

19 January 2022



## Music therapy has numerous benefits for children with hearing loss

These kids tend to do well in quiet environments but struggle to hear well when there is noise. They may be unable to hear the teacher in a loud classroom or interact well with peers in the playground. But what if we told you music could help this?



## For people like me, masks have taken away our independence

Despite being born with a near-profound hearing loss in both ears, I have spent the bulk of my life refusing to seriously acknowledge my deafness. Wanting to be independent and not thought of as an inconvenience, I often don't disclose my hearing loss. It is a high and misguided bar I've set for myself, to pass as hearing.



## Aussie transcribing app

Australia's national hearing research body has developed a free app that instantly transcribes conversations to make communication easier for people struggling to hear including due to mask and physical distance requirements.



## NDIS Board changes

The Government has announced changes to the board that directs the National Disability Insurance Scheme. There will be two retirements and four new board members including Dr Peta Seaton AM, who was until recently the chair of Hearing Australia.

## To hear for life, listen with care

That's the theme for World Hearing Day on 3 March.

Currently **one in six** Australians suffer from some form of hearing loss. This may increase to one in four by 2050. *Access Economics 2006*

Deafness Forum of Australia is a Voice for All. It is the peak body representing the views and interests of the 4 million Australians who live with hearing loss, have ear or balance disorders, people who also communicate using Australian Sign Language, and their families and supporters. Our mission is to make hearing health & wellbeing a national priority in Australia.

## How music is helping children with hearing loss

By Dr Chi Yhun Lo, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Macquarie University's Australian Institute of Health Innovation.



New Macquarie University research has revealed how singing, dancing and playing musical instruments has an array of important benefits for children with hearing impairments.

Imagine yourself in a primary school playground, surrounded by the chattering, shouts and laughter of children. The bell rings, there is a stampede of footsteps on the asphalt, and amid this chaos, you tune out all the distracting sounds and manage to hear your friend speaking to you. You have just successfully heard 'speech-in-noise'.

But children with hearing impairments have a vastly different experience of this typical scenario. Even with cochlear implants or hearing aids, they still experience significant challenges, such as hearing sounds in a noisy environment like the school playground.

They tend to do very well in quiet environments, but struggle to hear well when there is noise. They may be unable to hear the teacher in a loud classroom, or interact well with peers in the playground.

But what if I told you music could help this?

Interest in understanding the importance of music in the deaf community has deep historical roots, even predating the field of audiology, with the earliest formal studies way back in 1848.

Music training may be particularly helpful for hearing as it requires students to be receptive to quick and detailed changes in sound.

Music holds great therapeutic potential, and therapy based on music is associated with improved communication skills. Music therapy is a multisensory and engaging training method, that offers wider benefits that specifically target 'speech-in-noise' perception.

## Program improves perception

Together with a team of supervisors from Macquarie University, I established a music therapy program for early primary-aged children who used either hearing aids or cochlear implants. Over the 12-week program, 14 children were offered in-person weekly sessions, and an app they could use at home to guide them through various musical activities such as singing, dancing, playing instruments and creating their own pieces of music.



Instrumental: Over the 12-week program, 14 children had in-person sessions and an app to guide them at home.

The tasks the children performed sometimes used multiple senses, but sometimes relied entirely on hearing. For example, they listened to instruments hidden in bags and had to identify the instrument based only on the sound. This uses their ability to recognise the character, or timbre of a particular sound.

The children showed significant improvements in various aspects of their sound perception, such as their ability to identify whether a sentence was a question or statement based on the rhythm, linguistic stress patterns, and tone. The children had an average improvement of 14 per cent in their testing scores.

Their instrument identification success also increased by 8 per cent, indicating improvement in their timbre perception. Nevertheless, a gap remained in their performance levels when compared to children with typical hearing.

Most importantly, after the 12-week program, children with hearing loss were better at hearing speech-in-noise. On average, the lowest hearing level where the children could still perceive speech decreased by 1.1dB, which was a significant drop.

## Impact on quality of life

These findings were measured using standardised tests and clinical assessments, such as the Clinical Assessment of Music Perception Test, the Macquarie Battery of Emotional Prosody, and the Australian Sentence Test in Noise. The full results of this recent study can be accessed in the Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research.

We also found improved social, mental and emotional behaviours, as well as quality of life benefits in the children who took part. We found the children had less anxiety, depression, low mood and low energy after participating than before the program; and it also helped them regulate their emotions and improve both communication skills and peer relationships. These results were measured using quantitative questionnaires.



All-round benefits: The research found that music therapy can improve hearing-impaired children's perception of rhythm, stress, and tone in language, as well as help emotional regulation.

'Speech-in-noise' hearing is the number one challenge that researchers in the field are trying to improve in hearing-impaired children. The quality of speech and voice perception dramatically impacts how the hearing-impaired interact with the hearing world, and these findings are a cause for optimism.

Another advancement in this space includes "Singwell", a research project that advocates the benefits of group singing for people with communication disorders. Researchers from around the world have come together to support this cause, including Professor William Forde Thompson from Macquarie University.

This research underpins the notion that music therapy has numerous benefits for children with hearing loss. It can improve their perception of rhythm, stress, and tone in language, as well as help emotional regulation. Most importantly, their improved listening abilities mean they can more easily hear their friends in that noisy playground.

From [Mirage Education News](#). This material from the originating organisation/author(s) may be of a point-in-time nature, edited for clarity, style and length. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s). View in full [here](#).

# Hearing aids and insurance

By Natalie Green for [News.com.au](https://www.news.com.au)

Hearing aids can be expensive, so here's what you need to know about finding health insurance to help cover costs.

## Does Medicare cover the cost of hearing aids?

Medicare does not provide rebates for hearing aids, but the Australian Government Hearing Services Program will pay for hearing aid devices for [people who meet certain criteria](#).

Another option for financial assistance with hearing aids is the [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#).



Hearing aids may seem daunting at first, but they can make a positive difference to your quality of life. Picture: iStock.

## Does private health insurance cover hearing aids?

Many but not all health insurance funds cover hearing aids and audiology. Those that do generally include hearing aids and services in their mid to top tier extras policies. Depending on the policy, you will most likely need to pay the full cost of your hearing aids upfront and then claim your allowed benefit. Note, although you won't need a GP or ENT referral, your health insurance provider may require a referral letter before agreeing to pay you benefits for hearing aids and services.

You will need to refer to the individual insurance provider's terms and conditions to determine whether hearing aid repairs and audiology consultations are included.

## Questions to ask when looking for health insurance that covers hearing aids

- Which healthcare funds cover the cost of hearing aids?
- Does this healthcare insurance policy include hearing aids in the list of extras?
- How much in benefits do they offer over a given time? Is it a one-off benefit or does it cover replacements every few years?
- Are hearing assessments and device repairs included?
- What is the waiting period?
- Can I upgrade my current insurance plan to include hearing aid services? How does this compare with changing plans altogether?
- Does the policy require referral letters or specify the hearing care providers I use?
- Will I need to pay the full amount for the hearing aids upfront and claim the rebate later?

# World Hearing Day

3 March 2022

**To hear for life,  
listen with care!**



World Hearing Day will be observed on 3 March 2022 with the theme,

**“To hear for life, listen with care”**

Through this theme, we can focus on the importance of safe listening as a means of maintaining good hearing throughout our lives.

The key messages in 2022 will be:

- It is possible to have good hearing across the life course through ear and hearing care
- Many common causes of hearing loss can be prevented, including hearing loss caused by exposure to loud sounds
- Safe listening can mitigate the risk of hearing loss associated with recreational sound exposure

Deafness Forum joins the World Health Organization in its calls on government, industry partners and civil society to raise awareness for and implement evidence-based standards that promote safe listening.

The World Hearing Day 2022 will mark the launch of:

- The 'Global standard for safe listening entertainment venues and events'
- A Safe Listening handbook
- A media toolkit for journalists

Visit [our website](#) for updates and resources.

## Aussie transcribing app

Australia's national hearing research body has developed a free app that instantly transcribes conversations to make communication easier for people struggling to hear including due to mask and physical distance requirements.

The multilingual NALscribe app has been developed by the government-owned National Acoustic Laboratories. It is available to download at the App Store.



The Apple app quickly translates speech into large, easy-to-read text on iPads and iPhones in real-time.

NALscribe, which adheres to accessibility guidelines, features an inclusive design with customisable settings, such as text size, screen clearing privacy options, and dark and light appearance.

The app is available in 11 languages. The app also has an offline speech recognition mode and users can easily save, edit and share transcripts.

## Australia Day

The Australia Day holiday raises complex questions about our country's national identity.

At the heart of the matter is an ongoing debate about the meaning of our national day. On the fun side are BBQs, parties, parades, performances and fireworks. In contrast, Aboriginal people mourn their history and call it 'Invasion Day'.

The historical events of 26 January mean that many Australians perceive it as the commencement of a long history of violence and trauma.

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, Aboriginal Australian of the Year 1984 said, "Let us find a day on which we can all feel included and can celebrate with pride our common Australian identity."

Aboriginal hip-hop musician Jeswon (Thundamentals) expressed his hope:



Some say what's in a date?  
Some say what's in a name?  
Australia day  
Invasion day  
Homie, that's one and the same  
And I ain't pointing no fingers  
I ain't throwing no blame  
Just saying that we can do better  
You know that it's time for a change

# For people like me, masks have taken away our independence

By Vikki McNaughton for [ABC News](#)



Masks mean Vikki McNaughton can no longer rely on lip-reading to communicate.

I never realised how much I relied on lip-reading to participate in the world until masks made it impossible.

This became painfully clear the day I went to receive my second Pfizer vaccination. Just getting in line resulted in several misunderstandings with three separate people: the security guard out front, the receptionist and a nurse who tried to ask me a question. Her face, hidden by a mask, said something that may as well have been in another language.

My voice, possibly too loud and slightly pissed after months of struggling to understand others, announced to the nurse: "I'm deaf." The poor woman didn't know what to do with me.

She spoke louder and slower. Profoundly embarrassed by the interaction and horrified by the growing audience in the room, I felt my arms going numb.

"Sorry. Louder doesn't help, sorry. I lip-read," I said.

We looked at each other helplessly.

With a slow, deliberate movement, she pointed to my hand. She needed my blue vaccination appointment card.

"Oh. Sorry. Here you go," I said.

After my jab, I sat in a crowded waiting area for well past the necessary 15 minutes, since the person calling my name hadn't been told I was deaf.

## Carrying the burden of communication

Despite being born with a near-profound hearing loss in both ears, I have spent the bulk of my life refusing to seriously acknowledge my deafness. To communicate, I rely on a combination of my residual hearing — which I access through powerful hearing aids — and lip-reading. Wanting to be independent and not thought of as an inconvenience, I often don't disclose my hearing loss. It is a high and misguided bar I've set for myself, to pass as hearing.

Like some others who are deaf or hard of hearing, I am not fluent in sign language, and Auslan is not an easy way for me to speak to others.

About one in 10 Australians are completely or partially deaf, but it's estimated only 30,000 people in Australia use Auslan as their primary method of communication.

When the mask mandate was announced, I found my tried-and-trusted method of communication redundant.



Masks are an important public safety measure, but pose a barrier for people who lip-read. *(ABC News: Matt Bamford)*

I now realise that I have spent my whole life shouldering the burden of communication.

Lip-reading is exhausting and not always accurate.

In order to converse with someone, I have to turn an auditory medium into a visual one, concentrating intensely on people's faces while contending with background noise, poor lighting, the fact a subject may not be facing me, or that they may be moving, or they may have an accent or facial hair.

The success of the interaction relies completely on my ability to juggle these variables. Before the pandemic and the masks that came with it, these barriers were tolerated so I could get by in the hearing world. But without my ability to lip-read, my fragile sense of competency and independence rapidly unravelled.

Confronted with the realities of my disability, I realised I had no strategies to cope during the peak of the pandemic.

My workplace suddenly became a source of anxiety as I tried to grasp what people were saying behind their masks. As a teacher, I often didn't know what my students had said, or would miss entire sections of staff meetings. Periods of remote teaching were very difficult until I could get

closed captions activated for video calls. People would chatter easily to each other, all parties sharing information, moments, and laughter with ease. I was constantly exhausted from the strain of trying to listen.

What little hearing I had would rapidly drop due to the sheer stress of knowing what faced me in the day ahead. It often felt like I was trying to hear underwater.



Vikki McNaughton asks people to lower their masks to speak, but is afraid it might expose her toddler to COVID-19.

Sometimes it was easier to play it safe and not say anything at all. However, this response has been unsustainable. Months of avoiding eye contact with people in order to not be drawn into conversation is not conducive to good mental health.

Rather than excluding myself from conversations, I've learned to stop apologising for being deaf. I am starting to articulate my needs when they are not being met, and now ask for someone to face me. If I miss pieces of conversation, I will seek to clarify. If someone is moving when talking to me, I ask them to stop and face me.

I've also learned to not be so hard on myself and to tell people when I need to tap out to have a 'listening break'. I have found that when people are informed about my needs, they are generally willing to accommodate me.

A few days after my experience at the vaccination hub, I attended my GP clinic with my toddler for an appointment, tense with anxiety and close to tears. After following the doctor to her rooms, she faced me, smiled with her eyes and popped her mask down.

"Hey, is this better for you?" she asked.

Relief flooded through my body. I grinned from under my own mask. "Yeah. Thanks!"

We went about the everyday business of talking about my son's immunisations. No fuss. No awkwardness. No exaggerated movements.

Just understanding, patience and access.

## Review of early intervention status of a sample of children with hearing loss

In 2021, Hearing Australia conducted a review so that it could understand what types of intervention children under 7 years of age were receiving.

The review found that 74% were engaged with a provider of early intervention supports; 58% were receiving specialist early intervention for children who were deaf or hard of hearing and a further 16% had engaged with another type of Early Intervention provider, including those that provided specialist services for other disabilities, such as cerebral palsy.

This report is available [here](#) on the Hearing Australia website.

## New hearing aid fittings since July 2021

Each year, some 2,500 – 3,000 children, teens and young adults receive their first hearing aids from Hearing Australia.

Hearing Australia will now publish financial year-to-date information about newly fitted children and young adults, according to state/territory and age group.

This report is available [here](#) on the Hearing Australia website.

## NDIS Board changes

The Government has announced changes to the board that directs the National Disability Insurance Scheme. There will be four new board members:

- Dr Peta Seaton AM (the recently retired chair of Hearing Australia)
- Leah van Poppel
- Meredith Allan
- Dr Denis Napthine

Two of the new board members are people with disability - something that disability advocates have been calling for.

The board members listed below will continue in their roles:

- Prof Jane Burns, Estelle Pearson, Sandra Birkenleigh, Glenn Keys AO, James Minto

Two board members retired:

- Chair, Dr Helen Nugent AO
- Robyn Kruk AO

The Government has yet to announce who will be the new chair.

## Fighting hearing aid stigma



Michael Lawrence is an audiology student in the United Kingdom. He wrote this article for [Ida Institute](#)

“I suppose it’s another nail in the coffin,” said Rose (not her real name), one of my patients, after being told that hearing aids could help her struggles with communication.

It saddened me that she saw hearing aids first and foremost as a “nail in the coffin” rather than something that could help her to hear her loved ones again, hear on the telephone again, enjoy participating in group conversations in a restaurant again, and so on.

What saddened me more is that I’m not even a fully-fledged audiologist yet and I’ve already had several similar encounters while on placement.

Initially, I couldn’t believe that it would be common for people to choose hearing aids based on how “invisible” they are, rather than the quality of technology – or even forego devices entirely out of fear of what others will think when they see them, a fear often rooted in the stigma surrounding hearing aids and aging. For many people, this means putting off acting on their hearing loss and suffering in silence, often for years.

When I think about it though, I used to feel a similar way. I’ve worn hearing aids since I was four and felt stigmatized for many years. I stood out from my peers and not in a good way. I craved “invisible” hearing aids.

It was only when I started contemplating becoming an audiologist that I realised having hearing aids could be something to embrace in this position rather than something to hide. Seeing an audiologist who wore hearing aids was something I would’ve found motivating as a patient.

I am now happy to wear my hearing aids – I even wear them with pride. After all, hearing loss can’t be cured, so why should it be hidden? Especially considering that making our devices visible can lead to practical benefits. For example, I’ve noticed that people tend to face me and speak more clearly when they see I’m wearing hearing aids.

Having experienced the burden of stigma and how much better life is without it, I’m passionate about helping my patients overcome the same thing. For many adults, of course, it’s the connotation of aging that they want to avoid, which wasn’t the problem for me. But I still believe my experiences of wearing hearing aids puts me in a powerful position when speaking with patients such as Rose.

## Grant opportunity for our member organisations

The Department of Social Services recently announced a grant funding opportunity under the [Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program](#).

The Building Employer Confidence and Inclusion in Disability Grant Opportunity is an open, competitive grant round that will open in late January 2022.

This grant aims to build the confidence and ability of employers to hire, support and retain employees with disability and create inclusive workplaces by breaking down attitudinal barriers about people with disability.

More information is available on the [Community Grants Hub](#) website and [Grant Connect](#).

## Become a Deafness Forum member in 2022

An individual member of Deafness Forum Australia is a person who has hearing loss, has an ear or balance condition, is Deaf, a member of their family, or someone who provides services such as teachers, researchers and audiologists.

New memberships are free for the first calendar year for people under 26 years or a parent or guardian. To join as an individual, download and complete a membership [application form](#).

An organisation can be a member too. Download a membership [application form](#).

More information at <https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/about-us/become-a-member/>

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

Drop us a line to [hello@deafnessforum.org.au](mailto:hello@deafnessforum.org.au)

Contact us to receive this publication in an alternative file type.

Items in Deafness Forum communications may include terminology or summarise views, standards or recommendations of third parties, which are assembled in good faith but do not necessarily reflect the considered views of Deafness Forum or indicate commitment to a particular course of action. We make no representation or warranty about the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any third-party information. We want to be newsworthy and interesting, and our aim is to be balanced and to represent views from throughout our community sector, but this might not be reflected in particular editions. Content may be edited for style and length.



## Deafness Forum Australia is a Registered Charity

Your contributions keep us working.

All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

To donate, [go here](#)