



## Crisis looms in children's hearing care

Key organisations in the hearing health sector do not believe that the NDIS and the sector is ready move to a new model the delivery of hearing services to children, particularly during this major health crisis. The Government must not bring further chaos into an already chaotic world by introducing major changes in the delivery of hearing services to a highly vulnerable population.

## NABS in strife

The Government will press ahead with plans to move the National Auslan Interpreter Booking & Payment Service, better known as NABS into the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This will certainly create a breach in the nation's health defence.

## Can students with hearing loss study a foreign language?

All the subtleties in pronunciations and dialects can be difficult to master, especially if you have a hard time hearing every nuance. But it's not impossible! We've got tips to read.

## Button battery safety

Button batteries power hearing devices. They are a health risk to children. The consumer law will soon be changed to include safety provisions. But could this discourage people from using their hearing aids? They don't need another excuse.

## Kids will suffer from surgery delays

Cochlear says children born with hearing difficulties could suffer life-long issues if their surgery is delayed for too long as a result of the elective surgery restrictions around the world.

## Covid-19 and Paediatric Hearing Services in the NDIS



Key organisations in the hearing health sector do not believe that the NDIS and the sector is ready move to new funding arrangements and to a contestable market for the delivery of hearing services to children on 1 July 2020, particularly during this major health crisis.

It is clear that there is still much to be done to ensure children are able to access quality hearing services under the new arrangements, and it is highly unlikely that the work can be achieved in the time remaining, particularly in the current environment.

**This decision must be reversed. The Government must not bring further chaos into an already chaotic world by introducing major changes in the delivery of hearing services to a highly vulnerable population.**

The Government can protect the needs of children with hearing loss in these challenging times by extending the current in-kind arrangements with the Hearing Services Program for another two years. This will allow time for the policy framework to be finalised; for the necessary safeguards to be put into place; for consumers, NDIS staff and hearing services providers to be educated on the new arrangements; and time for the country to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The families of children with hearing loss, like all Australians, are anxious about how they will cope with the impact of COVID-19. They are worried about how to keep their family safe, whether they still have a job, whether they will need to put home-schooling arrangements in place, and whether they can access basic grocery items for their family.

Having to understand and navigate new arrangements that apply to accessing hearing services for their child is not what families need when they are trying to address critical issues that impact their daily living arrangements.

Deferring the transition of hearing services to the NDIS is a simple, practical solution to maintaining quality hearing care for children with hearing loss during this major health crisis.

Read the full report at

<https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/news-and-issues/paediatric-hearing-services-and-the-ndis/>



## Information on coronavirus and protective hygiene, plus tips to help you and your family cope



Government funded parenting website, raisingchildren.net.au has launched a number of new evidence-based resources for families with information on COVID-19.

These resources include articles on:

- Coronavirus and children in Australia – information about the virus, prevention and treatment, and how to talk to children about COVID-19
- Tips for families managing self-isolation and social distancing – information on routines, keeping children active, healthy eating and sleep, ideas for entertaining children, healthy screen time, mental health and more
- Coronavirus and pregnancy

The articles can be found at <https://raisingchildren.net.au/g.../coronavirus-covid-19-guide>

## Kids with hearing loss will suffer from surgery delays: Cochlear

The chief executive of hearing implant maker Cochlear has warned children born with hearing difficulties could suffer life-long issues if their surgery is delayed for too long as a result of the elective surgery restrictions around the world.

Cochlear boss Dig Howitt expressed serious concern about what he said was a "huge" human impact, particularly for children born with hearing issues, flowing from the closure of elective surgeries in Australia and in other parts of the world, including in Europe and in the United States.

"Earlier cochlear implantation for children born with hearing loss leads to them obtaining age-appropriate speech and language faster than delayed implantation," says Cochlear CEO Dig Howitt.

"A child born with hearing loss is a neurological emergency. A child born with hearing loss isn't getting the parts of their brain that are there for hearing stimulated with sound. The quicker that gets stimulated with sound the quicker that part of the brain learns what sound is, learns what speech is and to wire itself for speech and hearing."

Cochlear is one of Australia's biggest companies and has global operations servicing patients in Europe, the US, China as well as in Australia.

The company, which raised [\\$930 million in emergency funds](#) from its shareholders this week given the restrictions on elective surgery, services 600,000 implants in patients around the world with existing implants with yearly check-ups.

It sold 18,894 cochlear implants worldwide in the six months to December, and although the number of exact patients is not disclosed by the company, a number of implants were purchased in bulk by governments for their public health systems. According to the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, one in every 1000 children are born with hearing difficulties and more than 12,000 children in Australia have a significant hearing impairment. There is also a growing number of older people, both in Australia and globally, who benefit from the implant.



*Credit: Peter Rae*

Mr Howitt said his company fully recognised that freeing up capacity in the health sector was important in combating the impact of the coronavirus on the healthcare system. But he hoped there could be some allowances made in the coming months to allow surgeries for children requiring a cochlear implant and other important surgeries for children.

"The evidence is clear on that (the benefits of hearing implants), so we would like to see children getting access to surgery," he said.

In China, where there is a much higher number of children born with hearing issues, pediatric surgery has already resumed, though usually in areas outside of the hardest-hit areas of Hubei province which entered a severe lockdown in January.

"I think the China example is instructive. It's pleasing to see that for children in China the delays look like it will be only be a few months," Mr Howitt said.

It is expected likely the impact on the healthcare sector could be longer than on other parts of the economy given the appropriate steps by governments to 'flattening the curve' to slow the spread of COVID-19, Mr Howitt said.

"There's enormous uncertainty and one of the core parts of that uncertainty is how long the restrictions will last.

"If the curve is flattened, what are the implications through the health care system for all of the procedures that get delayed and deferred?" he asked.



By [Sarah Danckert](#), business reporter writing for The Sydney Morning Herald.  
<https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/kids-with-hearing-loss-will-suffer-from-surgery-delays-cochlear-20200326-p54e58.html>



## THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS DURING THIS CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

One in six Australians live with a hearing loss that impacts on their daily lives. We comprise one of the largest categories of persons with disability in the world with over 466 million persons have a disabling hearing loss.

Many of these people have an additional disability(s), making them particularly vulnerable in this health pandemic.

We experience communication issues that make it hard to interact with other people. These issues can result in loneliness, anxiety, and depression. We face challenges with social distancing and the use of face masks which impedes lip reading.

### Information from the media and social media sources must be captioned

Deafness Forum of Australia has been seeking the support of television broadcasters to provide open captions on all public emergency announcements.

We support the current accessibility arrangement that includes a sign language interpreter in these announcements for the 10,000 Australians whose first language is Auslan. However, there is a large number of Australians – estimates are in excess of 1 million – who rely on captions every day. This includes people for whom English is a second language, children with learning difficulties and particularly, older people who may use hearing aids or cochlear implants, and the many people who have no aided support to assist with their hearing.

Emergency broadcasts on television must have Open Captions – these are captions that are a permanent feature of a video, meaning that you can't switch them off - they will appear in any replays of the original broadcast, including social media.

### Service providers must provide accessible communications

We want providers to offer the option of text messaging versus verbal telephone contact, and promote the National Relay Service and National Auslan Booking Service.

Video communications must be captioned.

Tele-health, tele-practice, tele-education solutions must accommodate captions and when people who communicate in Auslan are involved, interpreters.

We urge all governments, their agencies, businesses and community groups to commit to making their communications accessible in this time of a national crisis.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Brady".

David Brady  
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Williamson".

Stephen Williamson  
Chief Executive

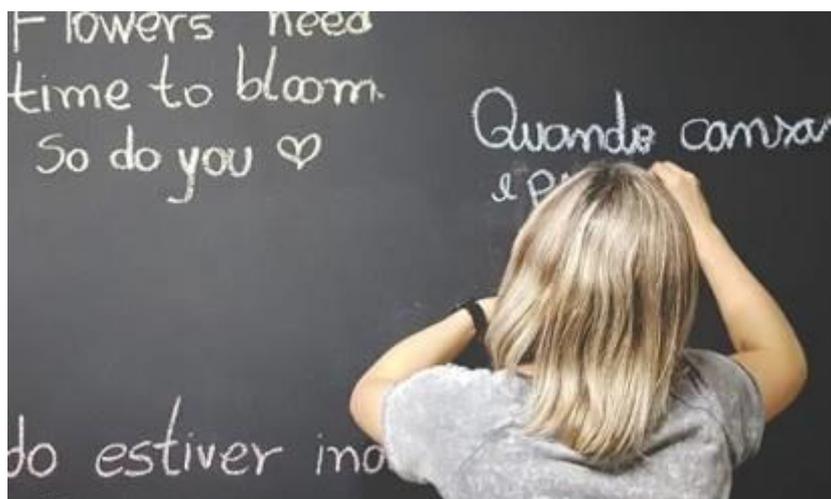
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## Studying a foreign language when you have a hearing loss can be challenging



All the subtleties in pronunciations and dialects can be difficult to master, especially if you have a hard time hearing every nuance.

But, it's not impossible! Here are some tips for studying a foreign language with hearing loss.

Can students with hearing loss study a foreign language?

For children with hearing loss, communication can be a factor in deciding which classes to take. Every deaf child is different, with varying levels of hearing loss to diverse hearing technologies. What works for one child may not for another.

The key thing to remember is to not let their hearing loss stand in the way of achieving their goals. Studying a foreign language with hearing loss is absolutely possible. First, chat with your child to see how they feel and what resources they think they might need to achieve their goals.

Studying a foreign language with hearing loss

I learned German as a foreign language throughout my secondary education, all the way through to A Levels (senior year). As a profoundly deaf person who wears hearing aids and communicates through speech and lipreading, I passed all my exams, which is a massive achievement.

Of course, my parents had doubts about whether I could study a foreign language with a hearing loss. My teacher encouraged my parents to let me give it a go. I proved I could do it and flourished each year at school.

If the prospect sounds too daunting, that's okay. There are plenty of other subjects to choose from. Some may be better for career choices. It's always good to weigh the options and discuss the pros and cons of each subject with your child.

### Choosing a foreign language

Typically, there are several foreign language options. In school, had a choice of German, French, and Spanish. I noticed that French and Spanish are higher pitched languages, so I struggled to hear them. German is low pitched, making it easier to hear. Also, German words are pronounced

whole. This makes the language easier to lipread compared to other languages with silent or quiet word endings.

Someone else might have different qualifiers, perhaps choosing a language that's more widely used and/or closer to English. Examine all the angles and make the choice that's best for you.

## **Classroom adjustments**

To help make language learning easier for someone with hearing loss, there are some modifications that can be made.

### **Planning, preparation, and productivity**

To start, it's always good to chat with teacher/s to explore the curriculum/course plan, discuss situations that may be challenging, and what steps can reduce these barriers. It's worth explaining how your child who's deaf currently learns in other subjects, what adjustments are made, or the hearing technologies that are used. The main aim is to make it an enjoyable experience, but accessible too.

The teacher/s may have to consult with the exam boards for advice on what accommodations can be made. Tools like [hearing aid accessories](#) for the classroom can also be beneficial.

If it's the first time the teacher has had a student who's deaf, inform them that there have been other people with hearing loss who successfully studied foreign languages. It always helps if teacher/s and language assistants can take part in Deaf Awareness training to make them aware about hearing loss. They must also have the mindset of being encouraging rather than focusing on barriers.

Educating other students that a fellow pupil has access needs is helpful as well. Teach them a few simple tips to help make classroom life easier. This can be done in a fun, positive way, and helps prepare students for the future if they meet other deaf people.

### **Language assistants**

If your child usually has a learning support assistant or support worker in classroom settings, they may be able to help in basic foreign language lessons. As the curriculum gets harder, however, they may struggle supporting the child. If the school has language assistants who work specifically in those lessons, it's worth exploring if they can work with the child who's deaf instead. This can be beneficial as they know the language inside out. They may need some extra training from the support assistant on how best to assist with the child's needs. Alternatively, there may be some students at a higher level (pre-University or currently at university) who may be able to help.

### **Daily learning**

Children with hearing loss may find it easier learning visual reading and writing tasks compared to oral/audio/speaking tasks. Like any subject, it's useful to have anything visual from books/diagrams/accessible videos to aid with learning. People with hearing loss are much more receptive to visual clues, which helps them to piece information together. For pronunciation and speaking practice, teachers/language assistants should explain how words are spoken by writing how they are said (syllables) compared to how it is written. If there are specific sounds or letters

which are pronounced in different ways, they should demonstrate how they are said differently or what sounds similar. Like any language, learning the basics such as vocabulary, grammar, and structure are key to understanding.

### **Audio, videos and listening tasks**

All foreign languages include learning from audio clips, videos and listening tasks. Any videos should be subtitled or transcribed prior to lessons. This is hugely beneficial for the deaf child and means they can follow the lesson without missing out on crucial information. If it's not provided, it can delay learning. Audio clips are slightly different as they test hearing students' ability to understand what is being said. The best way around this is for the teacher or language assistant to read the audio clip aloud to the child who's deaf in a quiet room and for them to lipread what is being said. This is a reasonable adjustment made in exam situations. In listening exams, if the child reads from the script, it can be considered cheating as the answers are in the script. If it is too hard, they may be able to be exempt from the audio tasks.

### **Group situations**

Like any subject in a classroom, foreign language classes may include group work. Gently remind students to raise a hand before they speak, and speak one at a time. This makes it easier for the child who's deaf to follow.

From Hearing Like Me, <https://www.hearinglikeme.com/studying-a-foreign-language-with-hearing-loss/>

### *Advertisement*



## **Hearing Australia Hear&Now 2020 Challenge**

According to research commissioned by Hearing Australia nearly 60 per cent of people interviewed say their partner or parent doesn't believe they have a hearing problem or they think they're coping fine – despite knowing their hearing isn't what it used to.

For the over 50s, almost 75 per cent of those who have a family member who hasn't had a hearing check, say it's likely due to them thinking they don't have a problem.

The research findings also indicate that the most common emotion felt by those who have a family member with hearing loss was frustration (68 per cent) – and the most affected are women and those aged over 50.

To make getting hearing help easier, Hearing Australia is calling on all Australians to take part in the Hear&Now 2020 Challenge by jumping on to [hearing.com.au](https://hearing.com.au) to do a 10-minute hearing check.



nabs

National Auslan Interpreter  
Booking & Payment Service



Despite the chaos being caused by this coronavirus pandemic, the Government is pressing ahead with plans to move the National Auslan Interpreter Booking & Payment Service, better known as NABS into the National Disability Insurance Scheme by 30 June 2020.

This will create a breach in the nation's health defence.

The NABS program provides a service that books and pays for an accredited interpreter to assist people whose first language is Australian Sign Language in their medical consultations that attract a Medicare rebate, or specified health consultations, provided in a private medical practice by a general practitioner, specialist or health professional.

As things stand, on 1 July 2020 the approximately 720 NABS users who do not have an active NDIS plan will no longer be able to access the NABS for their health appointments, particularly appointments with their GPs. However:

- people who were NDIS participants would theoretically pay for NABS usage from their plans
- people who were aged 65 and over would not be affected - they don't have to be a NDIS participant to get free access to NABS

To further complicate the situation, the Department is currently tendering for a new organisation to take over the NABS service delivery contract. Deafness Forum understands that a new contract is to commence in July. In ordinary circumstances, this might be an appropriate thing to do and we have no views on the relative merits of providers. However, in the context of this health crisis, a disruption to service (no matter how well-managed) poses high risk to the vulnerable citizens who need the NABS and therefore, a risk to the greater community.

It would be a relatively small public investment in the greater scheme of things for the Government to make the following arrangements:

- by whatever administrative means, all people who need the service will be able to access the NABS without impediment or additional rules and process until this time next year
- the current NABS delivery contract be extended for this same period if possible, perhaps incorporating additional requirements relating to the pandemic

Our case will be the stronger with many voices giving the same message. We would like the various groups whose focus is people whose first language is Auslan to recognise the threat and to make representations to the Government.

<https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/news-and-issues/national-auslan-booking-service-and-the-ndis/>

*Announcement*

## Deaf societies merge

Here's a message from the CEO of Deaf Services, Brett Casey and CEO of The Deaf Society, Leonie Jackson.

The Deaf Society (NSW) held an Extraordinary General Meeting to vote on two special resolutions related to the merger of The Deaf Society and Deaf Services.

“We are pleased to inform you that the members voted in support of both resolutions and the merger between The Deaf Society and Deaf Services will proceed.



This is an historic moment that means together we can:

- grow services across NSW, ACT and Queensland
- develop new services to the benefit of Deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind Australians
- influence government as the largest whole-of-life service provider for deaf people

Over the next few months, there will be much work done behind the scenes, as we work to bring the two organisations together, to become one organisation.

If you are a client of The Deaf Society or Deaf Services, you will notice no change to the support and service you receive currently.

You may notice some small changes to our systems and billing in the coming months but we will advise of this in advance.

There will be no changes to staff, and clients will continue to deal with the same people they are used to.

For now, both organisations will maintain their existing names and branding. Over the next 12 to 18 months a new name and brand will be developed in consultation with members, staff and the community which reflects the joint vision of the new organisation.

This merger has come about because we want the very best for our community, and we hope you agree.

We would like to sincerely thank everyone that has shown their support. We have been inspired by the overwhelmingly positive feedback from community members across Australia and even internationally.

We are glad so many people share our real excitement about the potential for this merger to create a stronger organisation delivering a stronger future for the Deaf Community.”

There is a video in Auslan without captions. <https://www.youtube.com/watch...>

## Button battery safety



Button batteries power hearing devices. At the same time, they are a very real health risk especially to children.

The consumer law will be changed later this year to provide safety provisions. But could changes have a negative effect on people's use of hearing aids? They don't need another excuse to leave them in a drawer.

The Australian Consumer and Competition Commission, better known as the ACCC is continuing its investigation into button battery safety and considering the options in designing a mandatory safety and information standard for button batteries and products containing button batteries, which will include hearing devices.

As part of this process, the ACCC has asked Deafness Forum and others to promote its current public consultation that runs till 30 April. Responses will inform the ACCC's development of its final recommendation to the Commonwealth Government, which will become consumer law.

Go to the page on the ACCC website called Button battery safety - Assessment of regulatory options - Consultation paper. It's at <https://consultation.accc.gov.au/product-safety/button-battery-safety-consultation-paper/>

You can read a factsheet; learn how to, then make a submission, or complete the individual questions in an online consultation (recommended for individuals).

## Know someone who might like to get their own One in Six?

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

We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay respect to them and their cultures, and to elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the challenge of overcoming high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people and its role in Closing the Gap. We acknowledge the risk to indigenous sign languages of disappearing and the importance of Auslan.

People with disability have and continue to be subjected to isolation, exploitation, violence and abuse in institutions. We thank the Australian Parliament for its bipartisan support of a Royal Commission into the evil committed on people with disability.

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