

24 November 2021



We call for a mandatory vaccination policy by providers of hearing services in Australia

Deafness Forum is urging hearing services providers, large and small, to do the right thing and implement a policy of mandatory COVID vaccinations for all their clinical and support staff that provide hearing services directly to clients in any environment.

Google searches for “learn sign language for beginners” skyrocket with new Deaf hero

“I didn’t really see anyone like myself ever represented on the screen,” said actress Lauren Ridloff. “Deaf and hard of hearing people are really taking this opportunity to push for more movie subtitling (captions), and I’m just thrilled that that’s happening.”

Aussie business success

“It’s not about hearing aids, it’s about hearing tech.” Brisbane-based Audeara announces a new partnership to sell its headphones with Sonova subsidiaries Connect Hearing and Blamey Saunders hears, taking the number of stockists above 800.

Everybody’s talking Telehealth

When 30 diverse organisations from around the world meet, it’s rare that one topic emerges as a universal priority. But that’s what happened when members of Ida Institute came together online representing hearing care professionals, consumers, academics, and students – and the word on everyone’s lips was telehealth.

How I discovered my deaf identity

Have you ever wondered about all the different deaf identities out there? Deaf identity can be a complex concept to understand but is incredibly diverse and unique to our culture and community.

Deafness Forum of Australia is the peak national body representing the views and interests of all Australians who live with hearing loss, people who have an ear or balance disorders, and the families that support them. Our mission is to make hearing health & wellbeing a national priority in Australia.

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

Mandatory vaccination policy - providers of hearing services

In an Open letter this week to major audiology chains and their representatives, Deafness Forum of Australia has called for providers of hearing services to introduce a mandatory vaccination policy.

Deafness Forum acknowledged hearing services providers, clinicians and customer care staff for continuing to meet the hearing and communication needs of Australians of all ages throughout the COVID pandemic. It is recognised that this required staff to put themselves at risk at times, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic. Staff also needed to adapt to delivering services in more innovative ways, as well as applying more rigorous infection control protocols.

But now that we are moving to more reliance on vaccinations, there does not appear to be a clear approach for protecting people who are accessing hearing services in the future.

Unvaccinated people are estimated to be 10-20 times more likely to pass on the virus to other people than vaccinated people [[source](#)]. This is particularly concerning given that people with hearing loss are most likely to be vulnerable (e.g., those under 12 who cannot yet be vaccinated and the elderly).

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee has recommended mandatory vaccination for disability support workers. Some States and Territories have issued Public Health Orders in relation to mandatory vaccination for people working in residential aged care facilities, hospitals and disability support workers. Queensland Health has issued a Public Health Direction requiring all healthcare workers including audiologists and support staff to be vaccinated.

Deafness Forum chair David Brady said, "We believe it is important to remove any ambiguity and provide confidence to people who rely on hearing services."

"We urge hearing services providers, large and small, to take the lead and implement a policy of mandatory vaccination for clinical and support staff that provide hearing services directly to clients in any setting, such as a person's home, a clinic, a visiting location, or a school" he said.

Having an industry-specific policy would:

- remove ambiguity about which staff are covered by a mandatory vaccination policy
- provide clarity on the workplaces/settings covered by a mandatory vaccination policy
- ensure consistency across the country
- cover any gaps in current Public Health Orders/Directions in States and Territories

The implementation of a mandatory vaccination policy for all hearing services staff involved in direct service delivery would reassure consumers that the hearing care staff they are seeing were vaccinated, especially as the staff are not obliged to reveal their vaccination status.

Deafness Forum requests providers publish their vaccination policy on their websites, perhaps by the end of the year. This would improve transparency for consumers.

Deafness Forum asked the Government - as it has for the disability workforce - to require Hearing Services Program (HSP) providers to implement mandatory vaccination of their client-facing workforce because the majority of HSP clients are highly vulnerable.

Deafness Forum contacted its international counterparts, encouraging them to promote this initiative.

World Hearing Day

3 March 2022

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



Announcement: 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 all will focus on the importance of safe listening as a means of maintaining good hearing across the life course as recommended in the World report on hearing.

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

The World Health Organization calls on governments, 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

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

Google searches for Sign Language classes spiked 250% after Marvel's first Deaf Superhero

By [Julian Rizzo-Smith](#) for [Pedestrian](#)

A lot of people reportedly seem to be interested in learning sign language after Marvel's first deaf superhero in *Eternals*, effectively proving that representation matters.

In the film, hearing-impaired actress Lauren Ridloff plays Makkari, a deaf member of the Eternals team who can move at superhuman speeds. One of the best parts of her story is how her disability doesn't define her and how her fellow teammates – costars Angelina Jolie, Kumail Nanjiani, Barry Keoghan, and more – communicate with her in American Sign Language.

According to research from an online language tutor service called Preply, via [Independent](#), search results for learning the language have skyrocketed since the film was released.

Specifically, the term "learn sign language for beginners" has increased by 250%. Search results for "Lauren Ridloff" globally increased by 550%, too, while searches for "first deaf superhero" doubled since November 2020, when the film was first announced.

In an interview with [Variety](#), Ridloff gushed over the experience of seeing herself truly represented on screen and being the representation she and other hearing-impaired people needed.

"It felt like a lifetime of waiting," she told the outlet, via an ASL interpreter. "I didn't really see anyone like myself ever represented on the screen."

"...From the deaf and hard of hearing community, the response has been very positive. I feel like a lot of people are thrilled just to see a deaf person of colour in the movie.

"But also what I'm seeing is deaf and hard of hearing people are really taking this opportunity to push for more movie subtitling (captions), and I'm just thrilled that that's happening," she continued.

"I think it is an important conversation that we need to continue to have. We just need to normalise subtitles (captions)."

Similar to the other minorities represented in *Eternals*, none of her team-mates comment on the fact she's deaf. Director Chloé Zhao doesn't take a moment to explain why Makkari is hearing-impaired which, in doing so, fantastically normalises it to its audience. Just like it should be in real life, her disability is merely an extension of her that they all embrace.

Eternals isn't the only recently-released blockbuster project to embrace the hearing-impaired community. Disney's *Only Murders in the Building* had an entire episode in American Sign Language and subtitles, and *The Quiet Place* is a horror film centered around the absence of noise and stars a deaf teen.



Study links noise-induced inner ear nerve damage to fluid buildup

Reviewed by [Emily Henderson, B.Sc.](#)

Exposure to loud noise, such as a firecracker or an ear-splitting concert, is the most common preventable cause of hearing loss. Research suggests that 12% or more of the world population is at risk for noise-induced loss of hearing.

Loud sounds can cause a loss of auditory nerve cells in the inner ear, which are responsible for sending acoustic information to the brain, resulting in hearing difficulty. However, the mechanism behind this hearing loss is not fully understood.

Now, a new study from Keck Medicine of University of Southern California links this type of inner ear nerve damage to a condition known as endolymphatic hydrops, a buildup of fluid in the inner ear, showing they both occur at noise exposure levels people might encounter in their daily life.

Additionally, researchers found that treating the resulting fluid buildup with a readily available saline solution lessened nerve damage in the inner ear.

This research was led by John Oghalai, MD, otolaryngologist with Keck Medicine, chair of the USC Caruso Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery.

He said it provides clues to better understand how and when noise-induced damage to the ears occurs and suggests new ways to detect and prevent hearing loss.



A previous study by Oghalai conducted on mice exposed to blast pressure waves simulating a bomb explosion linked nerve damage with fluid buildup in the inner ear. Oghalai and colleagues wanted to explore the effect of common loud sounds ranging from 80 to 100 decibels. After the exposure, they used an imaging technique to measure the level of inner ear fluid in the cochlea.

Up until exposure to 95 decibels of sound, the inner ear fluid level remained normal. However, researchers discovered that after exposure to 100 decibels - which is equivalent to sounds such as a power lawn mower, chain saw or motorcycle - mice developed inner ear fluid buildup within hours. A week after this exposure, the animals were found to have lost auditory nerve cells.

However, when researchers applied hypertonic saline, a salt-based solution used to treat nasal congestions in humans, into affected ears one hour after the noise exposure, both the immediate fluid buildup and the long-term nerve damage lessened.

These study results have several important implications, especially as the loss of nerve cells in the inner ear is known as "hidden hearing loss" because hearing tests are unable to detect damage.

"First, if human ears exposed to loud noise, such as a siren or airbag deployment, can be scanned for a level of fluid buildup - and this technology is already being tested out - medical professionals may have a way of diagnosing impending nerve damage," he said. "Secondly, if the scan discovered fluid buildup, people could be treated with hypertonic saline and possibly save their hearing."

He also believes the study opens a new window into understanding Meniere's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that causes vertigo, ringing in the ears (tinnitus) and hearing loss.

"Previously, inner ear fluid buildup was thought to be primarily linked to Meniere's disease. This study indicates that people exposed to loud noises experience similar changes," he said.

Oghalai hopes this study will lead to further research on the reasons ear fluid buildup occurs, and encourage the development of better treatments for Meniere's disease.

The study was supported by the United States National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders.

From [University of Southern California - Health Sciences](#) Journal reference: Badash, I., *et al.* (2021) Endolymphatic Hydrops is a Marker of Synaptopathy Following Traumatic Noise Exposure. *Frontiers in Cell and Developmental Biology*. doi.org/10.3389/fcell.2021.747870

Hearing Australia publishes its Annual Report

"Hearing Australia exceeded its operational and financial targets for 2020-21 and helped almost 290,000 clients during the year, a new record, while maintaining 84-86 per cent satisfaction rates."

"Our people have stood up across the nation, and I thank them for the resilience and caring they bring to their work every day, especially in the face of the pandemic and the associated health restrictions and lockdowns."

Dr Peta Seaton AM
Chair
Hearing Australia



Read and download the Annual Report [here](#)



The conference will be a hybrid event, hosted online to the world with a face to face event in Perth.

Pre-Conference Wednesday 29 June

Main Conference Thursday 30 to Friday 1 July

Esplanade Hotel Fremantle by Rydges, Western Australia



https://youtu.be/frsgGTE_oK4

The National conference “Deafblind Keeping Connected through COVID and beyond” in 2022 will support connection and reconnecting people with deafblindness and those who support them across Australia. It is the only forum in Australia with capacity to educate, connect, and support across sectors: deafblind individuals, families, service providers, educators, allied health and community organisations. More details [here](#).

HEARRING Round Table on cochlear implantation

Catchup with the presentations from a panel of internationally renowned experts at the recent HEARRING Round Table on Cochlear Implantation by MED-EL Implant Systems Australasia. Watch inspiring presentations [here](#) on latest research from around the world.



Hearing tech Audeara signs fresh supply deal

By Matt Ogg for [Business News Australia](#)



Within a month of further expansion in the United States, Brisbane-based hearing technology company [Audeara](#) has announced a new partnership to continue sales momentum for its headphones here in Australia.

The company has reached an agreement with Sonova subsidiaries Connect Hearing and Blamey Saunders hears (BSh) to stock its products in their network of more than 100 hearing health centres nationwide, taking the group's number of stockists above 800.

The news follows a strong performance in the September quarter when sales rose 49 per cent year-on-year, underpinned by Audeara's strengthened commercial relationship with Amplifon Australia which has expanded its footprint through the [\\$550 million purchase of Bay Audio](#).

Audeara has also been aided by changes to the Government's Hearing Services Program (HSP) since July that have led to a greater focus on assisted listening devices (ALDs) at hearing health clinics, including more funding for devices like Audeara's.

"Audeara has great momentum in the Australian hearing health market with the pace of growth in our clinic relationships exceeding even our own expectations," says Audeara's co-founder and CEO James Fielding.

Connect Hearing and BSh managing director Michelle Lawson says her companies' goal is to empower clients to take control of their hearing as crucial to their future health.

"It's not about hearing aids, it's about hearing tech," Lawson says.

Despite the positive announcement, AUA shares have fallen 40 per cent since the group's May initial public offering.

Telehealth top of the international agenda



When 30 diverse organisations from around the world meet, it's rare that one topic emerges as a universal priority. But that's what happened at the Person-centred Hearing Network meeting.

The members of Ida Institute based in Denmark came together online from five continents, representing hearing care professionals, consumers, academics, and students – and the word on everyone's lips was "telehealth."

They discussed the challenges and opportunities unique to different regions and made plans to support professionals and consumers facing a shift to remote care.



That's Australia's Christine Hunter in the little image at left. Christine is a Deafness Forum adviser, our representative on the board of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, and the immediate past president of Hearing Matters Australia.

Deafness Foundation



Deafness Forum is very happy to announce and welcome our **newest member** organisation! A warm welcome to the Deafness Foundation. Melbourne's [Deafness Foundation](#) was established in 1973 and supports the deaf and hard of hearing in the community.

The early voting period has started for the 2021 NSW Local Council elections

Voting open

Postal vote [applications are still open](#). Applications close Monday, 29 November.

iVote [applications and iVote voting are now open](#).

In-person early voting (pre-poll) is open. Find out where to vote by [entering your enrolled address in the search box](#).

Electoral material (including how-to-vote information) [is available online](#).

Visit the NSW Electoral Commission's website for [more information about the elections](#).

Electoral material and how-to-vote information

All candidates and campaign workers handing out printed election information during the early voting period and on election day must stand at least 100 meters from the entrance to a polling place. This is to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission between electors, election staff and political participants. To help you cast your vote, information about candidates, groups and parties is [available on the NSW Electoral Commission's website](#).

Information for communities

The NSW Electoral Commission developed a range of resources including videos and [translated information](#) to help raise awareness about the elections and support access to voting. For these elections, a [Stakeholder engagement kit is presented on a web page](#), which links to the community information and education resources across the website.



Announcement - new way for people to contact the Disability Royal Commission.

You can now make an enquiry using a **text message**. The number is 0459 906 629.

If you have a question about the Commission, want to learn about the different ways to share your experience you can send a message on this number any time.

For more information about contacting the Royal Commission, visit the website [Contact page](#).

You can watch an [Auslan video](#) about this.

Deafness Forum receives funding to promote the work of the Disability Royal Commission.



How I discovered my deaf identity

By [Danielle Guth](#) at [HearingLikeMe.com](#)

Have you ever wondered about all the different deaf identities out there? Or have you ever felt confused about why a person identifies with a certain deaf identity? Deaf identity can be a complex concept to understand but is incredibly diverse and unique to our culture and community. It exists on a continuum.

One's diagnosed hearing loss/deafness may not "appear" to align with their diagnosis. However, deaf identity is so much more than a diagnosis or severity of hearing loss.

Generally speaking, deaf identity refers to how one relates to or identifies with the deaf community. One may choose to identify as capital "D" Deaf (fully immersed in Deaf culture) or lowercase "d" deaf. People who identify as the latter tend to view their deafness as one aspect of their identity instead of the main part of it. Rather than aligning with Deaf culture, they may consider themselves part of a speaking deaf community.

Read More: [Why lower case "d" deaf culture matters](#)

Discovering my Deaf Identity

As someone who has had hearing loss my entire life, I have primarily used hearing aids and spoken English to communicate. For the longest time up until my 20's, I identified as hard of hearing because I had a moderate to severe (now almost fully severe) hearing loss. I've also lived in a hearing world, so this identity seemed suitable. However, I always felt like there was something missing. I was always stuck in the middle between not being fully hearing, and also not being profoundly Deaf. I felt as though I was not Deaf enough. People saw my hearing aids and saw that I could speak. It has always been as if I'm hearing, yet I'm not.

Read More: [Deaf community and deaf culture](#)

As I began my studies in psychology with a drive to work with deaf and hard of hearing individuals, I began taking Deaf culture and American Sign Language courses. My eyes were opened in unexpected ways. I instantly fell in love with the culture and the language. I started to realize that I don't have to be diagnosed with a profound deafness in order to identify as lower case "d" deaf

and be a part of this amazingly unique culture and community. When using sign language and communicating with other deaf and hard of hearing individuals, I feel alive – an experience I didn't fully have until recent years.

"I started to realise that I don't have to be diagnosed with a profound deafness in order to identify as lower case "d" deaf and be a part of this amazingly unique culture and community."

My eyes opened even more as my hearing loss began to progress. I started exploring different environments in which I needed different accommodations. What worked my entire life simply wasn't working anymore. Another particularly defining moment that highlighted my identity was recognizing the beauty of not wearing my hearing aids and having that complete silence without sensory overload or listening fatigue. I realized just how beautiful and even useful it can actually be to be deaf. It wasn't necessary to extend so much energy trying to hear. I could just follow my captioner without all of the distractions of noise, etc. and I appreciated the profound silence in so many ways.

New Awareness

While some adjustments were/are frustrating and challenging, it's an ongoing process that has awakened me to just how adaptable we can be, how empowering it can be to be have to be so resourceful, and find even more new ways of doing things, even when you already thought you've had it all figured out. These experiences showed me that I AM deaf enough, a sign that I've been looking for my entire life.

Today, I identify with the deaf community through continuously learning and using sign language, connecting with other deaf and hard of hearing individuals, using alternative methods of communication such as captioning or signed content, taking a break from my hearing aids/assistive technology, and being an advocate for myself and others in the community.

Read More: [Am I not deaf enough? Finding my hearing loss identity](#)

Finding your own deaf identity

If you're reading this article as someone who is struggling to find your own deaf identity, here are some things I've learned from my journey:

Your diagnosis/severity of hearing loss does not have to align with your chosen identity.

You don't need to justify your deaf identity to others. After all, it's yours and yours only.

It's okay to change your deaf identity. With new experiences comes new insight.

If you feel caught between two worlds, your identity is still valid.

Using hearing assistive technology doesn't have to define your identity.

Not everyone will understand your identity, and that's okay.

You don't need a certain degree of deafness to utilize accommodations/services that provide equal access. It's your right regardless of your degree of hearing loss.

It's okay if you're still not sure what your hearing loss identity is. It can be a complicated process.

What others should know about people who identify as deaf

If you're reading this as someone who is hearing, here are some things we want you to know:

We don't all communicate the same. Some of us speak, some of us use technology, others sign and don't speak. We all have our own preferences and what works for us. Respect our preferences.

Please don't judge how we choose to identify. There is so much that goes into our identity that cannot be seen on the surface, and so much to know about deaf identity and Deaf culture.

Be inclusive. Provide alternative means of communication, even if it's writing, learning basic sign, etc. All we want is to be included like everyone else. Inclusion can shape our identity in positive ways, but exclusion can always hurt.

Be an ally. You don't have to be deaf or hard of hearing to help us advocate. In fact, the more hearing people that speak up with us, the more our identity can be seen, heard, and accepted.

The Bottom Line

We all have identities and the way we identify is unique to our own selves, our own experiences, perspectives, preferences, and much more. Every single person you meet has a story that is remarkably different from one person to the next. Even two people who have the exact same diagnosis of hearing loss, or seem equally involved in the community, can choose to identify very differently because the way in which they experience their hearing loss will not be equivalent. That's okay. We were born to be different, to be ourselves, and be whomever we choose to be.

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

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

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

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