

Today is the United Nations International Day of Happiness.



Screen time robs the average toddler of hearing words spoken by adults.

Hearing loss is twice as common in Australia's lowest income groups.

Screen time robs average toddler of hearing words spoken by adults.



Research into 220 Australian families over two years concludes exposure to television, phone and other screens hinders young children's language skills.

The average toddler is missing out on hearing more than 1,000 words spoken by an adult each day due to screen time, setting back their language skills, a first-of-its kind study has found.

The research tracked 220 Australian families over two years to measure the relationship between family screen use and children's language environment.

The lead researcher, Dr Mary Brushe from the Telethon Kids Institute, said: "The technology we use is essentially like a Fitbit, but instead of counting the number of steps, this device counts the number of words spoken by, to and around the child."

The device also picked up electronic noise, which the researchers analysed to calculate screen time.

The researchers found young children's exposure to screens including TVs and phones was interfering with their language opportunities, with the association most pronounced at three years of age.

The study found the average three-year-old in the study was exposed to two hours and 52 minutes of screen time a day. Researchers estimated this led to those children being exposed to 1,139 fewer adult words, 843 fewer child words and 194 fewer conversations.

Because the study couldn't capture parents' silent phone use, including reading emails, texting or quietly scrolling through websites or social media, Dr Brushe said they might have underestimated how much screen usage is affecting children.

A language-rich home environment was critical in supporting infants and toddlers' language development.

Amber Flohm, the vice-president of the NSW Teachers Federation, said teachers had noted language skills going backwards, both in conversation between children themselves and teachers and in reading and writing skills. The pandemic exacerbated the situation, but teachers had noted the trends around the increased use of screen time "at least the last five or six years pre-Covid", she said.

By [Natasha May @natasha__may](#) for [The Guardian](#).

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Apple to Launch Hearing Aid Mode for AirPods.



Apple is tipped to enter the hearing aid market later this year with a new "hearing aid mode" feature for its AirPods Pro.

This update could transform Apple's earbuds into a less expensive, mass-marketed hearing aid alternative, addressing the needs of many millions with mild to moderate hearing loss. Apple's initiative taps into the growing demand for accessible hearing assistance, challenging the traditional hearing aid sector.

The AirPods Pro, with their built-in features like Conversation Boost and Ambient Noise Reduction, have already demonstrated potential as hearing aids, improving hearing in noisy environments by up to 7 decibels. Their Active Noise Cancellation system offers modest hearing protection by reducing ambient noise levels.

Tech giants like Apple will increasingly leverage their existing popular consumer electronics to introduce health and accessibility functions. Apple's entry into this market with its AirPods Pro could set a new standard for accessible hearing technology. The move also hints at future improvements, such as customised hearing tests and extended battery life, further solidifying the role of consumer electronics in meeting diverse accessibility needs.

Yet, buying a hearing device from a traditional audiology clinic has benefits. Prescription hearing aids offer customised solutions tailored to an individual hearing loss, ensuring optimal performance and comfort. Audiologists provide professional calibration and fittings to ensure that the hearing aids are adjusted correctly and ongoing support, adjustments, and guidance.

While non-traditional hearing aids may be more accessible and affordable, they lack the personalised care, expertise, and ongoing support that traditional audiology clinics provide.

But the worldwide hearing aid market is large and growing. People of all ages can benefit from hearing enhancement devices. There are many millions of people with hearing loss who don't use hearing devices and vast numbers of people with average hearing who have trouble hearing in certain situations like noisy workplaces, airports, and restaurants. That's a lot of people who can benefit from customised amplification, and a market worth exploring for any consumer electronics giant like Apple.

From an article by [Karl Strom](#).



Professional Bodies Tie the Knot.



The Hearing Aid Audiology Society of Australia will merge with Australian College of Audiology.

“This union represents a strong and strategic partnership to better serve and protect members, improve educational pathways, grow the workforce, and advocate for all hearing health clinicians,” a spokesperson said.

“Both organisations have recognised the need for greater infrastructure and resources in the face of a rapidly changing sector.

“The heart of HAASA will be preserved within the newly named *Australian College of Audiology incorporating Hearing Aid Audiology Society of Australia.*”

For further information about this new union, reach out to the organisations via acaud@acaud.org or haasa@haasa.org.au

Déjà vu.

In 2019, Audiology Australia floated the idea of absorbing the Australian College of Audiology. Concerns were raised about the potential for a monopoly within the professional body sector, which stakeholders feared might negatively affect the discipline. Given the polarised response and the serious concerns voiced, the merger proposal was quietly shelved, but perhaps not abandoned?

Deaf Human Rights in Crisis Situations.

There has been an increasing number of humanitarian crises cases around the world, both man-made and natural.

Deaf people in the midst of these crisis situations have repeatedly reported to us that they do not have access to basic humanitarian aid due to lack of access to information about where to go or how to respond.

How are deaf people affected by crises and disasters?

- Deaf individuals lack crucial information during disasters due to a lack of sign language interpretation, increasing vulnerability.
- Deaf people face barriers in accessing timely health care information and necessities during emergencies.
- Deaf children in non-signing environments struggle with communication during emergencies, impacting their safety and well-being.
- Shelters and displacement centres often lack sign language information, making it difficult for deaf individuals to access resources.
- Deaf individuals may be excluded from safe spaces and aid programming during humanitarian emergencies.

Learn more from the [World Federation of the Deaf](#), an international non-profit and non-governmental organisation of deaf associations from 136 countries representing 70 million deaf people worldwide.



MAR 25TH

**KELVIN KONG ON
INDIGENOUS HEARING
HEALTH.**



Deafness Forum Australia extends a warm invitation to an address by **Professor Kelvin Kong AM**.

The venue is Parliament House Canberra from 5:30 pm on Monday, 25 March 2024. There is no admission charge.

Kelvin is a proud Worimi man and Australia's first indigenous ENT surgeon and an inspiring advocate for hearing health. In 2023, he was honoured as the NAIDOC Person of the Year. In 2024, he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for his work with Indigenous children at risk of hearing loss.

“Australia still has the worst ear disease rates in the world. I ask the Prime Minister, what if it was your child and they weren't hearing well?”



This event is hosted by **Deafness Forum Australia**, the national peak body for the 3.5 million Australians living with hearing loss.

The Hon. Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health & Aged Care, will give a special introduction.

Refreshments from 5.30 pm for a 6.30 pm start, concluding at 7.45 pm.

RSVP, <https://kelvinkongonindigenoushearing.splashthat.com>

More information, info@deafnessforum.org.au



Professor Kong's presentation is the 25th [Libby Harricks Memorial Oration](#).

Since the first Oration in 1999, the series has featured renowned speakers worldwide and gained international recognition for its exceptional presentations on important hearing health and advocacy issues.



Hearing loss is twice as common in Australia's lowest income groups, research shows.

Hearing loss affects communication and social engagement and limits educational and employment opportunities.

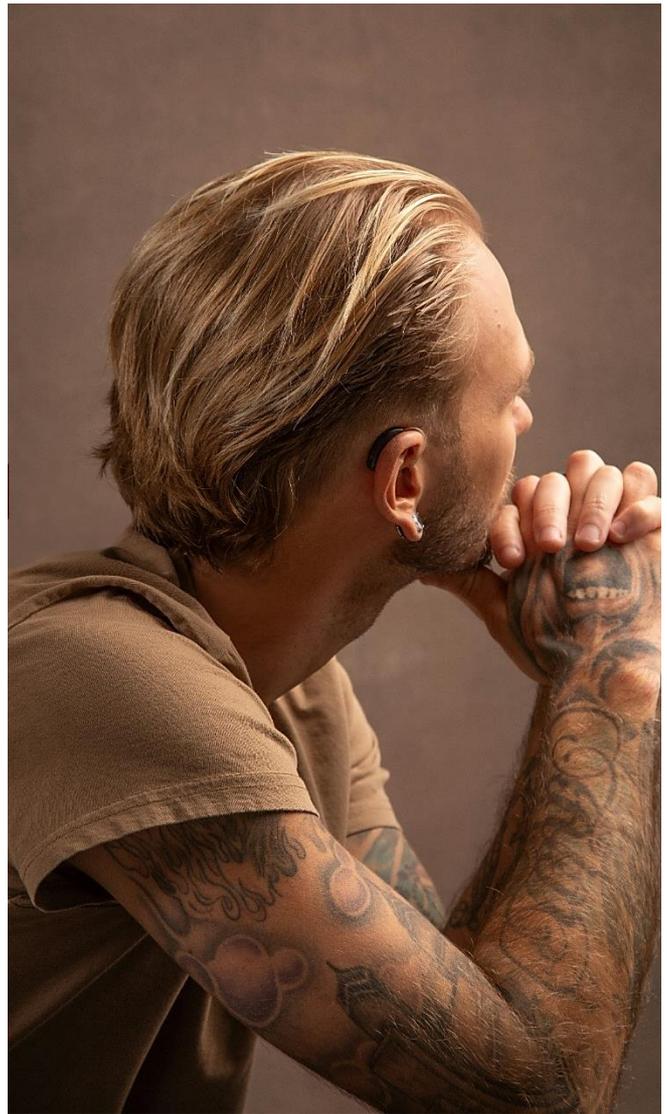
By Mohammad Nure Alam, Kompal Sinha and Piers Dawes, [The Conversation](#)

Effective treatment for hearing loss is available in the form of communication training (for example, lipreading and auditory training), hearing aids and other devices.

But the uptake of treatment is low. In Australia, publicly subsidised hearing care is available predominantly only to children, young people and retirement-age people on a pension. Adults of working age are mostly not eligible for hearing health care under the government's [Hearing Services Program](#).

Our recent study published in the journal [Ear and Hearing](#) showed, for the first time, that working-age Australians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are at much greater risk of hearing loss than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

We believe the lack of socially subsidised hearing care for adults of working age results in poor detection and care for hearing loss among people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This in turn exacerbates social inequalities.



Population data shows hearing inequality.

We analysed a large data set called the Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey that collects information on various aspects of people's lives, including health and hearing loss.

Using a HILDA sub-sample of 10,719 working-age Australians, we evaluated whether self-reported hearing loss was more common among people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds than for those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds between 2008 and 2018.

Relying on self-reported hearing data instead of information from hearing tests is one limitation

of our paper. However, self-reported hearing tends to underestimate actual rates of hearing impairment, so the hearing loss rates we reported are likely an underestimate.

We also wanted to find out whether people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were more likely to develop hearing loss in the long run.

We found people in the lowest income groups were more than twice as likely to have hearing loss than those in the highest income groups. Further, hearing loss was 1.5 times as common among people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods than in the most affluent areas.

For people reporting no hearing loss at the beginning of the study, after 11 years of follow up, those from a more deprived socioeconomic background were much more likely to develop hearing loss. For example, a lack of post-secondary education was associated with a more than 1.5 times increased risk of developing hearing loss compared to those who achieved a bachelor's degree or above.

Overall, men were more likely to have hearing loss than women. As seen in the figure below, this gap is largest for people of low socioeconomic status.

Why are disadvantaged groups more likely to experience hearing loss?

There are several possible reasons hearing loss is more common among people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Noise exposure is one of the biggest risks for hearing loss and people from low socioeconomic backgrounds may be more likely to be exposed to damaging levels of noise in jobs in mining, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture.

Lifestyle factors which may be more prevalent in lower socioeconomic communities such as smoking, unhealthy diet, and a lack of regular exercise are also related to the risk of hearing loss.

Finally, people with lower incomes may face challenges in accessing timely hearing care, alongside competing health needs, which could lead to missed identification of treatable ear disease.

Why does this disparity in hearing loss matter?

We like to think of Australia as an egalitarian society—the land of the fair go. But nearly half of people in Australia with hearing loss are of working age and mostly ineligible for publicly funded hearing services.

Hearing aids with a private hearing care provider cost from around \$1,000 up to more than \$4,000 for higher-end devices. Most people need two hearing aids.

Lack of access to affordable hearing care for working-age adults on low incomes comes with an economic as well as a social cost.

Previous economic analysis estimated hearing loss was responsible for financial costs of around \$20 billion in 2019–20 in Australia. The largest component of these costs was productivity losses (unemployment, under-employment and Jobseeker social security payment costs) among working-age adults.

Providing affordable hearing care for all Australians

Lack of affordable hearing care for working-age adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may significantly exacerbate the impact of hearing loss among deprived communities and worsen social inequalities.

Recently, the federal government has been considering extending publicly subsidised hearing services to lower income working age Australians. We believe reforming the current government Hearing Services Program and expanding eligibility to this group could not only promote a more inclusive, fairer and healthier

society but may also yield overall cost savings by reducing lost productivity.

All Australians should have access to affordable hearing care to have sufficient functional hearing to achieve their potential in life. That's the land of the fair go.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#).

Addressing Hearing Loss Inequity among Vulnerable and First Nations Australians.

The Australian Government's Hearing Services Program aims to reduce the impact of hearing loss by providing eligible people with access to hearing services.

Hearing services may include:

- a comprehensive hearing assessment performed by a qualified hearing services provider
- access to a wide range of quality fully subsidised hearing devices, made by leading manufacturers
- if you are fitted with a hearing device, you will receive advice on how to achieve maximum benefit from your device
- further support and hearing services, which can be accessed even if fitting a hearing device is not suitable
- access to an optional annual maintenance agreement where, for a small fee, you can receive repairs and batteries to support your hearing device.

The **Community Service Obligation** component of the Government program includes individual rehabilitation programs for people with complex hearing rehabilitation needs such as children,

adults with severe to profound hearing loss or severe communication difficulties, including those in aged care. And culturally appropriate programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Deafness Forum Australia and its members say that the objective of the Hearing Services Program should be to ensure that vulnerable groups, those requiring specialised programs to address their hearing needs, and people on low income have access to high-quality hearing services at no cost or minimal cost. In order to do so, the eligibility of the Program should be extended to a broader group of vulnerable people including:

1. People on a Health Care Card, or Low Income Card.

Health Care Card holders and Low Income Health Care Card holders who are not eligible for hearing supports under the National Disability Insurance Scheme should have access to government-funded hearing services as a vulnerable group on low income. Access to hearing services could improve the person's opportunities for further education, employment or advancement within existing employment.

2. Seniors Health Care Card Holders.

As the prevalence of hearing loss increases with age, it is critical to ensure that this population has appropriate access to hearing services so they can continue to engage socially and through employment. There are many self-funded retirees who do not have high levels of superannuation and because they do not receive any concessions on living expenses, struggle to fund the hearing services they need.

The eligibility criteria needs to be reviewed so that it is targeted to the broader ageing population who need assistance with their hearing needs as they age, and who are not in a position to fund these services themselves.

3. Children of refugees.

Most children living with hearing loss in Australia have access to the Hearing Services Program which provides listening devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants as well as early intervention programs to ensure their speech and language outcomes are on par with their hearing peers. These children, up until the age of 26 who are Australian citizens or permanent residents, are given every opportunity to access equitable education to ensure employment opportunities in adulthood.

However, for children with hearing loss living in Australia whose parents may be waiting for citizenship or permanent residency - and therefore, do not fulfil Hearing Services Program eligibility criteria - their opportunities to thrive in adulthood are much more difficult. Firstly, many are fleeing countries with higher rates of chronic otitis media, which if left untreated can lead to life-long hearing loss. They may be unable to access hearing assessments in their country of origin and, once in Australia, due to the visa status of their parents, are denied access to the health care and services provided by the Hearing Services Program that could equip them with the support needed to successfully settle into the Australian community and to access education and jobs. Research shows that in Australia, rates of chronic suppurative otitis media are much higher in refugee populations than in the wider community. Some refugee populations are also at higher risk of developing hearing loss due to exposure to extreme noise during conflict situations in their country of origin.

Being proficient in English is a priority for all refugees and even mild hearing loss will restrict their learning and subsequent access to education, government services and jobs. By providing access to the Hearing Services Program, this small and vulnerable population will have the best chance of successful resettlement and participation in the social and economic life of the nation.

4. People in the criminal justice system.

People held in incarceration experience higher rates of hearing loss than the general population, particularly those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, leading to acute hearing needs that are currently being poorly serviced by current policies.

While the Hearing Services Program is federally funded, prisoners are denied access to the Hearing Services Program because correctional facilities are a state and territory matter. However, without adequate access to the Program, the vicious cycle of social disadvantage, incarceration and recidivism is likely to continue.

5. People in Aged Care.

Research shows that those in aged care have a much higher prevalence of hearing and communication impairment than those living in the community, contributing to further barriers to psychosocial wellbeing. They are more likely to have more complex health conditions combined with hearing loss such as dementia, vision loss and physical impairments, requiring a program that can provide specialist care and support.

Addressing the hearing needs of people in aged care facilities is a complex and challenging problem. Servicing this group is financially unattractive to commercial audiology service providers. **It should be managed through the Government's Community Service Obligation program.**

Implementing this change offers the Department of Health and Aged Care a significant opportunity to enact a practical and impactful response to the Disability Royal Commission's findings on Aged Care. The department can improve the quality and accessibility of care for older people, aligning their actions with the Commission's recommendations for a more inclusive and supportive aged care system.



Australian Child Deafness Research.

The AusChildDeafness-CAG is a group of family members of children who are deaf or hard of hearing who are interested in engaging with researchers on projects relating to the hearing health of children in Australia.

The purpose of the group is to work with hearing researchers to improve outcomes of deaf children and their families in Australia; and provide a platform to exchange advice, guidance and knowledge between researchers and family members with the goal of best meeting the research project aims relating to the hearing health of deaf children in Australia.

We ask members to try to attend at least three meetings a year. These will normally be for one to two hours and take place online. We might also ask members to contribute their views or comment on a piece of research in between meetings via email. Members will be reimbursed for their time dedicated to associated activities. Any member with accessibility needs can raise this with the Chair ahead of scheduled meetings.

Do I need to have particular experience or qualifications?

No. But you do need to be a family member of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing who is aged up to 26 years or be a young person who is deaf or hard of hearing. You should also have interest

in research relating to children and young people – but we do not expect people to have any knowledge in research.

What might I be asked to do?

- Give your views about the kinds of subjects that you think should be researched
- help with the design of research projects
- suggest ways of contacting family members to take part in particular research studies
- help develop information for families about research studies
- comment on questionnaires to be sent to families
- help researchers understand what their findings mean for families
- make sure research findings are communicated in ways that are easy for families to understand.

How can I apply?

Contact auschilddeafness-cag@mcri.edu.au
Applications will be accepted until the end of March 2024.

Can I ask others to apply?

Sure. If you know of other parents/carers or family members of children who are deaf or hard of hearing who might be interested, please feel free to forward this information to them.

Bring your family, friends and fur-babies.



Get ready for the biggest pooch social event of the year at A Dog's Life: Pet Expo on Saturday 23 March, along the scenic Noosa River.

It is a day of doggy fun, supporting Hear No Evil: Australian Deaf Dog Rescue, a charity caring for and rehoming deaf and special needs dogs.

Hear No Evil president, Vicki Law, describes this volunteer-run organisation as having substantial impact, driven by dedication.

A Dog's Life event director Lea Bye is the parent of a son with profound hearing loss and feels passionately about community accessibility for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

“We're proud to present a community event that is inclusive, where everyone can come and enjoy the speakers, demonstrations and fun activities, regardless of their abilities. When my son was younger, we often faced barriers to attending events such as these.”

Tickets at events.humanitix.com/a-dog-s-life-pet-expo-2024

Auslan Day is coming on 13 April.

Deaf Australia is excited to continue the Auslan Day Video Competition for the third year in recognition of our community's beautiful language and to celebrate the anniversary publication of the Auslan dictionary in 1989.

Auslan Day Video Competition Theme this year is Deaf Life Mishaps. You can share your funny stories and experiences related to Deaf culture or Auslan. Deaf people have plenty of amusing misadventures that occur frequently.

For example, if you're signing and you accidentally bump your glasses and they fall off. Or when you're sleeping during a lightning storm and you sleep through it. Tell us your funny story!



Watch the [video](#).



Resilience Amidst the Ruin.

It hasn't been an easy road for Tülay and her two children, Cihan and Hilal* from Türkiye. Both children had cochlear implants fitted at a young age. But the devices were broken. For more than two years, the children couldn't hear, had trouble learning, and became distant from their friends.

Cihan (11) and Hilal (16) couldn't understand their family or friends and became withdrawn, spending hours alone in their rooms.

Then 12 months ago, the family's home was rocked by two massive earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria. 50,000 were killed and 2.7 million people displaced, including Tülay and her children.

“After the earthquake, my kids didn't go to school because they didn't have devices. They couldn't understand, hear or speak. It was a big problem both for me and for their teachers,” the children's mother, Tülay says.

When [Save The Children](#) dropped a care package of household goods and toys at Tülay's temporary home, Tülay described the challenges her children faced. She and her husband had saved just enough money for one implant and were struggling to decide which child to help first.

Save The Children supported Tülay and picked up the bill to get hearing devices fitted for Cihan and Hilal so they could reconnect with their friends and get back to school.



Cihan, Hilal and their siblings lost their home in the 2023 earthquakes hit Türkiye. Photo: Ayşe Nur Gençalp / Save the Children.

Three months since their hearing implants were fitted, the children have experienced dramatic improvements. They're happier than they've been in years.

Tülay says the devices have had a huge impact on Cihan and Hilal's quality of life. Both children can hear and communicate with their family.

“My children are very happy. They get what I say, and I get what they tell me.”

Tülay's middle child, Yasemin, says “my sister had her device put on and she's able to talk now.” Describing her little brother, she adds “before the devices were fitted, we couldn't understand each other very well. Now we draw

pictures together, play Jenga, and when we play games, he is very smart and shares everything with me.”

While things have dramatically improved, the earthquakes have left a mark on the family that’s still palpable one year on. Displacement, disruption to routine and financial pressures are a heavy burden for families facing compounding crises like these.

“My kids are my number one priority,” Tülay says. And with the recent addition of the cat 'Gece' to the family, who shares a unique bond with the children due to her hearing impairment, their home is filled with even more joy and love.



Photo: Ayşe Nur Gençalp / Save the Children. Main photo by Jordi Matas / Save the Children.

*Names of the children were changed to protect identities.

International Sharing.

The Shepherd Centre was named a recipient of an Australia–Japan Foundation grant aimed at enhancing a long–standing partnership with its counterpart in Shizuoka, Japan.

For more than ten years, The Shepherd Centre and The Infant Hearing Support Centre at

Shizuoka General Prefectural Hospital have collaborated on research and developing programs for children with hearing loss, focusing on listening and spoken language skills.



With this new grant, The Shepherd Centre plans to organise events and training sessions to build stronger ties and share expertise. Activities will include information exchange sessions with The Infant Hearing Support Centre. The Shepherd Centre’s clinical team members will share their approach to supporting children with hearing loss and their families, focusing on their family-centred, team-based model.

The grant will also support training for hearing health professionals in Shizuoka on early listening support and outcomes for children with hearing loss.

The project is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and aims to improve the lives of children with hearing loss in Japan by leveraging The Shepherd Centre’s expertise.

The [Shepherd Centre](#) is a specialist in helping children with hearing loss learn to listen and speak. Child-safe programs meet the needs of children at all ages and stages, from world-leading early intervention system for babies and toddlers to its mentoring program, *Hear for You*, which supports school-aged children and teenagers.



Update on the review of the NDIS – what’s in the works.



By Hayley Stone, Director of National Disability Policy and Advocacy for Deafness Forum Australia.

The Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Bill Shorten began a review of the NDIS in October 2022.

The Review had three main objectives: to put people with disability at the centre of the NDIS, restore trust, confidence, and pride in the NDIS, and ensure sustainability for future generations.

It had significant community engagement, receiving 4,000 submissions before releasing a final report on December 7, 2023, which detailed 26 recommendations and 139 supporting actions to get the scheme ‘back on track’.

While the federal, state, and territory governments have yet to formally respond to the Review’s recommendations, there have already been changes made to the Scheme since Minister Shorten took over the portfolio in June 2022.

Some of this work started before or during the Review. Other actions have commenced as a direct consequence of the Review’s recommendations.

Here’s what we understand has already been done, or is in the works:

Legislative reform.

All Australian Governments have committed to implementing legislative reform and making other necessary changes to support the NDIS Review’s vision of an expanded ecosystem of supports and services for people with disability. This includes legislative changes to both the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act* and the introduction of a new *Disability Services and Inclusion Act* to replace the *Disability Service Act 1986*.

While we are yet to learn much in the way of details about the changes being planned to the *National Disability Insurance Act*, we know that the Government has had conversations with some Disability Representative Organisations on draft changes to the Act which have been flagged as going out to public consultation soon. When we have access to the changes, we’ll review them, and let you know what has been proposed.

The new *Disability Services and Inclusion Act* strengthens quality and safeguarding arrangements for people with disability who access services outside the NDIS. The new ACT introduces a mandatory code of conduct and certification for any person who receives Commonwealth funding to provide activities or programs to support people with disability.

The new Act also simplifies funding processes for these activities. We anticipate that the *Disability Service and Inclusion Act* will be the

primary legislation governing foundational supports we've provided further details

Market reform.

The NDIS marketplace has been a particular focus for the Minister, who has publicly called out fraud, overservicing of participants, and excessive pricing for NDIS clients amongst a broad range of concerns. The Australian Government has invested \$10.2 million in funding for repairing the NDIS market and developing better ways to access and pay for supports.

In November 2022, a month after the Independent Review of the NDIS was announced, the Government established a Fraud Fusion Taskforce, jointly administered by Services Australia and the National Disability Insurance Agency. A key priority of the Taskforce is to support the safety of NDIS Participants and ensure that NDIS funding is utilised appropriately.



Another initiative, which was announced more recently is a new NDIS Provider and Worker Registration Taskforce, chaired by lawyer and disability advocate Natalie Wade. The purpose of the task force is to provide expert advice to the Government on how to move forward on the Review's recommendations for increased regulation of NDIS service providers while balancing the need to preserve consumer choice and control and maintain a robust marketplace.

In addition to these welcome changes, we understand there are also positive legislative

reforms on the cards to address the overcharging of NDIS participants by unscrupulous providers – and we look forward to reviewing the specific details of these changes in due course.

Foundational Supports.

The Independent NDIS Review noted that supports for people with disability who were not participants in the NDIS either did not exist or were difficult to find.

The Review recommended the development of 'foundational supports' which could be accessed by people who were not eligible for the NDIS and spoke to the need for two different 'streams' of foundational supports – **general foundational supports** for all people with disability, and **targeted supports** for people with specific disability related support needs.

While the vision of a two-tiered system for foundational supports was the brainchild of the Review Panel, reestablishing state and territory-level supports for those excluded from the NDIS was already on the Federal Government agenda.

Eight months before the release of the Review's final report, Minister Shorten stated:

"There needs to be investment in community-based programs - sports, recreation, education - and ensuring these programs are better integrated into the support mix for NDIS participants, because the NDIS in isolation can't deliver independence, and because it was never conceived or promised to support every Australian with any disability."

National Cabinet agreed in January this year that the Commonwealth, states, and territories will work together to co-fund and co-commission the establishment of foundational supports for Australians with a disability aged under 65 – we now know it's not a matter of whether foundational supports will be introduced, but rather, when they will commence.

For those who are close to 65 or older this raises two key questions:

- Will the Government recant on its decision to cap foundational supports to those over 65, and acknowledge that the distinction between disability supports and aged care is primarily an arbitrary one, and
- Will those who have access to foundational supports prior to turning 65 be able to retain the foundational supports they have grown to rely on after they turn 65?

We predict that unless we push back strongly, foundational supports will become an extension on the inequalities that currently exist between the NDIS and Aged Care systems, and yet another example of older Australians being left behind.

To date, the Commonwealth has invested \$11.6 million over two years to develop and implement a Foundational Supports Strategy, to be directly informed by the disability community, families, carers, and researchers. We know that the NDIS Review recommended that the Foundational Supports Strategy should be developed with an advisory group of disability representative organisations and people with lived experience of disability, and we anticipate that the Government will follow through on this recommendation. Having said this, we're yet to learn if such a group has been set up, and if not, what organisations and people with lived experience will be invited to the 'table'. This is particularly relevant to advocates for people who are Deaf or hearing challenged since the Government has previously explicitly highlighted people with hearing loss as a cohort that is anticipated to benefit from targeted foundational supports.

The Government has advised that plans for the Strategy will be put to the National Cabinet for consideration in the latter part of this year.

Improving effectiveness.

In the 2023-24 Federal Budget, the government committed a massive \$910 million over 4 years to improve the effectiveness and delivery of the NDIS. Of this amount \$429.5 million has been committed to building workforce capacity and

systems, \$54.6 million for reforming the processes around determining budgets, \$3.6 million has been earmarked for foundational work on the development of a best-practice system of early childhood supports and \$49.7 million has been put towards improved home and living options.

Since October 2023, the NDIA has been slowly rolling out a new computer system to improve delivery of the NDIS, which will apply to both participants and providers. The NDIA released a new Supported Decision-Making Policy to empower participants to make decisions around applying for the NDIS, goal setting, and using plan supports.



To say that it is a busy time in the evolution of the NDIS is an understatement. To my mind, this makes sense – the Albanese Government has a limited timeframe to make as many foundational changes as possible before the next federal election and a vested interest in the NDIS as a Labor-driven scheme. The challenge is getting the balance right – if the Government wants to put people with disability back at the centre of the NDIS, and restore trust, confidence, and pride in the Scheme, people with disability must have an investment and ownership in its evolution – and this can only come through genuine consultation and co-design. These processes take time.

Another reflection is the extent to which the Review appears to have provided legitimacy for decisions already made by Government – it's as if Government has drafted up a plan and laid the foundations, with the Review then providing the scaffolding and materials to realise that plan.

While we don't see this as a negative, given the strong investment the government has in the NDIS as a cornerstone of our social support system, and noting that the Review was explicit from the beginning in advising that it would not wait to make recommendations for change, it indicates that this is not simply Government responding to the disability community. There is a broader political agenda here, and a little bit of scepticism will be a good thing across the sector as we get into the nuts and bolts planning.

Deafness Forum Australia has direct links to the National Disability Agency, aka NDIA (the government body that manages the NDIS) through sector co-design and stakeholder manager meetings which we've used to promote the interests of our constituents. In addition to these activities, over the last three months, we've provided the NDIA with a report on our NDIS Independent Review Survey, contributed to a joint position paper collated by the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations on preliminary concerns with the review's recommendations, and provided feedback on the NDIA's draft Agency strategy.

We will continue to advocate the interests of our stakeholders and inform you of any new information as it becomes available to share.

Are you aware of any other changes to the NDIS we've missed? Do you have thoughts that you'd like to share? Please feel free to reach out to me directly – hayley.stone@deafnessforum.org.au.

Our survey on the NDIS Independent Review is still open.

A quick reminder that we are still running our NDIS Independent Review Survey to understand your initial impression of the Independent Review's key recommendations and collate any questions you have about the reforms. You can access the survey via the link – <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3MXC69P>.

A big thank you to all who have completed the survey to date – we've already provided a summary report of your responses to key government stakeholders.



March 20th is United Nations International Day of Happiness.

There are lots of issues in our world right now. We can't always change what is happening, but we can choose how we respond.

Give positive comments to as many people as possible today



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Really listen to what people say, without judging them



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Happiness and Social Isolation.

Social connections play a crucial role in people's wellbeing, happiness, and health. Studies have shown that individuals who maintain positive relationships tend to live longer and happier lives. The evidence consistently highlights the importance of social connections in promoting happiness and overall wellbeing.

Social isolation can lead to harmful health outcomes, lower quality of life, and limited access to health-promoting resources through a social support network.

Sensory impairments, particularly hearing and vision, have been linked to social isolation. Sensory impairment may impact daily functioning, mobility, and communication, disrupting the quantity and quality of one's social interactions and the ability to participate in activities that promote socialisation.

Reach out to a friend, family member or colleague for support



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

Given older adults, and particularly older adults with sensory loss, have more frequent healthcare encounters, there is a significant opportunity within the healthcare system for identifying and addressing social isolation with benefits for downstream health and mental health outcomes.

Deafness Council WA turns 50.

Celebrating half a century of empowering the deaf and hard of hearing community in Western Australia.

The [Deafness Council W.A](#) is a coordinating body whose role is facilitating the work of Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals and agencies. The Council encourages relevant research and represents the needs and interests of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing to decision makers.



Deafness Council President Barry MacKinnon AM.



Harvey with Lily Conlin, first person identified with a hearing loss after the introduction of neo-natal screening in WA.



Jenelle Macri, Community Engagement and Services Coordinator; parliamentarian Hon Sophia Moermond MLC; Raelene Walker co-chair Deafness Council WA (and Deafness Forum Australia vice chair); Hon. Martin Brian Pritchard MLC.



NDIS Independent Review Survey

What we've learnt

Thanks to everyone who has already contributed to Deafness Forum's NDIS Independent Review Survey. We've been collating responses and using this information to guide our discussions with the NDIA and other key stakeholders. Here's a summary of key findings to date.



41% of participants are confused about the changes and what they mean for them.

28% of participants were feel hopeful about the proposed reforms.



The most popular recommendation is increased supports for young children and their families

The least popular recommendation is the introduction of foundational supports



People are most uncertain about the introduction of a new assessment model to determine eligibility

We want to know your thoughts!

To have your say, and support our policy work in this space, use the QR code or go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3MXC69P>



John Byrne and Aemon Doak celebrate Deafness Council WA's 50 years of community service.

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

Email hello@deafnessforum.org.au

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