the person with hearing loss, whose speech level often corresponds to the severity of their hearing loss.

Even in quiet, one-on-one conversations, communication was affected when the person with hearing loss wasn't using a hearing aid. When data from different studies was combined, it became clear that people with average hearing adjust their speech levels to match those of their hard-of-hearing conversation partners.

When asked about their experiences in quiet settings, many people with hearing loss report little difficulty in communication. Hearing aids are designed to amplify sound and improve speech understanding, particularly in quiet environments.

Previous studies have shown that hearing aids can improve the dynamics of conversations in quiet settings. Conversations are complex, requiring us to listen, understand, and respond quickly. This quick exchange of turns in conversation relies on predicting when the other person will finish speaking. Hearing loss disrupts this process, making it harder to keep up with the flow of conversation.

Without hearing aids, people with hearing loss tend to speak more slowly, take longer to respond, and speak louder. These changes are similar to those experienced by average-hearing people when trying to communicate in noisy environments. However, when people with hearing loss use hearing aids, they become quicker at taking turns and speak more like their average hearing partners. Both individuals tend to talk at lower volumes.

This research suggests hearing aids help people with hearing loss and make conversations smoother and more natural for both involved. Hearing aids seem to reduce communication challenges, allowing conversations to flow more easily, even in quiet settings.

From [Speak Up: How Hearing Loss and the Lack of Hearing Aids Affect Conversations in Quiet.](#)



# Offering Yourself Grace: Easier Said than Done.

**We've all heard it before. Aging is not for the faint of heart. Even if our physical components have issues that surface and then heal or get resolved, the mental aspects of knowing there is more time behind you than ahead of you can mess with your outlook, either positively or mentally.**

By [Dena Kouremetis](#) in [Psychology Today](#).

Lately, I had a two-month period that has tested my belief in the word “[grace](#),” even though it’s part of what I named this very blog for *Psychology Today*. I am not a patient person. Ask anyone. Results are my personal [amphetamine](#) so that I can look back and admire the final product as well as my resolve to get things done. Ego? Perhaps. Plus the desire to somehow make a difference in even a few people’s lives or minds while I am here.

Giving yourself grace is no walk in the park, however. It’s not really a “result” of anything. It’s a gentle, kind resignation of sorts as well as a gift you give yourself—and yes, I need to learn it in no uncertain terms.

So how do you get it?

While you can beat yourself up for mistakes and regrets (in my case, breaking a bone while playing pickleball *knowing* I wasn't up to it that day) or out of your control (like getting COVID just a few weeks later), it’s easy to see “giving yourself grace” as a cliché catchphrase. But it’s one many of us should start taking to heart. The caveat here? Those times you need grace most are the times you’re least likely to bestow it on yourself. Keeping these truisms in mind could help.

Perfection is not reality. No one is perfect. We all mess up, say the wrong things, and/or make mistakes. The goal is to be genuine—not perfect. Because the real you *is* perfect—more now than ever, because with age comes that golden “I don’t give a damn” attitude that judgments favour the insecurities of the young. Period.

If you’re still messing up, congratulations! You are truly living life. While it’s fine to admit you were wrong, stop saying you’re sorry for everything under the sun. Women, especially, are well-trained in this nasty habit. All those sayings about the number of times famous people messed up before they got it right mean they had to test life before it rewarded them. They lived.

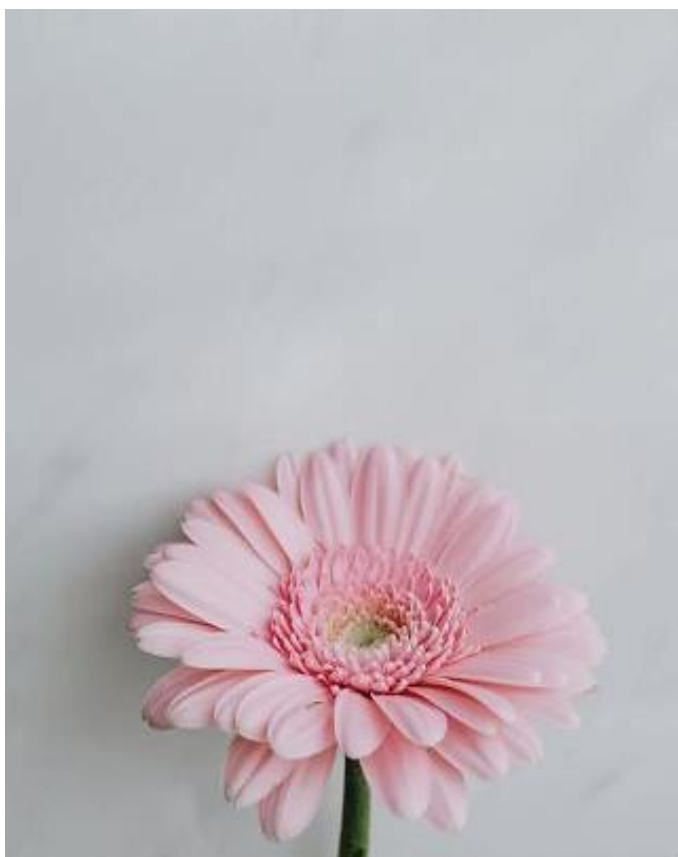
Do a heavy edit to your “to-do list.” No, you are not superhuman and no one will write a blog about how you didn’t get through that list in a day. It’s OK to attack the “have-to” items and then plan to do the other half another day, even if it’s the following week or month. You’ll have time.

Guess what? Retail therapy (“me time”) works. Sure, it sounds somewhat shallow to admit it, but doing whatever it takes to lift your spirits—even if it’s ordering an inexpensive poncho on Amazon or buying a trinket at Home Goods—can be huge picker-uppers. Grace. There’s that word again. Each day is a gift, especially in your life’s third trimester.

Just do one thing a day you're proud of. Perhaps that's facing a fear, perfecting a hobby, or making a dent in a task that at first felt overwhelming. Find ways to be proud of yourself more often. Self-satisfaction actually affects those around you because you're more apt to share positivity with others when you feel good about yourself.

So what does grace look like for you? Whatever form it takes, don't sweat the small stuff. I see my broken wrist as a trophy for being active because it feels much better at my age to say I got a sports injury instead of having to say I tripped on some uneven pavement.

Because this, too, shall pass. And there are so many more adventures ahead if you just cut yourself some slack.



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