



Fixing the NDIS

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Orchestras deliver programs that bust access barriers

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National Safe Work Month

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National Safe Work Month focuses on some common health and safety risks and how to control these to keep workers safe.

Hearing loss strikes young and old

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Hearing Loss may increase Dementia risk

Frank Lin, M.D., and Nicholas Reed for [AARP](#)



Westend61/Getty Images

Over the past decade, research has shown that compared to those with normal hearing, people with hearing loss have a much higher risk of [developing dementia](#).

Increasingly, researchers are beginning to understand why. Here are three of the main theories that could explain the risk.

1. Hearing loss can lead to social isolation and loneliness.

When people with hearing loss begin to feel uncomfortable in social situations, they often cut themselves off, which can lead to loneliness, loss of engagement in cognitively stimulating activities, and depression — all of which can increase a person's risk for dementia.

2. Hearing loss overloads the circuitry of the brain.

With hearing loss, the brain is constantly having to work harder to process the degraded sounds coming from the ear. Scientists say that when this happens, the brain may have fewer resources (brain power!) to help preserve thinking and memory abilities.

3. Hearing loss damages the brain.

Hearing loss leads to the brain being less stimulated with sound information, and this in turn appears to be linked with parts of the brain shrinking and atrophying faster from this chronic deprivation. As you can probably guess, an atrophying brain is not a good thing!

Scientists estimate that hearing loss may be the biggest potentially treatable risk factor for dementia, accounting for more cases of dementia in the world than other risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking or low education.

Hearing aids to prevent dementia?

At this point, you may be scratching your head and asking something along the lines of "Uh ... so are you telling me that people who have hearing loss are definitely going to get dementia?"

The answer to this, of course, is "No." Hearing loss may, however, increase your risk of dementia. Researchers can't predict the exact increase of risk for a given person.

Orchestras fusing creativity and science for access

Orchestras across the country are teaming up with experts and community groups to deliver specialised programs that bust access barriers.

Relaxed and accessible orchestra performances are offered as a regular component of performance seasons, including at the [Adelaide Symphony Orchestra](#), [Melbourne Symphony Orchestra](#) and [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#).

Recently launching their Relaxed and Family concert series earlier in the year, ASO's Managing Director Vincent Ciccarello said "Relaxed performances are created with accessibility in mind, designed to make artistic experiences and spaces more welcoming and comfortable for neurodiverse audience members, anyone on the autism spectrum, and people with vision or hearing challenges, sensory and/or communication needs or learning disabilities.



ASO partnered with Can:Do 4Kids, a company providing vision, hearing and sensory services for children, to make sure that they get things right for the intended audience.

In these concerts, a child has the freedom to approach the conductor, make loud noises or leave the concert space to re-set in break out rooms provided if needed. Many relaxed and accessible concerts also feature an Auslan presenter, adjusted seating and lighting, and a visual storybook downloadable before purchasing tickets on how to get to the venue and what to expect.

Taking a deeper dive into the nuances of music and audiology, Canberra Symphony Orchestra's [Rediscovering Music](#) program reintroduces the possibility for those with hearing loss to enjoy live concerts once again.

Long established and led by CSO bassoonist and clinical audiologist Kristen Sutcliffe, Rediscovering Music aims to create a turning point for those under the impression that they can never enjoy their favourite music again.

Sutcliffe told ArtsHub: 'When you have hearing loss and wearing hearing aids, a cochlear implant or any kind of amplification, music sounds different. These devices are designed to hear speech as clearly as possible [not music]. Some people even say that when they first got the cochlear implant they weren't even able to identify what used to be their favourite song.'

From [ArtsHub](#)

My experience with hearing loss support shows ‘fixing’ Labor’s NDIS will be no easy feat

[Annabel Hennessy](#) writing for [The West Australian](#)



It's not bad enough to qualify me for the NDIS. Credit: Pixabay, The West Australian

I was 21 and just about to graduate from university when I was first diagnosed as hearing impaired. When he looked at the scores from my hearing test, the audiologist said he was surprised I'd been able to complete my degree without a hearing aid.

I'd struggled with hearing since I was in school but, like a typical teenager, had put off doing anything about it. Hearing loss was something I'd associated with elderly people, and I didn't know anyone my own age who used a hearing aid.

But what did make the initial diagnosis easier was that I was eligible to receive free hearing aids through the Federal Government's Hearing Services Program for 21–25-year-olds. This was simple to access, and I was approved almost immediately.

By contrast, I recently investigated whether I would be eligible to access NDIS funding to get new hearing aids and was shocked at how confusing it was. I was aware of complaints about the schemes' bureaucracy but naively assumed my background as a journalist would mean I would be able to find the right information.

It also emerged that despite my hearing loss is severe enough that my audiologist was surprised I was able to complete university without hearing aids, it's not bad enough to qualify for the NDIS.

This is because NDIS guidelines use a hearing loss of at least 65 decibels, in whichever is the better ear, to determine whether someone should get access. I have high-frequency loss which means because I'm better at hearing low-frequency sounds my overall score is dragged up.

Unfortunately, there aren't too many other Government funding options for hearing impaired people if they don't meet NDIS criteria. For me, I'm now too old for the scheme for under 25s but also a few decades too young for the scheme for over 65s. Hearing aids are not covered by Medicare.

I'm lucky that I am employed full-time, so I ended up getting a loan that I pay off monthly to cover the cost of my new hearing aids. But in total, the hearing aids cost \$8000, which would not be accessible for many.

I wouldn't want to suggest my experience in anyway comes close to some of the horror stories we have heard from the NDIS, but it did give an insight into how tricky it can be to navigate.

Labor went to the election promising to "fix" the NDIS. However, "fixing" the scheme is no easy feat. It's also worth noting Labor haven't promised a bigger overall NDIS spend. They've instead said they will "stop waste in the system" and use these savings to better fund supports.

The question of eligibility requirements is undoubtedly going to be a tricky one. The NDIS has typically focused on more severe disabilities. However, there are those who have not met NDIS criteria who clearly need some form of support.

Often when we talk about spending on infrastructure it's done through the lens of job creation, perhaps we should be thinking the same way about the NDIS.

Connecting with Communities

Life on the road with the Ear Health team and Chevron.



Telethon Speech and Hearing has been working in partnership with Chevron Australia since 2011 to provide vital services to rural and remote areas of Western Australia.

This includes

- ear health screenings in schools
- educational workshops for local teachers, health professionals and parents
- helping families access further medical intervention where needed.

11 years on and with the involvement of local Elders and residents, the Chevron Ear Health Program has expanded its services to include teletherapy, speech pathology, language development and occupational therapy.

Learn more about this vital [outreach program](#)

Focus on noise in National Safe Work Month



Everyone has the right to be safe at work. The first week of [National Safe Work Month](#) focuses on some common health and safety risks and how to control these to keep workers safe.

Noise can damage your hearing if it's too loud. Both sudden, loud noises, like an explosion, and constant, loud noise, like working near industrial machinery, can damage your hearing.

Hearing damage includes permanent or temporary hearing loss and tinnitus (ringing in the ears).

Whether you work in construction, agriculture, manufacturing or an office, all workplaces have hazards that need to be identified and risks that need to be managed to keep workers safe. As a person conducting a business you must reduce your workers exposure to noise as much as is possible.

Visit our website for a range of resources to help you manage health and safety risks and create a safer and healthier workplace.

- [Model Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work](#)
- [Model Code of Practice: How to manage work health and safety risks](#)
- [Infographic: Hazardous noise in the workplace](#)
- [infographic: Noise hazards and sound levels](#)

78-year-old Collin worked in the construction industry for more than 30 years – during which time he says he never wore any hearing protection.

“I knew my hearing had been affected because I kept asking people to repeat themselves and found it difficult to hear in noisy environments,” he says.

“I later found it was near impossible to follow conversations in restaurants, and my wife had to raise her voice when speaking to me. I realised I needed to do something about my hearing.

Hearing Australia has released a new factsheet [Protecting your hearing at work](#), with useful information on noise-induced hearing loss and top tips for protecting your hearing at work.

Omicron impacted people with disability

The Disability Royal Commission has published an Overview of Responses to the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Royal Commission invited the public to share their experiences so it could better understand how people with disability were impacted during the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

People told the Royal Commission:

governments did not consider the needs of people with disability when mandating restrictions, setting up vaccination hubs or updating information about the pandemic

people with disability had trouble accessing personal protective equipment and rapid antigen tests
disability services were disrupted or suspended, making it hard to access disability support workers, which meant some people had to rely on family members for support

people with disability could not access, or chose to postpone, health care services and routine health checks due to fewer disability support staff. These issues were made worse for people with disability living in remote or regional areas.

People proposed a wide range of changes to current government policies and procedures. These included:

greater funding for disability advocacy organisations during national emergencies

direct support for people with disability and their families during pandemics so they can access care including mental health support, food and medication, and continued in-home and emergency respite care

accessible booking systems and drop-in services for vaccines and boosters, as well as in-home vaccinations for people who need them

consultations with peak disability organisations and the disability community about all areas of pandemic planning and decision-making.

The [Overview of responses](#) is available [here](#), along with summaries in Auslan and Easy Read.

Study links lack of running water to prevalence of ear infections among rural Alaska children

Yereth Rosen, [Alaska Beacon](#) for [Alaska Public Media](#)



Plastic buckets used for human waste, known as “honeybuckets,” await pickup outside a home in Teller. Teller is one of the Bering Strait villages lacking piped water service or flush toilets; residents use plastic-bag-lined buckets for toilets, with the contents collected for disposal by a city crew. Children in homes without running water are at much higher risks of developing middle-ear infections, research shows. (Yereth Rosen/Alaska Beacon)

Bering Strait region children in households without running water are much more likely to get middle-ear infections, a newly published [study](#) confirmed.

Data from screenings of more than 1,600 schoolchildren in various communities in western Alaska found that lack of running water – a chronic problem in rural Alaska – corresponded to a 53% higher rate of middle-ear infections, the study found. Young children, 3 to 6 years old, were most at risk.

The study, published in the journal *Ear and Hearing*, is part of a program to address high rates of ear infections and the hearing loss that can result from them. Ultimately, the research should help health providers improve hearing screenings for children in the region, said co-author Samantha Kleindienst Robler, an audiologist who is also an assistant professor at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

“Hearing screenings are an important element of the larger picture of ensuring children are ready to learn in the classroom and able to reach their full potential,” she said.

Though the study found a strong link between lack of running water and ear infections, that link did not extend to children’s hearing loss. Nor did the study find a link between other known risk

factors, housing crowding and indoor smoke. However, this study was just a first step in a process to better understand environmental factors in children's ear diseases.

Ear infections do not always cause hearing loss, Kleindienst Robler said, but the results may also be skewed by some limitations in the methods used in the study. The measure used in the hearing screenings, an otoacoustic emission or OAE, is an important tool, she said, "but unfortunately is not the most sensitive at detecting the mild hearing loss that is most commonly found with middle ear infections."

Follow-up studies are underway to better pinpoint the problems and their environmental causes. An ongoing study is examining environmental and nutritional factors, Kleindienst Robler said. "We hope that this new study, geared specifically to measure these factors, will be able to evaluate with greater accuracy the impact of environmental risk factors on ear and hearing health," she said.

A related study [sponsored](#) by the Norton Sound Health Corp. and conducted by largely the same group of researchers showed that telemedicine could provide speedier treatment of children with hearing problems. The [study](#), published in The Lancet, examined outcomes for children who were screened by telemedicine compared to those screened through standard primary care. About two-thirds of the children who had ear problems detected by telemedicine got follow-up care, compared to only one-third of the children whose problems were detected through standard care, the study found. Of those who did get follow-up care, the telemedicine group received that service in an average of 41 days, compared to about three months for the other group, the study found.

Doctors and scientists have long tied poor water and sanitation service in rural Alaska and elsewhere in remote parts of the Arctic to health problems, with infants and young children especially affected. That is especially the case for respiratory diseases such as respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, a chronic problem in rural Alaska. More recently, the link has been confirmed for COVID-19 in rural Alaska.

And high prevalence of ear infections and associated hearing loss among Alaska Native children has been documented for decades, at least as far back as the 1960s, when it was found to be correlated with higher rates of respiratory disease.

The Norton Sound research has provided some lessons about finding solutions to the longstanding problem.

One recommendation is to ensure that hearing screenings include measures for middle ear disease, something that is sometimes omitted, Kleindienst Robler said. "We have found from work in the Norton Sound region that it is critically important to include screening measures for both hearing loss and middle ear disease in rural areas where the rate of ear infections is high. This is to ensure no child who needs ear and hearing care is missed," she said.

Other lessons are about the value of both telemedicine and community involvement in health research.

The research initiative is part of a "ground-up" project that is being guided by an advisory board and tribal council, said Kleindienst Robler, who has lived and worked in the region for over a decade.

"In all our research projects, we have worked alongside community members and stakeholders."

Wagga audiometrist warns hearing loss can strike both young and old

By [Andrew Mangelsdorf](#) for [The Daily Advertiser](#)



Renee Stratton, student audiometrist at Audika Hearing Clinic. Picture courtesy Les Smith.

Workplace injuries are often thought of as a sudden accident that causes serious damage to the victim. However, the experience of trainee Wagga (NSW) audiometrist Renee Stratton shows this is not always the case. Working at a family-run dry cleaners business in Wagga during the 1990s and early 2000s, Ms Stratton said the injury developed over a long period of time.

"It definitely affected my lifestyle. I was forever asking for repeats and it became embarrassing."

Ms Stratton is now an audiometrist student at Wagga's Audika Hearing Clinic and hopes to break the stigma around young people and hearing aids. She recalls having clients who were reluctant to wear hearing aids due to their age.

"There's a stigma that says you have to be old to wear hearing aids," she said. "Hearing loss can happen to anyone."

Ms Hughes describes the sense of hearing as like a 'plush carpet'. "When it's new, you tread on it and it bounces up again," she said. "That's like when the hair-like nerve cells are exposed to noise, they go down and recover again. But if they are exposed to too much noise, they suffer irreparable damage. That's like a carpet in a high traffic area, it stops bouncing back and just sits flat."

New research has found that of the 9,366 technicians, tradespeople, labourers, and machinery operators in Wagga, around half are not taking the preventative measures to look after their eyes and ears.

In the past there were inadequate protections for worker safety. Ms Hughes said employers are now required to provide hearing protection for employees. However, she said this means the onus is really on the individual to wear it.

"Sometimes young people think they are six foot tall and bullet proof and that it will never happen to them, but it does," she said.

Healthy lifestyle changes may lead to a reduced risk of hearing impairment in later life

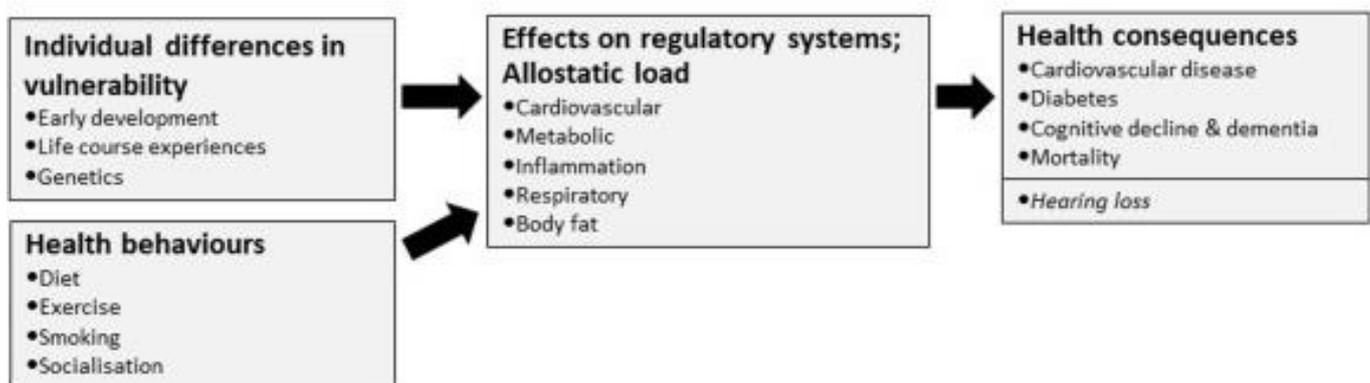
By Katey Matthews, Piers Dawes, Rebecca Elliot, Asri Maharanie, Neil Pendleton, Gindo Tampubolong.
From [Science Direct](#)

Allostatic load is an index of cumulative, often-modifiable physiological stressors in your body.

A study in England has found high allostatic load was associated with greater risk of hearing loss. Reducing allostatic load through healthy lifestyles including non-smoking, healthy diet, and exercise may reduce the risk of hearing impairment in later life.

Among adults aged 50 and over living in England, long-term exposure to higher allostatic load was associated with increased likelihood of hearing impairment. Longer-term exposure to allostatic load is a greater risk factor to hearing than short term exposure.

Hearing loss is a major source of burden in terms of years lived with disability, so understanding causal pathways to inform interventions to reduce risk of hearing loss is worthwhile.



Conceptual schematic of health consequences of long-term exposure to excess allostatic load.

The finding that allostatic load is a predictor of audiometric but not self-reported hearing impairments corroborates with evidence suggesting that self-reported hearing loss strongly correlates with, but under-estimates audiometric hearing impairment. This under-estimation is due to denial and/or individual circumstances affecting a person's own view of their hearing ability. In other words, self-reported hearing is a measure of self-perceived disability - which is affected by psychosocial context - while audiometric measures index hearing impairment - which is not. It follows that audiometric measures are more closely associated with pathology causing hearing impairment than measures of hearing disability. This study is the first that we know of to compare the effect of allostatic load on both an objective and subjective health outcome.

In summary, hearing impairment is associated with prolonged high allostatic load. The individual components of allostatic load can be modified by healthy lifestyle changes including non-smoking, healthy diet and exercise. Monitoring biomarkers in older age and maintaining a healthy lifestyle may therefore lead to a reduced risk of hearing impairment in later-life.

Photos from Deafness Forum special event



Dr David McAlpine delivered the 23rd Libby Harricks Memorial Oration in Sydney this week. His topic was 'Is Prevention Better than Cure?' David is Distinguished Professor of Hearing, Language & The Brain, Dept of Linguistics, and Academic Director of Macquarie University Hearing.



Since 1999, the Libby Harricks Memorial Oration series has featured the world's leading academics, researchers, policymakers, advocates, and commentators. David McAlpine's oration was presented by Deafness Forum Australia and Hearing Australia, celebrating 75 years of service to the nation.



The Deafness Forum team - David Brady, Steve Williamson, Rhonda Locke and Dwin Tucker - photographed with the chair of Hearing Australia (far right), Elizabeth Crouch.



Calling all adults interested in being part of a working group to develop best practice guidelines for adults with hearing loss.

A number of representatives from the ANZ hearing community have gathered in order to provide recommendations on how to develop and implement meaningful, patient centred best practice guidelines for the diagnosis and management of adults with hearing loss. The assembled group is working to understand the various points of view, perspectives and ideas when considering the development of guidelines.

This group maintains that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, must be involved in co-designing and contributing to the process, ensuring their perspectives are heard, with the resulting recommendations designed for humans in the real world. We therefore ask if there is anyone who lives with hearing loss currently and would like to join this important project, to reach out to us at the email address below. Participants must be able to commit to a total of two hours per month and will be offered joint research training sessions if required.

Benefits of practice guidelines

To increase equitable access to hearing healthcare and provide opportunities to obtain high quality population-based outcomes. This effort will mark an unprecedented opportunity to bring thought leaders and representatives from the hearing health community in ANZ to explore how this might be achieved, reflecting an important milestone in supporting adults who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Challenges

Globally, guidelines for the diagnosis and treatment of hearing loss for adults are not well defined. Guidelines are limited, vary and are associated with disparate levels of access and systemic underuse across the world.

Delivery and adoption of meaningful patient centred guidelines will require alignment from a wide variety of stakeholders, as well as endorsement from hearing organisations nationally.

Action is required to address the unmet needs for adults with severe to profound hearing loss.

For more information and to express your interest in the project please e mail info@adulthearing.com

Opportunity for consumer organisations that are members of Deafness Forum

Commonwealth Government funding is available to send an Australian representative of peak national organisations such as Deafness Forum Australia to the 2023 Conference on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Deafness Forum invites our consumer organisation members to identify someone in your networks who is an active advocate and a person with lived experience to be our nominated representative.

The 16th Session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be held at the United Nations headquarters 13 to 15 June 2023 in New York USA.

The Australian Human Rights Commission is managing an Expression of Interest process for this funding, which is now open. Applications will close 4 November 2022.

The first step is to read the information on the [Australian Human Rights Commission website link](#).

Deaf couple married in sign language: a first in Liberia

By Kaipee Luther Newray for FrontPageAfrica (Monrovia)



Nigerian born American information technology specialist, Mr. James W. Adeyemi, who found love and travelled from the United States of America tied the knot with a beautiful Liberian woman, Miss Zanimba Dugbo.

The scene was a victory of love as the couple proceeded towards the podium for the official signing of the Marriage Certificate and Licenses.

The lovely and infrequent marriage of a non-verbal couple was witnessed by the Liberian National Archives Director-General, Hon. Emmanuel A. Lomax, members of the speech impaired community in Liberia, friends and supporters of the newly wedded couples.

National award for Dane, who is profoundly deaf

Australian-born Dane Eralp dreamt of a big life. Born profoundly deaf, the former job seeker finds communication especially challenging, and English is her second language.

Determined to show what a person with disability and limited English skills could achieve, Dane dug deep to overcome her barriers to employment. She persevered through years of setbacks to achieve her career goals, and has won the 'Achiever of the Year' award at the 2022 National Employment Services Association (NESA) Awards for Excellence.

After Dane's family returned to Turkey when she was age six, her school education began but it was difficult.

"I was the only deaf person in school, so it was hard. I am not great at literacy. Communication is a challenge for me. I am not fluent in either English or Turkish," Dane said.

Dane left school at age 14. Determined to not let her disability limit or define her, she persevered through studies to qualify as a hairdresser.

Then found work with an inclusive employer who helped her communicate with clients and expand her skillset.

Yet life in Turkey was hard. In 2010, 26-year-old Dane moved back to Australia with her family.

After arriving in Australia, Dane received a Disability Support Pension and started looking for work. With 11 years experience, she thought she would find something. Yet no one would employ her, even after she completed a Certificate III in Hairdressing at Kangan Institute in Melbourne and spent two years at Vicdeaf learning Auslan.

"I wanted to learn English, but it was hard as a deaf person to lip read.

"Then I did a basic English course. I had an interpreter so that was good."

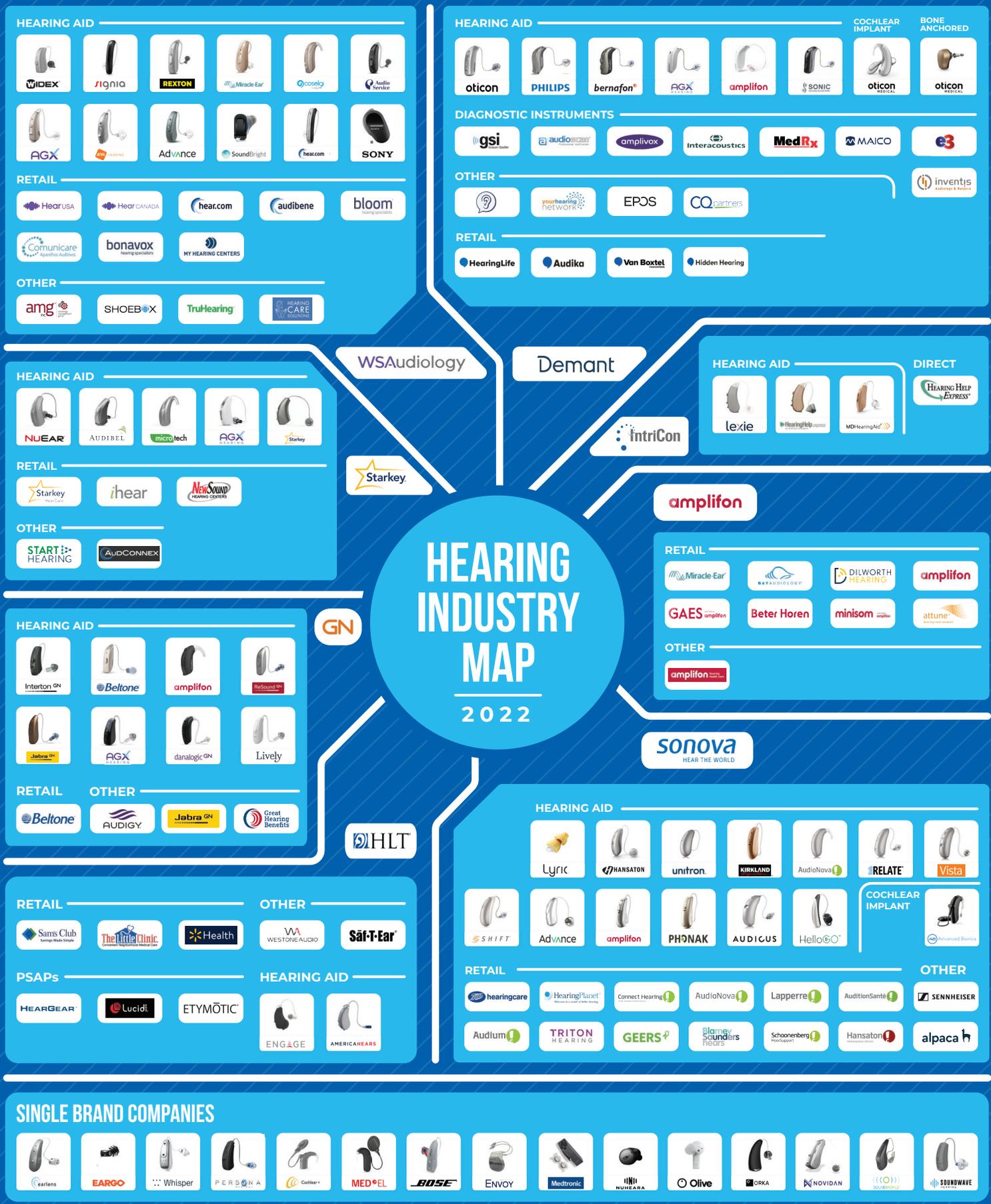
With the help of her mother and the MatchWorks Disability Employment team in Sunshine (VIC), Dane finally found the career opportunity she was looking for. Local salon Endless Hair in Essendon is a multi-cultural, friendly and creative work environment; and Salon Director, Eddie speaks Turkish.

"I'm more energetic, happy and more social," Dane said. "I really enjoy the positive feedback I have received from my customers – this encourages me to work harder...My life now has purpose and I'm very happy to be in my dream job."

"Dane is a great hairdresser," Salon Owner, Sally Akbulut said. "We are so blessed to have her part of our team. We hope to be together for many years to come."

Congratulations to Dane for winning the 2022 NESA 'Achiever of the Year' Award. Winners were announced at the NESA Awards for Excellence Gala dinner in Sydney.





HearingTracker.com is the #1 consumer resource for hearing aids. This is the 9th edition of its map that tracks ownership, investment, and private-labeling relationships within the hearing aid industry. A free printable high-resolution version of this map is available at hearingtracker.com/map. This map reflects Hearing Tracker's best educated guesses as to the associations between companies and brands in the hearing healthcare industry. *Represents our best guess on the look of an unreleased product.



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Know someone who deserves their own copy of One in Six?

Drop us a line to hello@deafnessforum.org.au

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