



## Susie was a media star but her hearing wasn't performing

"There are so many environments that make it almost impossible to hear – in the end you stop going to these places because it's all just too hard. The next thing you know, you've isolated yourself. Even when people are around you, you can still feel isolated because you can't hear everything they're saying."

## Disability in advertising: inclusion or objectification?

Advertisements that include people with disabilities should be about the people, not about their disabilities. And diversity and inclusion are not just about the models but also about the team that designs the inclusion campaigns and makes it a success.

## 19 recommended changes to Government Hearing Services Program

The Government formed an Expert Panel and tasked it with recommending changes to the Hearing Services Program. The Program aims to reduce the impact of hearing loss by providing eligible people with access to hearing services. A Report by the Expert Panel, released last week, makes 19 recommendations.

## Deafness is not a disability but a linguistic identity

To most Malaysians, deafness is a disability. Hearing individuals tend to pity the deaf. Think of deafness as a curse. A barrier to educational excellence. And an obstacle in the workplace. For half of his life, Anthony Chong Vee Yee felt the same.

## Susie Elelman: My hearing aids are a huge health win



Susie Elelman was overjoyed when she was fitted with her first pair of hearing aids. For the popular Australian broadcaster, being told she needed a device to treat her hearing loss was a happy end to a difficult health journey that had stretched over decades.

“At school, I always sat at the front of a classroom. I never knew why, because there was nothing wrong with my eyesight, but clearly I must’ve had some form of hearing loss even then.

“Then when I was 20 and had started working in television, my workmates would say that I didn’t need a microphone because my voice was already loud enough. Of course, the reason for that, is because you can’t hear yourself talking.

“As time went on, I found I was asking people to repeat themselves more and more, so I decided to get my hearing checked.”

That was the first of many hearing checks Susie underwent over the years, all of which found that although she had hearing loss, it wasn’t yet severe enough to warrant hearing aids.

Susie says that, meanwhile, she was painfully aware of the small but important connections with other people she was missing out on.

“There are so many environments that make it almost impossible to hear – in crowds, restaurants with loud background music playing, places where there’s no carpet on the floor so the sound keeps bouncing around everywhere – in the end you stop going to these places because it’s all just too hard.

“The next thing you know, you’ve isolated yourself. Even when people are around you, you can still feel isolated because you can’t hear everything they’re saying.”

An audiologist finally recommended Susie get hearing aids. Her Connect Hearing audiologist was able to pinpoint for the first time the likely cause of Susie’s hearing loss – a disorder of the inner ear called Meniere’s disease – finally answering a lifelong question for the television and radio host.

Now a Connect Hearing ambassador, Susie uses a range of technology to allow her to hear, including hearing aids that employ Bluetooth to send sound from her smartphone or television, direct to her hearing aids. “I can answer calls by simply tapping my ear even if the actual phone is in my handbag,” she says. “And it’s like listening to everything in stereo.”

## Why deafness is not a disability but a linguistic identity

To most Malaysians, deafness is a disability. Hearing individuals tend to pity the deaf. Think of deafness as a curse. A barrier to educational excellence. And an obstacle in the workplace.

For more than half of his life, Anthony Chong Vee Yee, 38, felt the same. Born Deaf and with no voice to express himself, he soon began to realise just how different he was from others. And the realisation stung.

“My parents never told me about deafness as a linguistic identity. I was told it was a disability. In reality, these two concepts – the linguistic identity and the disabled identity – are completely different,” says Chong.

It wasn't easy interacting with the hearing kids at school. So, his circle of friends was limited to those, who like him, attended the school's program for deaf students.

Those were long years of isolation and alienation. But things took a 180 degree turn when he least expected it.

“When I was 18, I went to the US to attend the Deaf Way 2 Conference. It was here that I learned there were many people like me outside Malaysia and they were just as capable as hearing people. I only saw non-capable deaf people in Malaysia. But this conference inspired me to embrace the deaf linguistic identity, not the disabled identity,” Chong says.

He returned to Malaysia pumped. He threw himself into his studies and became the first deaf student to be accepted by KDU (Malaysia's prestigious university) in the Faculty of Information and Multimedia Technologies. He went back to the US and completed two master's programs and is currently pursuing a doctorate on research and anthropology.

Today, Chong is very much involved with the local deaf community and has been co-writing sign language reference books to help hearing people communicate with the deaf.



The latest Malaysian Sign Language (BIM) book co-authored by Anthony Chong. (Majudiri 'Y' Foundation for the Deaf pic)

Before venturing into the field of writing, Chong worked as a production editor for a publishing company, formatting text and adjusting alignments. He never thought of writing textbooks until the YMCA Kuala Lumpur approached him about it.

Now Chong is part of a team that writes sign language reference books tailored for hearing learners so they can communicate with the deaf. Chong and his team take what's important for hearing individuals to learn, and adjust the content based on the levels of difficulty.

After gathering the content, Chong and his team list and label the various components they wish to teach hearing people. Once the content is checked and double-checked, a deaf person is asked to sign so it can be photographed for illustration purposes. Chong explains that using the photographs taken, an illustrator painstakingly draws the individual hand signs, which is then checked meticulously. He says this is an important aspect of their work as viewing a hand gesture from different angles could change its meaning altogether.



Malaysian Sign Language (BIM) and American Sign Language (ASL) share about 500 common 'sords' or 'sign words'. What makes BIM and ASL different is the cultural context of each and how users string sentences using the 'sords'.

Most deaf Malaysians understand a little English and a little Bahasa Melayu, so the use of these two languages influence BIM's development. Chong says the common misconception is that BIM is based on Bahasa Melayu and ASL is based on English which is not the case as BIM is its own language.

What about fairly new words like 'selfie'? Who decides how it should be signed? Is there a certain methodology for creating new signs?

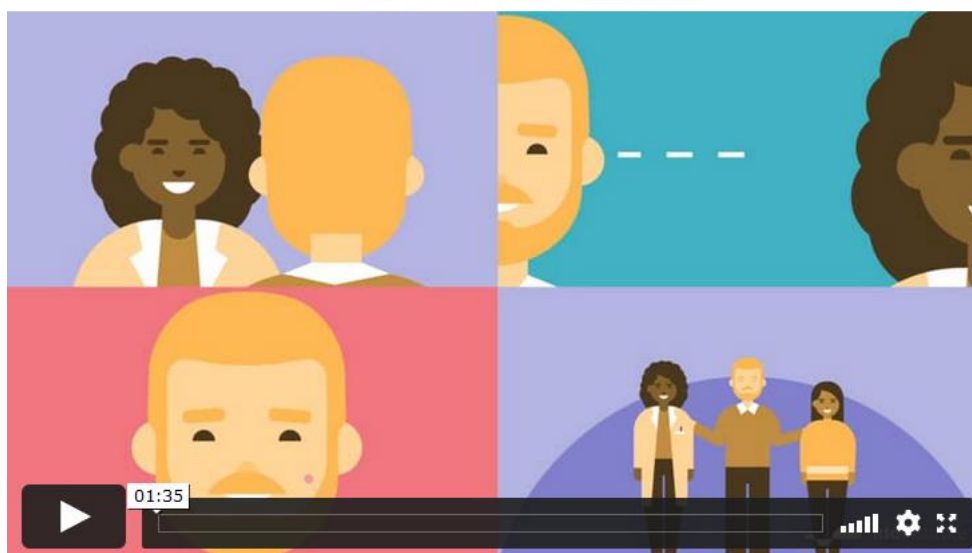
Chong explains that there are no rules and regulations when it comes to signing new words. It most likely starts with one person, then others pick it up along the way and it starts being used more extensively among the deaf.

"Language belongs to the people, so I would not create a hand sign myself and insist this is the hand sign for that particular word. In the world of the deaf, hand signs emerge organically.

"If people tend to use a certain hand sign to indicate 'selfie' and if others understand the sign and like it, they will start using it.

By Soo Soo Xin Xin, writing for [FMT News](#)

## We're All Ears



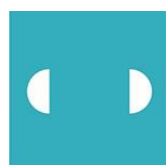
Helping people hear is knowing how to listen. A good hearing care professional will work to understand your individual needs and make recommendations based on them. That's person-centred care. Learn what you can do to help your audiologist so they can help you better manage your hearing loss. [Watch the video](#)



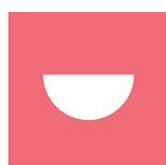
[Take part](#) "The more you reveal about your personal challenges, the more information your audiologist will have when planning possible solutions."



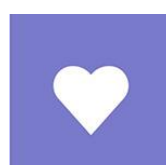
[Be seen](#) "My audiologist made me feel human, and normal. She explained why I struggled and understood why I couldn't do some things. She showed empathy. She had my back."



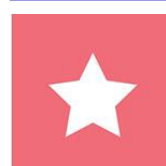
[Be heard](#) "She didn't give up. And that was everything. Someone was still trying to help me. I knew there was something wrong, and she just listened."



[Tell your story](#) "As this audiologist got to know me, he also realised how into technology I was. These days I've got everything from remote controls to Bluetooth technology."



[Open up](#) "I became a lot more confident, and not so embarrassed about being hard of hearing. The more you talk about it, the easier it becomes."



[Be clear](#) "Years ago, I realised that I too have responsibilities in the process towards better communication."

More at [We're All Ears](#)

## Disability in advertising: celebration or commodification?

### Disability representation is about more than lip service in advertising.

By Sydney Tran writing for [Psychology Today](#)

Consumers are asking brands to include more diverse and inclusive representations that reflect society. Companies who address these calls for action must do so in a way that is genuine so that their actions are not perceived simply as a marketing tactic.



Photo: Anna Shvets/Pexels

Despite being the largest minority group in the United States, people with disability are underrepresented in advertisements. This act of intentional exclusion is known as ableism. Ableism refers to “stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities” (Bogart & Dunn, 2019, p. 651). People with disabilities have historically been banned from public spaces because of their stigmatised attributes. The passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities, essentially making it illegal to exclude people with disabilities from physical public spaces. But it still left room for more subtle forms of exclusion, including lack of representation in ads.

A [study in 2012](#) found that out of 1,671 prime-time commercials, only 1.7% portrayed people with a disability. Since then, popular brands like Nike, ASOS, Tommy Hilfiger, Microsoft, American Eagle, Target, and Home Depot have responded to consumers with more inclusive campaigns and have increased their disability representation in ads.

However, not every company’s diversity and inclusion initiative has been met with positivity. In 1997, Mattel, one of the largest toy manufacturing companies in the US, launched a Barbie doll with a disability, Becky, who used a wheelchair. While the first two weeks of Mattel’s launch was a success in terms of sales and praise, the launch was quickly met with criticism as consumers began realising that Becky’s wheelchair was incompatible with Barbie’s Dreamhouse.

Nike's efforts have garnered mixed reactions, too. Since 2012, Matthew Walzer, a then teenager with cerebral palsy, has worked collaboratively with Nike in redesigning some of their sneakers to be more accessible. Nike released a video to promote the newest edition to the FlyEase line, a distinct new hands-free sneaker - not an adaptation of a previous sneaker - that was intentionally designed to be accessible.

The Nike Go FlyEase shoe also received criticisms. Some people are asking why Nike's ad promotes the accessibility of the design but hardly mentions the disability community or the man who initially called for more accessible footwear.

And exclusion from the promotional video is not the only concern. The Nike Go FlyEase is set to sell for \$120 USD. With disabled people being twice as likely as nondisabled people to be living in poverty, some are questioning the affordability of the sneakers. Nike is being accused of potentially earning significant profits on the accessibility marketing tactic while erasing those they profit from.

### **Inclusion or Objectification?**

A brand's diversity and disability representation in advertising is important to many consumers. Brands may value diversity and disability representation for 1 of 2 reasons: 1) brands authentically value their customers and the diverse backgrounds they come from or 2) brands value revenue.

The latter reason for diversity and inclusion efforts is referred to as objectification. American philosopher Martha Nussbaum defined objectification as the act of treating someone as though they are an object to be used by another person.

The objectified person is merely seen as an instrument. Another notion of objectification is that the perpetrator treats the objectified person as though they do not have feelings. These two notions may explain the difference between authentic inclusion initiatives and those that are disingenuous and the difference in reactions towards different campaigns, such as that of Aerie's and that of Barbie's.

Authenticity maintains customer support, but so does accessibility and affordability. So, it should not be surprising to know that objectification in advertisements can produce negative responses.

But how do consumers know that the brand's inclusion efforts are genuine? How do we know that the initiative to include people with disabilities is not just simply to check off the brand's diversity box?

It is difficult for consumers to know the brand's true intentions, but there are hints and questions that we as consumers can ask ourselves: How long has the inclusion campaign and effort been in place? Are the efforts continued and consistent? Who is a part of the company's team? Similarly, who is not a part of the company's team? Are people with disabilities included in the advertisement planning? When appropriate, does the advertisement center disabled people? The answers may not always be available to consumers, but they should be.

Advertisements that include people with disabilities should be about the people, not about their disabilities. And diversity and inclusion are not just about the models but also about the team that designs the inclusion campaigns and makes it a success. Anything less may hint at ableism and the commodification of diversity.



## **Congenital Deafblindness**

### **One day workshops in Victoria**

This interactive workshop is suitable for education staff, therapy professionals, families and others caring for or providing services to people without full vision and hearing at birth or before acquiring language.

Topics include definitions, causes, maximising functional vision and hearing, teaching and learning strategies and deafblind communication.

Bring questions and case studies for personalised learning. Recommended preparation viewing: [Click here for congenital deafblindness training modules.](#)

#### **Bendigo**

Monday 28 June 2021, 9:30am to 4:30pm

Please register via [Trybooking link for Bendigo workshop](#)

#### **Ballarat**

Tuesday 29 June 2021, 9:30am to 4:30pm

Registration Please register via [Trybooking link for Ballarat workshop](#)

#### **Melbourne city**

Wednesday 30 June 2021, 9:30am to 4:30pm

Registration Please register via [Trybooking link for Melbourne workshop](#)

Presenters. Meredith Prain, National Head of Research and Centre of Excellence – Deafblind at Able Australia. Speech Pathologist Melanie Robartson and Occupational Therapist Emily McDonald.



## Auslan videos explain your legal advice options



Auslan video: <https://youtu.be/zU4wAmZYM0U>

'Your Story Disability Legal Support' has short Auslan videos about how you can get free, independent legal support to safely share your story with the Disability Royal Commission. For free legal advice on the options to keep your story safe, visit [www.yourstorydisabilitylegal.org.au](http://www.yourstorydisabilitylegal.org.au)

## Support our work on your behalf

Deafness Forum's mission is to make hearing health & ear care a national priority in Australia.

An individual member of Deafness Forum can be person who has a hearing impairment, is Deaf or deafblind, a member of their family; or someone who provides services such as teachers, researchers and audiologists. Find the membership forms are [here](#)

An organisation can be a member. You can see the list of our corporate members [here](#)



Stand in solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community. Every June, Pride Month celebrates the diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. It's a time to reflect on just how far civil rights have progressed in half a century and an opportunity to protest discrimination and violence. Australia is at the forefront of the push towards true equality and inclusion for LGBTI people, but there is more to do.

## Vision loss influences perception of sound

People with severe vision loss can less accurately judge the distance of nearby sounds, potentially putting them more at risk of injury, according to new research.

Researchers from Anglia Ruskin University's Vision and Eye Research Institute tested participants with different levels of vision loss, presenting them with speech, music and noise stimuli, and different levels of reverberation (echoes).



Participants were asked to judge the distance of the different sounds, as well as the size of the room.

People with severe visual loss judged closer sounds more inaccurately compared to those whose vision loss is less severe, who in turn, were less accurate when compared to people with normal sight.

For more distant sounds, people with severe visual loss judged these to be twice as far away when compared to normal sighted individuals. Participants with severe sight loss also judged the rooms to be three times larger than the control group of normal sighted individuals.

Professor Shahina Pardhan, Director of VERI, said: "Vision loss means people rely more on their hearing for awareness and safety, communication and interaction, but it was not known how hearing is affected by the severity of partial vision loss.

"The results demonstrate that full blindness is not necessary for judged auditory distance and room size to be affected by visual loss, and that changes in auditory perception are systematic and related to the severity of visual loss.

"Our research found that more severely visually impaired people were less accurate in judging the distance of closer sounds, which may make it harder for them in real-life situations, for example such as crossing busy streets."

From a report by Anglia Ruskin University. Published in [Science Daily](#)

A banner with a dark blue background and several red circular shapes containing white line drawings of people. The text is centered in white.

# Request for Proposals Research Funding Round NOW OPEN

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) 2021 Research Funding Round is designed to fund disability research that will deliver new findings and test and refine the NDRP processes.

Research must be done by and with people with disability, align with the NDRP Guiding Principles and address an area of demonstrated importance to people with disability.

Applications are accepted from any incorporated association in Australia. More info at <https://www.ndrp.org.au/funding-round>

## Themes

This round of NDRP Research Funding invites proposals for high quality, collaborative research that addresses topics of importance to people with disability within one or more of these themes:

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people with disability
- Women with disability
- Children and young people with disability
- People with disability in rural and remote areas
- People with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people with disability
- People with disability who require support to express their will and preference, and to implement their decisions
- People with disability who experience other intersectional disadvantage.

## Principles

Research projects are expected to align with the NDRP Guiding Principles, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and the National Disability Strategy.

## Funding and timeline

Projects can apply for funding up to \$150,000. Projects must be achievable in ten months. The total funding pool is \$1 million.

Submission timeline: proposals are due Friday 2 July 2021.

# Review of Australian Government Hearing Services Program

The Government formed an Expert Panel and tasked it with recommending changes to the Hearing Services Program. The Program aims to reduce the impact of hearing loss by providing eligible people with access to hearing services.

The Expert Panel sought written submissions and conducted direct consultation with a broad section of stakeholders including Deafness Forum of Australia and its advisers: Parents of Deaf Children, Aussie Deaf Kids, UsherKids Australia, Hear For You, and Deafness Council Western Australia.

The advice from the Program Review Expert Panel is published on the Health Department's [Hearing Services website](#)

The report by the Expert Panel has made the following recommendations to the Government:

## **1. Defining new Objectives for the Hearing Services Program**

Define the objectives of the Program to guide the expectations of those with hearing loss, the administration of the Program, the delivery of services by providers, the participation of other stakeholders in the Program, and the measurement and assessment of client outcomes.

## **2. Extension of eligibility to additional priority populations**

Expand eligibility to all Low Income Health Care Card holders and all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

## **3. Clearer delineation and support for Voucher stream and CSO stream clients**

- Replace the term 'Voucher stream' with a term such as 'National Hearing Support stream' to reflect the importance of rehabilitation as well as devices.
- Remove adults with complex hearing needs and adults with cochlear/bone anchored implants from the Community Service Obligation program and move them to the Voucher stream.
  - Introduce audits and require providers to demonstrate that they have the capacity, skills and cultural awareness capabilities to support these clients.

## **4. Making better use of Medicare**

The Australian Government, through its management of Medicare, should include within the funded item 'Health assessment for people aged 75 years and older' a full diagnostic hearing assessment where considered warranted by the patient and the GP.

## **5. Engagement with consumer groups**

Establish a hearing services consumer consultation forum to facilitate information exchange, to seek advice on improving the functioning of the Program and associated hearing activities, and to explore ways to increase the opportunities for consumer organisations to assist people with hearing loss.

## **6. Client decision-making support**

Develop a range of illustrative client pathways that clearly show the options for clients who are eligible for hearing services in the Voucher stream and the Community Service Obligation stream.

## **7. Availability of translation, interpreting and Auslan services**

Ensure that audiologists are made aware of the Auslan services available under the NDIS and the NABS programs and how to access these services.

## **8. Delivering rehabilitation and support services**

Undertake a review of the current Schedule of Fees to assess whether there is a bias that favours the supply and fitting of hearing aid devices ahead of, or instead of, providing rehabilitation services.

## **9. Assessment of hearing loss**

Redefine a hearing assessment to be a comprehensive process that involves an individual's communication and psychosocial needs.

## **10. Improving access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Work with key Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to co-develop alternative models of hearing service delivery that are culturally safe and accessible to increase the proportion of eligible Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with hearing loss taking part in the Program.

## **11. Improving access for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds**

Analyse shortfalls in engagement with, and outcomes from, the Program for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

## **12. Improve access for Regional, rural and remote communities**

Maintain Hearing Australia's role as sole provider of Community Service Obligation services, recognising the critical role that its service plays in maintaining access to hearing health care for eligible people living in regional, rural and remote areas and the likelihood that increased competition would harm service availability for people with hearing loss who live in thin markets.

## **13. Improve access for residents of Aged Care Homes**

Lift the quality of hearing health and care in aged care across the country, with a particular focus on identification, management and workforce training.

Ensure aged care assessment processes, including on entry to residential care, appropriately identify hearing loss and balance disorders.

## **14. Supply and client choice**

Improve consumer choice by making device providers publish the price and features of the devices they supply under the Program.

Look into removing partially subsidised devices (a client can currently use the value of the device provided by the Program as a contribution towards a more expensive device).

## **15. Broaden the scope of technology**

Continue support of tele-audiology and other technologies such as improving Bluetooth technologies as they are discovered and implemented, subject to evaluations of the benefits and costs of those modalities and the level of confidence and comfort felt by clients that their needs are being met.

## 16. A national data service

Federal, State and Territory Governments should commission a feasibility study into the development of a national digital database of hearing screening of infants and children, recognising that the responsibility for universal newborn hearing screening and screening at any other age such as prior to starting school, lies with State and Territory Governments.

## 17. Program monitoring and evaluation

Invest in a Data Plan for the Hearing Services Program that aims to support the monitoring of the Program's achievements of its objectives.

Undertake an evaluation of the Program in two years, drawing on the improved data availability and measurement tools and a major external evaluation in five years.

## 18. Research strategy

Develop a Research Strategy with the guiding principle of ensuring co-design with each relevant population cohort, with research priorities to include the removal of barriers to access to services and to facilitate the cultural appropriateness of service delivery.

## 19. The Longitudinal Outcomes of Children with Hearing Impairment Study

The Australian Government should continue to fund the National Acoustics Laboratory to conduct the Longitudinal Outcomes of Children with Hearing Impairment (LOCHI) Study.

Read more at the [Hearing Services website](#)

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

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



### Deafness Forum is a Registered Charity

All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

To donate, go to <https://www.givenow.com.au/organisation/public/534>

Thanks very much!

We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community: we pay respect to them and their cultures, to elders past, present and future. We want to be part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people; and we understand that it is an essential component of Closing the Gap. We understand the risk of the disappearance of indigenous sign languages and the cultural loss it would cause.

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

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