

Surfer's Ear





The Secrets of Hearing

Imagine being at a bustling party, surrounded by multiple conversations, yet somehow managing to focus on just one person talking.

This remarkable ability is something many can take for granted. However, for people with hearing challenges, understanding speech in noisy environments can be a significant challenge.

Researchers at Oregon Health & Science University in the U.S. have made groundbreaking discoveries about how this ability - to focus on just one person talking in a crowd - develops in children. Their study focuses on "binaural pitch fusion," a process where the brain combines different pitches from each ear into a single sound. This process allows us to tune in to specific voices while tuning out others.

What Did the Study Find?

The Oregon University study revealed that binaural pitch fusion is still developing in pre-adolescent children. Even children with typical hearing experience difficulties with speech perception in noisy environments due to immature binaural fusion. However, as they grow older, their ability to separate sounds improves significantly.

The findings have exciting implications for developing more effective interventions. By understanding how and when this ability develops, clinicians can create targeted treatments to improve speech perception in noisy environments.

Researchers suggest several potential strategies:

- **Quieter Classroom Environments:** Using microphone systems in classrooms can help children hear more clearly over background noise.
- **Music Training:** Music has been shown to sharpen binaural fusion, making it a promising tool for improving auditory development in children.

Looking to the Future

The ultimate goal is to prevent the development of abnormally broad fusion and reduce its impacts. By studying the biological structures involved in binaural fusion during childhood development, researchers hope to develop new or more targeted uses of hearing devices.

This research not only sheds light on how children develop their hearing abilities but also offers hope for improving learning and developmental outcomes for all children, regardless of their hearing status.

From [Research Reveals New Insights on Kids' Hearing Development](#)

Auslan, Interpreting and Translating Qualifications Review

The Australian Government has responded to a recommendation of the Disability Royal Commission in 2022 to increase the number of Auslan Interpreters available to the community.

This new project, managed by Public Skills Australia, will review the current qualifications, their utilisation and structure and identify key areas of improvement. The project's objectives are to identify and document the issues, barriers and opportunities associated with the Auslan, Interpreting and Translating qualifications.

Specifically, Public Skills Australia will review the:

- utilisation of the Auslan training qualifications
- ability of Registered Training Organisations and TAFEs to effectively deliver interpreter training
- transition from training qualification to employment as an Auslan interpreter.

The project outcome will provide recommendations to focus on ensuring the qualifications meet the current and future needs of the industry. It will also address key barriers to training delivery and interpreter employment. These findings will support the goal of increasing the number of qualified Auslan interpreters to meet the growing demand as identified by the recent Disability Royal Commission.

Please visit

<http://www.publicskillsaustralia.org.au/projects> for more information on upcoming consultative workshops, feedback opportunities, consultation outcomes and more project updates.



Missed our 'Tinnitus Unveiled' Webinar? Here's Your Chance to Catch Up!

As part of Tinnitus Awareness Week 2025 (3-9 Feb), we hosted a free webinar called 'Tinnitus Unveiled'.

This exclusive webcast featured experts Myriam Westcott, Ben Hoddinott, and Victoria Didenko. They shared valuable information on the causes of tinnitus, its impact on daily life, and effective ways to manage it.

The session covered how tinnitus affects the brain, the role of stress and emotions, and the importance of seeking support and further research.

If you weren't able to join us, don't worry! You can still catch the recording, read the transcript, and explore additional resources [here](#).



Kipp's Story of Starting School Without Support



Kipp is a 4-year-old deaf child, has started pre-primary in Esperance, Western Australia, without the necessary Auslan translator. Despite receiving full-time funding for an education assistant, no one has taken on the job, forcing Kipp's parents to fill in.

Parents, Sarah and Damian have had to take time off work to interpret for Kipp in the classroom. This situation has put a significant strain on their family and finances, potentially forcing them to relocate or consider placing Kipp in a deaf education centre in Perth.

The shortage of Auslan interpreters extends beyond regional areas into metropolitan areas, affecting an entire generation of deaf children's access to equal education. Brophy had to fight to secure full-time funding for Kipp's education assistant, escalating the issue to the Department of Education's director general's office.

The Department of Education does not keep central records of interpreter requirements, leaving staffing decisions to individual schools. Options for schools struggling to find interpreters include contracting freelance Auslan interpreters or using video conference interpreting services.

Brophy hopes to find someone for Kipp's role soon, as she recognises the importance of his independence and social confidence in these foundational years of schooling. The lack of proper support could have long-lasting detrimental effects on Kipp's education and future prospects.

By [Holly Thompson](#), a journalist with WAtoday, specialising in education. From [Kipp is Deaf: he started school in WA this year without a translator](#)





Surfer's Ear

Surfer's ear affects the auditory canal. That's the thin tube which conveys sound waves from our surroundings, channelling them towards the sensory organs which generate our sense of hearing.

These inner portions of the ear are shielded by bone. This is because the anatomical structures that turn air pressure waves into sounds – the eardrum, ossicles and cochlea – are very small, very sensitive and would be easily and irreparably damaged if not protected.

Ideally, our ear canals should be clear and unobstructed. Sure, sometimes they can get clogged up with wax and even sometimes foreign bodies can work their way inside.

But surfer's ear causes an obstruction of the ear canal in a different manner. Growths start to develop on the bone which lines the auditory canal.

As these growths continue to develop, they push into the canal, effectively narrowing the space inside. In doing so, this can prevent the conduction of sound waves getting through to the eardrum. One symptom patients with surfer's ear may notice as a result is hearing loss.

Other associated problems may arise, too. The ear canal produces wax. Any narrowing of the canal will more easily retain wax, but also water – not just from swimming, but from wet weather or taking a shower. An accumulation of both in the canal can worsen hearing loss and raise the risk of developing an ear infection.

But what causes surfer's ear in the first place?

The cause appears to lie in repeated exposure to cold water and high winds – which most surfers encounter while riding a wave, or tumbling off one. It appears to be a problem unique to humans, perhaps because of the configuration of their ears.

While researchers aren't entirely sure why cold exposure causes the bone to grow abnormally, it's possible that the ear's natural response to prolonged cold (which irritates the eardrum) is to create a bigger shield for it. Cold water and wind may stimulate bone cells called osteoblasts, causing new bone to grow – offering more protection.

It's important to note that surfer's ear is different from swimmer's ear – a condition which you may be more familiar with. Though both can arise from water immersion.



Swimmer's ear, also called otitis externa, is a form of ear infection. It typically results in pain and discharge, and can arise from water accumulating in the ear canal, which then acts as a breeding ground for bacteria. Narrowing of the ear canal can worsen the problem, so swimmer's ear can also be associated with surfer's ear.

It's estimated that 3-6 per cent of the general population may have some form of exostosis. But the condition does appear to overwhelmingly affect surfers – with one systematic review finding the condition affected an average of around 68 per cent of surfers.

It's not unique

However, surfer's ear is not unique to surfers. Any sport that exposes an athlete to cold water and wind might result in the same effect. These include wild or outdoor swimming, windsurfing and kayaking.

There's also a cultural and geographical difference in prevalence across the globe. It's estimated that 10 per cent of Australians surf, and potentially raising the risk.

You don't even have to venture into the water to develop surfer's ear, either. Some research suggests people living near the coast have an increased risk of developing surfer's ear as they're more likely to be exposed to cold winds. Other cases have been observed in patients without a clear cause.

The condition might also be more common in males – though this may be due to a larger proportion of men participating in both the sport and the research.

Preventing surfer's ear

Some research suggests that using earplugs while in the water can help reduce cold exposure to the ear and lower the risk. There are also specialised hooded wetsuits and bands that can worn as further protective measures. Surfer's ear appears to be a long-term complication, and is more

likely to develop from regular exposure, not just an occasional cold water dip.

More than 10 years of surfing appears to be associated with a greater risk, and more severe canal obstruction.

For patients who develop severe symptoms – such as hearing loss and persistent ear infections – surgery may be required.

The operation is called a canalplasty. It involves chiselling or drilling away the excess bone to widen the canal again. Surfers should avoid heading back into the waves for two to three months after the operation until the site has properly healed.

There's some indication surfer's ear may be on the rise, though this could also be because we're getting better at diagnosing it and nowadays more surfers are aware of the condition.

The risk of developing surfer's ear in one or both ears is sadly real. Unfortunately, it appears that only by abstaining from surfing can the condition be averted.

So, if you do plan to go out into the wind and water – whether that's surfing, paddleboarding or swimming – don't forget your earplugs.

A study conducted by Dr. Vini Simas and the Water Base Research Unit at Bond University found that 100% of the World Surf League surfers tested had some level of surfer's ear. The study included 14 highly ranked professional surfers, with 50% showing severe grade exostoses.

Tom Carroll, the two-time world champion has battled exostoses throughout his career. He underwent surgery on both ears and now advocates for the use of protective earplugs.

By [Dan Baumgardt](#), Senior Lecturer, School of Physiology, Pharmacology and Neuroscience, [University of Bristol](#). This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).



Celebrating Champions of Hearing Health



Eminent guests from across the hearing health sector gathered in Sydney to honour the distinguished service of David Brady and Michelle Courts to Deafness Forum. From Left: Michelle, David and new Deafness Forum chair, Rae Walker.



David, a passionate advocate born with profound hearing loss, retired recently after chairing Deafness Forum Australia for 14 years. Michelle, a dedicated nurse and educator, has served on the board since 2014, championing family-centred policies.



Their legacy of advocacy and compassion will continue to inspire future generations in hearing health.



Earbus Chair Sue Beath & FISH Co-Chair Liza Fraser-Gooda with Earbus CEO & Co-founder Dr Lara Shur, Earbus Board Director Greg Narrier and FISH CEO Mark Anderson.

Earbus Foundation and the Foundation for Indigenous Sustainable Health (aka FISH) have signed an MOU to improve ear health and overall wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Earbus Foundation is a Western Australian children's charity dedicated to reducing middle ear disease in Aboriginal and at-risk children. They operate mobile ear health clinics across regional and remote WA, providing comprehensive screening, treatment, and follow-up care. Their innovative approach brings healthcare directly to communities, significantly improving ear health outcomes for vulnerable populations

The partnership will enhance access to specialist services in regional and remote WA with a focus on addressing middle ear disease and its long-term impacts.

Celebrating this milestone were Earbus Chair Sue Beath, a Karriyarra Knowledge Holder; FISH Co-Chair Liza Fraser-Gooda, a Bidjara, Ghangulu & Iman woman originally from Rockhampton in Central Queensland; FISH Co-Chair and Co-founder Dr Scott Martyn; Earbus Co-founder and CEO Dr Lara Shur; FISH CEO Mark Anderson; Earbus Director Greg Narrier (Yued Noongar) and Earbus Co-founder and Executive Director Paul Higginbotham.

Dr Lara Shur said the MOU highlighted the commitment of both organisations to breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

"This collaboration will integrate ear health programs with FISH's holistic services, ensuring sustainable, community-led solutions", she said.

"FISH is honoured to be walking alongside Earbus Foundation as together we are working to close the gap in health and wellbeing outcomes," FISH Co-Chair Liza Fraser-Gooda said following the signing ceremony.

"In signing this MOU, Sue and I both acknowledge that together, we can do far more than working alone."

Read [more about FISH](#)



Independent Regulation of All Audiologists and Audiometrists?

The debate over regulating audiologists and audiometrists in Australia is complex and multifaceted.

Currently, the profession is largely self-regulated, with professional bodies Audiology Australia and the Australian College of Audiology representing membership of their bodies as a form of regulation.

However, other stakeholders, including Independent Audiologists Australia and Deafness Forum Australia, strongly support mandatory registration under the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Consumer Perspectives

There appears to be confusion among consumers about the roles of audiometrists and audiologists, with some expressing uncertainty about the expertise each profession possesses. This points to a need for better public education about professional roles and where the current system can be enhanced.

Terms like 'audiology professionals', 'audiology profession' and 'audiology clinics', are often used in advertising which can contribute to consumer confusion about the qualifications of different service providers.

We believe that establishing a consistent national standard for both audiologists and audiometrists, supported by strong governance structures and evidence-based data, could help ensure that consumers receive accurate information. This approach aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions about

their hearing health care. We are committed to collaborating with all stakeholders to ensure that these improvements are made together, with them, and not for them.

Challenges and Opportunities

The hearing services industry in Australia is a complex ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders, each with their own interests and perspectives. Some of our constituents feel that the current self-regulating model faces challenges in ensuring consistent quality across the industry.

One respondent in our national survey (you can [request a copy of the report](#) here) expressed concerns about the potential influence of financial interests in the hearing services industry stating:

“There’s a lot of money in hearing aids, and some players in the industry might not want to see that change...”

While this reflects one perspective, we recognise it may be one of several factors that require further exploration to ensure clarity and consistency within the system, ultimately ensuring that consumers receive the care they need.

The opportunity for positive change is here. We believe there is growing support for independent, national regulation from consumers and providers presenting a unique chance to strengthen and improve our hearing health services system. Now is the time to take meaningful steps toward enhancing the system and ensuring better outcomes for everyone.

Something to Contribute?

- Here is the [survey for hearing professionals](#) to complete
- This one is for [consumers of hearing services](#) to complete



Hearing loss can significantly impact relationships, with one in three Australians reporting that their partner's hearing loss makes communication difficult.

This can lead to frustration, strain on relationships, and feelings of isolation. Recent research indicates that many Australians feel ignored by their partners due to undiagnosed hearing problems.

By addressing hearing loss proactively and working together as a couple, it's possible to minimise its impact on relationships and maintain a strong, communicative bond. Seeking help and finding appropriate solutions can save relationships from deteriorating and restore harmony in households affected by hearing loss.

Karen Hirschausen, Principal Audiologist with Hearing Australia, emphasises the importance of communication:

"Communication is the foundation of any healthy relationship. If one partner can't hear

well and misunderstands what is being said, it will cause a breakdown in communication".

She also notes that family members often play a crucial role in making individuals aware of their hearing loss.

Untreated hearing loss can have several detrimental effects on relationships. These include increased frustration and resentment between partners, feelings of loneliness and missing out on companionship, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions and activities. Furthermore, it can lead to a decrease in intimate conversations and light-hearted joking within the family, a loss of shared activities and companionship, and a general reduction in communication, with conversations becoming brief and functional.

These issues can lead to a significant strain on personal relationships, affecting both partners. The person with hearing loss may experience cognitive overload, making it difficult to focus on conversations, especially in noisy environments. This can cause misunderstandings and a perceived lack of interest, further exacerbating relationship problems.

Kim Terrell, Managing Director of Hearing Australia, encourages people to address hearing concerns.

"Hearing loss can be devastating and it's not something you and your partner just 'have to live with.' If you have a hearing loss, you need to act".

He highlighted advancements in hearing aid technology, emphasising how much of a difference they can make.

Interventions such as hearing aids can improve not only quality of life but also relationship satisfaction, communication, and social functioning. People who get hearing aids often find that they can once again enjoy activities like watching TV together or socialising as a couple.

From [One in three Australians say their partner's hearing loss makes communication difficult](#).



Bougainville Besties is a not-for-profit that hopes to provide an opportunity for Australians to support community-based education and health projects that will help Bougainville and future leaders revive its economy and rebuild.

Its focus is on supporting the most disadvantaged and ensuring "no one is left behind".

Up to 50% of school students in many areas of Papua New Guinea have some hearing loss. Much of the hearing loss is thought to be related to poor ear health and limited health services. The Pacific islands have among the highest rates of otitis media (middle ear infection) in the world.

Bougainville is located at the most northern end of the Solomon Islands archipelago but is an autonomous region within Papua New Guinea.

The legacy of 10 years of civil war

In the early 1970s, one of the world's largest copper and gold mines was established at Panguna in central Bougainville. The mine was co-owned by an Australian mining company and the PNG government. However, a

long-held desire for self-determination, growing concern around the mine's negative environmental and social impacts, and the fair distribution of financial benefits led to increasing tension, culminating in a civil war in 1989.

The protracted and violent 10-year war and blockade prevented access to essential services, including medical supplies, displaced half the population, claimed an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 lives and destroyed much of the region's economic and social infrastructure.



In 2001, the Bougainville Peace Agreement formally ended the conflict with a follow-up referendum in 2019, which found that 98% of the island's population supported independence.

Bougainville must rebuild to achieve stability and self-rule, but there are significant challenges. Around 40% of the population aged over 15, known as the "lost generation", are now illiterate due to schooling missed as a result of the civil war. Post-conflict, restoration of health services has also been slow, with the health worker-to-population ratio at 0.4 to 1000 (in Australia the ratio in 2022 was 25 to 1000).



Assisting teachers

Education is a top priority in Bougainville's efforts to become more self-reliant and prosperous. Despite the ARoB government working hard to increase access to educational opportunities the lack of education infrastructure and a significant increase in the population following the civil war is making it very challenging. Students mustn't be held back by hearing loss. Going to school with hearing loss can be frustrating and isolating. These students need inclusive strategies to assist their learning and social development.

Bougainville Besties partnered with the widely respected disabilities service provider Callan Services in 2023 to undertake a pilot study. Teachers were provided with a booklet and introductory training to help them identify behavioural signs that may indicate a possible hearing loss together with supportive teaching strategies. The results were compelling:

- 37% of students having some degree of hearing loss using the checklist of behavioural signs
- 100% of teachers agreed that using the teaching strategies benefited students with hearing loss as well as other students.

Teacher training in identifying signs of hearing loss in the classroom and applying teaching strategies to support these students is now part of Callan Services outreaches across Bougainville

More recently, Bougainville Besties has been assisting Callan Services to increase ear health awareness and training of community health staff. Callan Services was concerned that community health centre staff relied heavily on antibiotics when basic ear health practices would often be appropriate to treat and help prevent ear health conditions. This would also help to conserve very limited antibiotic supplies.

Callan Services asked Bougainville Besties to provide an ear health reference manual for community health workers. This was done drawing on World Health Organization resources and elements of the Australian NAL "PLUM" program that screens listening skills in children under 6 years.

The reference manual and otoscopes provided by Bougainville Besties are helping to support Callan Services deliver training for community health centre staff during their outreaches.

You can help

More help is desperately needed to support those children that have been identified with a detrimental hearing loss.

Donations towards supplying a child with **hearing aids** would be invaluable. Hearing aids cost \$400 which is beyond the means of most parents.

Otosopes are essential for diagnosing and treating a wide range of ear health conditions. A donation of \$55 can provide a community health centre with an otoscope and a set of specula.

Currently there is only one **audiometer** located in the far north of Bougainville! Donations towards getting an audiometer would enable many more people to access the help they need. A manual screening portable audiometer costs around \$2,700.

Contact

bougainvillebesties@gmail.com

www.bougainvillebesties.org

The Perfect Fit

Fitting a hearing aid is a delicate dance that combines technical prowess, clinical insight, and a deep commitment to patient care. In Australia, audiometrists *and* audiologists are at the forefront of this vital process.

This article by Mark Paton FACAud delves into the clinical requirements for fitting hearing aids in Australia, spotlighting the scope of practice for audiometrists and audiologists.

Both audiometrists and audiologists in Australia are dedicated experts trained to assess and manage hearing loss. Their responsibilities encompass conducting hearing assessments, fitting and adjusting hearing aids, and offering rehabilitation services. Audiometrist training is particularly concentrated on the hands-on skills necessary for hearing aid fitting and management.

Assessment of Hearing Loss: Audiometrists and Audiologists conduct comprehensive hearing evaluations, including audiometry, speech tests, and tympanometry. They take detailed client histories and refer complex cases to medical practitioners. Clients must satisfy specific eligibility criteria to qualify for a hearing aid under the Hearing Services Program. This involves a minimum hearing loss threshold and other factors such as communication challenges and the client's motivation for hearing improvement.

Selection of Hearing Aid: Following the assessment, and if indicated, audiometrists and audiologists select the most suitable hearing aid. The selection considers the client's hearing loss profile, lifestyle, and individual preferences. Under the Hearing Services Program the chosen hearing aid must adhere to the minimum specifications, which include many features available in privately purchased devices.

Audiometrists and audiologists must ensure the device is included in the latest fully subsidised or partially subsidised device schedule.

Fitting and Adjustment: During the initial fitting session, audiometrists and audiologists program the hearing aid to match the client's specific hearing loss profile. This involves fine-tuning the gain, frequency response, and other parameters to achieve optimal performance. They use both objective and subjective methods to verify and validate the hearing aid fitting. This includes real-ear measurements and gathering feedback from the client to ensure the device effectively meets their needs.

Follow-Up and Rehabilitation: Regular follow-up appointments are crucial to track the client's progress and make necessary adjustments to the hearing aid. Audiometrists and audiologists provide ongoing support and counselling to help clients adapt to their new hearing aids. They offer rehabilitation services, such as auditory training and communication strategies, to enhance the client's hearing experience and overall quality of life.

Audiometrists and audiologists play a crucial role in Australia's hearing aid fitting process, providing personalised care tailored to individual needs. Their expertise, developed through extensive education and clinical practice, ensures high-quality outcomes for clients.

This article is based upon the scope of practice for audiometrists in Australia. It also reflects the two-year diploma qualification and the subsequent two-year supervision process where hearing aid fitting and rehabilitations skills are emphasised. Four years of education and mentoring specifically aimed at making sure that client outcomes are paramount. It reflects the true nature of the provision of adult rehabilitation in Australia.

The author, Mark Paton commenced practice fitting hearing aids in 1983 in rural Queensland. He is an Audiometrist. He currently owns a small private clinic on Queensland's Sunshine Coast that is based on client centred practice.

Simplifying Hearing Aid Consultations: A Positive Change

A study has examined how changing the pricing structure for hearing aid consultations could affect the decisions of adults who have never used hearing aids before.

The main change we tested was "unbundling" the consultation fees from the overall cost of the hearing aids. Here's what was found and why it matters.

What is Unbundling?

Unbundling means charging separately for the consultation needed to get a hearing aid, instead of including it in the total price of the hearing aid. Researchers wanted to see if this change would make the consultation process more efficient and encourage more people to choose to use hearing aids.

Results of the Change

With unbundling, fewer people came in just to talk about hearing aids without actually getting one. This made each appointment more valuable because the people who did come were more likely to need and get a hearing aid. Even though there were fewer appointments, the number of people who ended up with hearing aids stayed about the same. This means the consultations were more effective.

Additionally, the change helped the test clinic manage its schedule better. With unbundling, they could see new patients faster - nearly half of them within two weeks of contact, compared to about a quarter before the change.

Financial Benefits

Interestingly, this new approach also led to an increase in the clinic's earnings from hearing aid services by about 17% compared to four years earlier. This suggests that focusing on patients who are ready to get hearing aids is not only efficient but also profitable.

What About Cost?

One might think cost would stop people from getting hearing aids, but the study showed that isn't the main issue. People who feel they really need hearing aids because of difficulty hearing are the ones who most often decide to get them. The degree of hearing loss and how much it bothers someone are bigger factors than cost.

Stability in Non-adoption Reasons

Researchers also noticed that the reasons people chose not to get hearing aids didn't change much after unbundling. Most people who didn't get hearing aids said they were either not in a hurry or weren't troubled by their hearing loss, rather than being concerned about the price.

Concluding Thoughts

Changing to unbundled pricing made hearing aid consultations more focused and efficient. It turns out that for many people, the decision to get a hearing aid is more about the need and less about the cost. These findings could help clinics think about how they charge for and schedule their services, making sure they spend time with the patients who will benefit most from hearing aids.

From [Hearing aid adoption rates among adults without hearing aid experience in an audiology clinic before and after price unbundling](#)



Be Inspired!

The 26th Libby Harricks Memorial Address will be presented by the Hon Jacque Petrusma, Minister for Health, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister for Veterans' Affairs in the Tasmanian Government.

As someone with a cochlear implant, she is a powerful advocate for accessibility and equality in healthcare, making her an inspiring role model for the hearing health community.

Her personal experience with hearing loss and cochlear implants means she deeply understands the importance of access to hearing health services. With her background in public health and a wealth of personal experience, Jacque Petrusma brings a patient-centred perspective to her role as Health minister.

Her career spans over a decade as a Member of Franklin, and she is no stranger to serving the public in roles that have seen her prioritise vulnerable populations. Her experience as a Registered Nurse provides her with a knowledge of the challenges within Tasmania's healthcare system.

On Tuesday, 11 March 2025, Jacque Petrusma will deliver Deafness Forum Australia's prestigious Libby Harricks Memorial Address at

Parliament House Hobart in partnership with The Shepherd Centre.

Having a state Health Minister share her insights in her Address is a remarkable milestone for Deafness Forum Australia and our official partner, [The Shepherd Centre](#), underscoring our shared mission to elevate awareness and influence policy in hearing health.

[REGISTER HERE](#)



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

The series honours the memory of the late Libby Harricks AM, the first President of Deafness Forum Australia. Libby was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1990 for her work on behalf of deaf and hard-of-hearing people.



Hearing Our Way to 2030

Hearing health is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of global wellbeing that aligns with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

As we approach 2030, the target date for achieving these ambitious global objectives, it's crucial to recognise hearing health's profound impact on individuals, communities, and nations worldwide.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a plan adopted by the United Nations in 2015. They are a "universal call to action" for all countries to work together to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure everyone has peace and prosperity by 2030.

The SDGs address global challenges and promote sustainable development by balancing social, economic, and environmental needs. Seventeen goals include ending poverty and hunger, ensuring good health and education, achieving gender equality, and implementing climate change.

The Scale of the Challenge

The World Health Organization has sounded a clear alarm: by 2050, an estimated 2.5 billion people worldwide will have hearing loss.

This staggering projection underscores the urgency of addressing hearing health as a global priority.

Hearing Health and the SDGs

o SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

The most direct connection between hearing health and the SDGs is evident in Goal 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages.

Hearing loss, if left untreated, can have far-reaching consequences on an individual's quality of life, affecting not only communication but also mental health, cognitive function, and social engagement. Untreated hearing loss can have detrimental effects on personal relationships.

By addressing hearing health, we directly contribute to populations' overall health and wellbeing worldwide.

The World Health Organization has set concrete targets for improving ear and hearing care by 2030, including a 20% relative increase in the effective coverage of newborn hearing screening services and adult use of hearing technology and a 20% relative reduction in the prevalence of chronic ear diseases and unaddressed hearing loss in school-age children.

These targets align with the spirit of SDG 3 and provide a clear roadmap for action.



- **SDG 4: Quality Education**

Hearing health plays a crucial role in education, particularly for children. Untreated hearing loss can severely limit speech and language development, cognitive growth, and academic performance. By ensuring access to hearing care, we can enable them to fully participate in educational opportunities and reach their potential.

- **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

The economic impact of untreated hearing loss is substantial. The WHO estimates that unaddressed hearing loss costs countries approximately \$750 billion annually in direct health costs and loss of productivity. By investing in hearing health, we not only improve individual lives but also contribute to economic growth and productivity on a national and global scale.

- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

Currently, 80% of people with hearing loss live in developing countries, where hearing aids are often unaffordable and trained professionals are scarce. Addressing this disparity is crucial for reducing global inequalities. Expanding access to hearing care in lower-income countries through innovative approaches and training local specialists can help bridge this gap and ensure more equitable health outcomes.

- **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

This goal aims to foster inclusive societies where individuals with hearing challenges are not marginalised and can fully participate in social, economic, and cultural life. It also ensures universal access to information by mandating accessible formats.

This goal emphasises equal access to justice, which is particularly important for addressing the disproportionately high incarceration rates of Aboriginal people with hearing loss in Australia.

A Public Health Approach to Hearing Health

We must adopt a comprehensive public health approach to address hearing health in the context of the SDGs effectively. This includes:

1. **Prevention:** Implement measures to reduce exposure to hazardous noise and ototoxic chemicals in occupational and recreational settings.
2. **Early Detection:** Increasing the proportion of people who undergo hearing examinations and expanding newborn hearing screening programs.
3. **Access to Care:** Improving access to hearing health services and assistive technologies, particularly in underserved communities.
4. **Awareness and Education:** Promoting hearing health behaviours and raising public awareness about the importance of hearing care.
5. **Urban Planning:** Considering acoustic environments in urban design to create more hearing-friendly spaces.

The Economic Case for Investment

Investing in hearing health is not just a moral imperative; it's economically sound. The WHO estimates that scaling up hearing care to cover 90% of the population would require an additional annual investment of just U.S.\$1.33 per capita. This investment would yield a return of \$16 for every \$1 invested, benefiting 1.4 billion people. Such a compelling cost-benefit ratio makes hearing health interventions a smart choice for governments and health systems looking to maximise their impact.

A Call to Action

As countries towards achieving the SDGs by 2030, it's clear that hearing health must be an

integral part of our global strategy. To make this a reality, we need:

1. **Policy Integration:** Incorporating hearing care into national healthcare plans and strategy.
2. **Multi-sectoral Collaboration:** Engaging ministries of health, international organisations, NGOs, and private stakeholders in coordinated efforts.
3. **Workforce Development:** Training more hearing health professionals, especially in underserved areas.
4. **Technology Innovation:** Developing and deploying affordable, accessible hearing technologies.
5. **Research and Data:** Conducting updated epidemiological studies to inform policy and interventions.

Hearing Health as a Catalyst for Global Progress

Hearing health is not a peripheral issue but a central component of achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals. Recognising its importance and taking concerted action can improve health outcomes, enhance educational and economic opportunities, and reduce global inequalities. As we move towards 2030, the ability to hear and communicate effectively is recognised as a fundamental right and a key factor in sustainable development.

For our part, by embedding the SDGs into Deafness Forum Australia's Connect, Collaborate, and Impact framework, we contribute to the "Decade of Action" called for by the UN Secretary-General to accelerate sustainable solutions to global challenges. This approach guides our organisational strategy and positions us as active participants in the worldwide effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Scott Avery on Aboriginality, deafness and advocacy

As a university student in the 1980s and 90s, Scott Avery says being deaf is something he dealt with privately. Now he is using his platform to put equity at the forefront.

“I remember I wore these giant hearing aids, they almost looked like boom boxes strapped to my ears,” Scott laughs, reminiscing on his early days as a commerce student at the University of Wollongong (UOW).

He originally had plans to become a history teacher, but made a last minute change to enrol at UOW to do a commerce degree, and before long had completed his honours in economics, a graduate diploma in law, two master’s degrees and a PhD.

He has since dedicated his life to bridging the gaps of inclusion for First Nations peoples and people with disability. He’s a nationally renowned advocate, with his research informing government policy like the Disability Royal Commission, Australia’s Disability Strategy and Closing the Gap. His latest honours: being named 2023 Ambassador for International Day of People with Disability, and giving the 2024 Disability Leadership Oration in Canberra.

Hearing Australia recently appointed Prof Avery to its Board.

“Dr Scott’s connections with First Nations communities, will add great depth to the Board’s work and its focus on improving the ear and hearing health of First Nations peoples,” Hearing Australia Chair Elizabeth Crouch, AM, said

“I touched on my deaf experience, and how when I was at university, being deaf is something I was dealing with very privately and navigating my way through. While technology has changed and moved [to be more accommodating] there still needs to be more understanding around of how something like hearing can affect your engagement in learning or education,” he says.

Traditional knowledge meets lived experience

Alongside decades of research and lived experience, Scott has thousands of years of traditional knowledge helping him navigate life with a disability.

“I have this phrase where I say: ‘I’m deaf, I’m Aboriginal, I’m proud times two’,” Scott says.



Scott and his daughter Tegan. Photo: supplied

Descendant from the Worimi people of New South Wales, and with an affiliation to the First Nations disability community, he credits teachings from Elders with helping understand and accept his deafness. This intersection inspired Scott to write *Culture is Inclusion*, a book of stories told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability about traditional societies of inclusion.

One story that stands out to Scott is the One-Legged Mungo Man in Western NSW – a track of single right footprints portraying a one-legged hunter.

“When we tell this story in Indigenous culture, it’s showing that communities don’t see disability in the same way that non-Indigenous communities do,” he says.

“Being deaf is not something that is no longer a stigma for me, it is my natural world. I feel like I am meant to be deaf for a reason; it’s not something that needs to be fixed or cured.

“That’s a message I got from my Aboriginal Elders, a very powerful and liberating message to be able to share and speak about broadly as an ambassador.”

Changing the world for the better

While Scott’s work focuses on systemic change for First Nations and disability inclusion, he recognises the importance of everyday behaviours that can help create better environments for all, like simply the inclusion of Aboriginal art within institutions.

“I might go into a university and see Aboriginal art around and an Acknowledgement of Country and those things can help you feel like you belong. Disability is a similar experience. If people with disability can see people around them and then there’s a community around them, then they’ll feel like they belong,” he says.

“I’ve made a conscious choice to talk about the impact of not hearing, communicating and not feeling stigmatised about that,” he says.

“I just say to young people that you are who you are for a reason and that’s something my Indigenous Elders told me. Your story is unique and the fact that you’ve done that and probably come up against barriers that other people may not know about gives you a special form of knowledge that others won’t have. Just keep going – you don’t need to fight your battles on your own.”

From [Scott Avery on Aboriginality, deafness and advocacy](#).



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