

In The Loop.

Telecoils and hearing loop systems might be old technology, but so is the wheel.



Celebrating National Rural Health Month: A Step Toward Better Hearing Health

Did you know that nearly 30% of Australians live in rural or remote areas, yet they experience higher rates of hearing loss compared to those in urban centres?

Farmers, in particular, are at high risk, with up to 65% of Australian farmers experiencing hearing loss due to constant noise from machinery and farming activities.

In recognition of National Rural Health Month this November, we're focusing on the unique health challenges rural communities face.

To do this, Deafness Forum Australia partnered with the [National Rural Health Alliance](#) to update their 'Hearing Loss in Rural Australia' fact sheet to the goal to raise awareness about the growing issue of hearing loss in rural and remote areas. This revised resource provides valuable information and support to prevent hearing loss and assist those already affected by it.

Here are 3 key facts you may not know about hearing loss in rural Australia:

1. Noise exposure from farming and rural jobs puts many people at risk of permanent hearing damage.
2. Age-related hearing loss is more common in rural communities, where the population tends to be older.
3. Limited healthcare access means diagnoses and treatments are often delayed, making it harder to manage hearing loss.


Our updated fact sheet provides a comprehensive yet easy-to-read overview, covering key topics such as:

- The current situation
- Understanding hearing loss
- Occupational noise risks
- Farmers as a high-risk group
- Childhood otitis media
- Noise-induced hearing loss
- Climate change and hearing health
- Recognising hearing loss
- The impacts of hearing loss
- Prevention and management
- Support services and workplace noise control

It's packed with important information, but we've kept it clear and concise so it's quick and easy to digest.

To learn more and discover practical ways to protect your hearing, read our full fact sheet: [Hearing Loss in Rural Australia](#).

Your hearing health matters, and we're here to support the conversation.



SEE YOU LATER

When It's Time to Change by Gael Hannan.

I respect and applaud audiologists and hearing instrument

specialists, whether they have chosen the life of a clinician, researcher, industry representative and clinic owner, or a personal combination of these practices.

They offer me better technology, better understanding of hearing loss, and improved acceptance and control over my individual hearing journey. But these outcomes are not possible without the important, mutually beneficial relationship with the Client.

Sometimes, the person with hearing loss makes the decision change their hearing care provider. Geography can be a factor; moving to a new place meant a wrenching goodbye to a clinic and personnel that I'd been working with for years. Sometimes the decision is thrust upon us when our provider leaves the clinic on personal or professional grounds.

But there are other reasons for a person with hearing loss to consider shifting their 'business', such as I have done more than once in my decades of receiving hearing care. Some want a second opinion and others balk at hearing aid prices, but I'm talking about a radical break from an established relationship, like when clinic ownership changes, whether sold to another private practice owner or a corporate hearing

care organisation, sometimes the transformation is not subtle but jarring. I have seen clinics suddenly become very *clinical*. Reading material disappears, leading you to expect that you won't have to wait more than a nano-second to be seen. But think about this: have you ever been to a clinic – let's say family practice or cancer – where there wasn't a variety of issue-related brochures available to read? In our field, clients need information on living well with hearing loss, seldom provided by their service providers.

My main reason for the rare decision to move is feeling a deep shift in my connection to, or even trust in, my hearing care provider. Over time, I may have sensed a drop in attention to my needs. Or I realise that the connection was simply not as strong as what I had enjoyed in the past with others – and that connection is *everything*.

We can forgive hearing aid snafus, such as getting the right ear mold fit from the manufacturer. Clinicians have bad days. Clients have bad days. But when I realise that I'm not getting what I need from the arrangement, the time has come to say goodbye. I need a solid and rich connection with an audiologist who works on the dedicated philosophy of person-centred care.

That's what works for me, and I won't settle for less.

Australia's Health Ministers Consider Regulating the Audiology Profession

Deafness Forum Australia is committed to supporting the registration of audiologists and audiometrists in Australia under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, emphasising the benefits it would bring to public safety.

Earlier this year, Australia's Health Ministers commissioned a report to explore the level of regulatory intervention necessary for hearing healthcare offered by audiologists. One option under investigation was whether audiology should become a registered profession, where every Australian audiology practitioner would be subject to monitoring and enforcement of uniform standards through thorough audits, investigations, and penalties.

Supporting Audiologists and Audiometrists

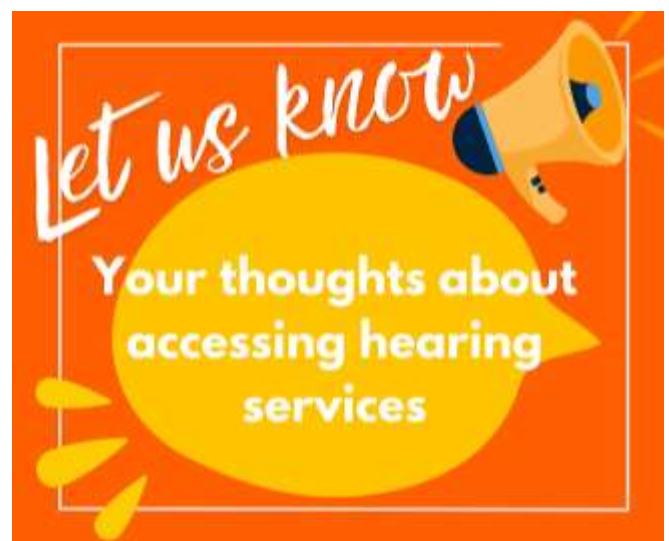
Deafness Forum Australia values the expertise and dedication of audiology and audiometry professionals. We aim to further support these practitioners by advocating for a structured registration process that ensures ongoing quality and recognition for qualified practitioners.

Regulation presents an opportunity to strengthen trust between individual consumers and their chosen audiology professionals. Building this trust can enhance the support for individuals experiencing hearing loss and deafness, ensuring they receive.

Your voice can make a difference – share your views with Deafness Forum Australia

Deafness Forum Australia is committed to bringing the consumer voice to the decision-making.

We invite you to contribute your experiences, knowledge, and opinions through our anonymous surveys to help us better understand the potential benefits and challenges of mandatory professional registration.



[Survey 1: Your lived experience as consumers](#), and how you have engaged with audiologists, audiometrists. Deafness Forum invites you to tell your story – in confidence – about your experiences receiving care from hearing care providers. We will convey your collective experience to decision makers.

[Survey 2: Service providers, your experience and views matter too](#). Deafness Forum invites you to share your perspective so that we can understand the issues from all perspectives.

Please complete our online surveys before 30 November.

Untimely Demise of the Telecoil?



There are concerning signs in Australia that hearing device manufacturers are prematurely phasing out the Telecoil function, which provides crucial connectivity to public Hearing Loops.

Forced obsolescence is occurring despite the continued relevance and widespread use of Telecoil technology in many countries.

Hearing Loops connected to Telecoils in hearing devices dramatically increase the intelligibility of what is being said over public address systems and other large-area broadcasts.

This is because the "speech to noise ratio" that's so important in hearing and understanding conversation is heavily weighted to speech as opposed to noise.

User-friendly hearing loops are common in the United Kingdom, much of Western Europe, and Australasia. In the United States, hearing loops are increasingly found in theatres, places of worship, and other places where people with hearing loss can expect to have difficulty hearing. The pace of loop installation has not slackened.

Australia is In The Loop

In Australia's transportation sector, hearing loops are part of the Agil Passenger Information System in the new six-car passenger trains planned for the state of Queensland.

Melbourne is getting 25 new ultra-modern trains called X'Trapolis 2.0, which will cost \$1 billion and feature hearing loops in the passenger cars.

A significant portion of people with hearing loss have telecoil-equipped hearing aids that give them access to hearing loops like those described above. It could be five and more years before the majority of those hearing aids have been replaced with hearing aids capable of connecting to emerging assistive listening systems using Bluetooth's Auracast broadcast audio technology.

Consequently, it's expected that the current pace in the installation of hearing loops – and the related need for hearing devices equipped with a Telecoil – will not slacken for a good many years.

From [Hearing Aid Telecoil and Loop Update 2024](#).

Don't Throw Baby Out With the Bathwater

The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) emphasises the need for a balanced approach that values both emerging and existing technologies to ensure uninterrupted communication accessibility. EFHOH advocates for the continued inclusion of telecoils in hearing aids and cochlear implants for at least the next 10 to 15 years. This advocacy is grounded in the reality that it will take considerable time before newer technologies, such as Auracast transmitters, are not only widely available in public buildings but also fully integrated into all hearing aids, ensuring comprehensive accessibility.

EFHOH's stance is supported by experiences and recommendations discussed in international forums, like the Budapest Declaration during the 2022 World Congress of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, which highlighted the necessity of telecoils coexisting with new technologies like Auracast™.

EFHOH reminds Audiologists and Audiometrists about their role as frontline hearing care professionals: they are gatekeepers of information and are responsible for informing their clients about Telecoils and Bluetooth features in their devices. Both features should be demonstrated for greater adoption.

Technological Integration and Consumer Impact

While Auracast™ promises enhanced flexibility in the future by allowing users to stream audio from multiple sources, the accessibility and reliability of telecoils in public spaces remain unmatched. The transition to new technologies faces technological and regulatory hurdles that could delay widespread adoption. Therefore, ensuring that hearing aids and cochlear implants continue to feature telecoils is essential for uninterrupted access to established assistive listening systems.

Voices from the Field

We have often heard that hearing loops “are redundant” and have been overtaken by newer technologies. Telecoils and hearing loop systems might be old technology, but so is the wheel.

And like the wheel, they continue to offer a quality, fit-for-purpose solution.

New and emerging technologies will undoubtedly supersede them in time, but are we there yet?

[Better Hearing Australia](#) advocates for the ongoing relevance of telecoils, suggesting that while new technologies are welcome, the real-world effectiveness and user-friendliness of existing systems like hearing loops must be considered. They stress the importance of these systems in delivering immediate and reliable

solutions without the need for wearers to disclose their hearing loss or manage additional devices. Additionally, there is concern about user acceptance among older people who might prefer the familiarity and straightforward operation of Telecoil-based systems.


Hybrid Solutions for Accessible Listening

Recognising the slow adoption rate of Auracast™ among current hearing aid models and the continued relevance of telecoils, Univox (a major overseas manufacturer of hearing augmentation products) recommends a pragmatic approach: a hybrid system combining both Auracast™ and induction loops. This ensures backward compatibility and future-proofing, enabling venues to accommodate both traditional telecoil users and those adopting new technologies. Such an approach not only broadens accessibility but also aligns with inclusive design principles, ensuring that technological advancements do not exclude those dependent on existing solutions. It emphasises the importance of maintaining the well-functioning hearing loop systems, advocating against abandoning proven technologies.

The Role of Major Buyers

While it's challenging to influence large international manufacturers to retain telecoils, major buyers such as the Australian Government play a crucial role.

Government programs must not inadvertently hasten an untimely end to public hearing accessibility. By mandating the inclusion of hybrid systems in their procurement contracts, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Hearing Services Program can ensure that all hearing devices they fund are equipped with telecoils for the foreseeable future. This will safeguard continued access to hearing augmentation systems that many rely on daily.



Cochlear Implants to Health Minister: Jacquie Petrusma.

Deafness Forum Australia welcomes the Hon. Jacquie Petrusma as the new Health Minister in the Tasmanian Government.

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

Jacquie's 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 troubled healthcare system. 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.

In March 2025, Jacquie Petrusma will deliver Deafness Forum Australia's prestigious Libby Harricks Memorial Address in Hobart. This annual event has become a significant platform for addressing issues in hearing health and advocacy. Having a state Health Minister share

her insights at the Address is a remarkable milestone for Deafness Forum Australia and its official partner, The Shepherd Centre, underscoring our mission to elevate awareness and influence policy in hearing health.



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. Libby worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the need for equal inclusion in life activities for all people with hearing challenges. Her legacy continues through this annual event.

We look forward to hearing Jacquie's story and celebrating her leadership - a testament to how lived experience can shape a Health Minister's approach to ensuring a healthier, more inclusive Tasmania.



NDIS Providers Put on Notice about Consequences of Dickey Advertising.

The Australian Competition & Consumer Commission is focusing on problematic advertising practices which target participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The ACCC is a government organisation that is responsible for making sure that individuals and businesses comply with Australian competition and consumer protection laws.

It has been working with the National Disability Insurance Agency to identify advertising which may be in breach of the Australian Consumer Law.

“Businesses must not make false representations regarding access to the NDIS, and consumers must be able to rely on statements being made by NDIS providers as being true and accurate,” ACCC Deputy Chair Catriona Lowe said.

Changes to the NDIS clarifying the supports that NDIS participants can and cannot spend their NDIS funding on came into effect on 3 October 2024. The goods and services that can and cannot be claimed can be found at the [NDIS website](#).

“The ACCC is concerned that many businesses continue to advertise goods or services that appear on the list of ineligible supports in a way that suggests NDIS funding can be used to purchase them,” Ms Lowe said.

“We are also concerned that many NDIS providers are claiming that certain products or services are ‘NDIS approved’, ‘NDIS funded’ or otherwise NDIS endorsed when this is not the case.”

There are no categories of goods or services which are automatically NDIS approved or funded for all NDIS participants. Whether particular goods and services will be approved or funded under an individual NDIS participant’s plan will depend on the needs and goals identified in an individual’s plan. The NDIS also does not provide specific approval or accreditation for any particular goods or services in general.

“When NDIS participants are induced into buying support goods or services that are not claimable under their plans, they can be left with substantial personal debts. These participants may also be experiencing financial hardship or vulnerability and may not have the means to pay for these goods and services,” Ms Lowe said.

“The ACCC is actively investigating multiple NDIS providers for contraventions of the Australian Consumer Law and anticipates taking public enforcement action in the near future.”

“NDIS providers should be aware that we are closely monitoring and responding to how they advertise their products and services to consumers, and that we will not hesitate to take

appropriate enforcement action if we consider advertising is false or misleading,” Ms Lowe said.

“All businesses supplying goods and services to NDIS participants should urgently review their advertising and ensure they are acting in compliance with the Australian Consumer Law.”

Dob in shady practice

If an NDIS participant thinks a business has made false or misleading statements about products or services, including whether they are funded by the NDIS, or if they consider their consumer rights have not been met, they can [make a report](#) to the ACCC.

Examples of concerning advertising that may be false or misleading include:

- The use of the words ‘NDIS approved’, as the NDIS does not have the function of approving or endorsing particular goods or services.
- Advertising suggesting NDIS funds will cover “all inclusive” holidays, when general costs associated with holidays would not be covered by NDIS funding.
- Meal delivery services suggesting the cost of meals is covered by the NDIS, when the NDIS does not cover food expenses.
- Advertising that provides instructions on how to use NDIS funding codes to cover costs of recreational services that are not covered by the NDIS – for example, going to the movies or a theme park.
- Advertising that suggests a business is affiliated or endorsed by the NDIS, by using NDIS in its business name or in the description of its services, for example ‘NDIS therapies’.

Further information is available on the [ACCC website](#).

Forensic Audiology: from Clinic to Courtroom

How does audiology intersect with the legal system?

Dr. Robert Traynor, an expert in forensic audiology, delves into this unique area where audiologists apply their knowledge to assist in legal cases involving hearing loss, tinnitus, and injury claims.



Dr. Traynor explains how forensic audiologists help attorneys and courts understand complex auditory issues, whether in noise-induced hearing loss lawsuits or other legal disputes involving hearing health.

Dr. Traynor emphasises the need for expertise, attention to detail, and proper training in forensic audiology. He explains the process of becoming an expert witness, from preparing comprehensive reports to testifying in court under cross-examination. For audiologists considering this path, Dr. Traynor highlights forensic audiology as a rewarding career choice that not only elevates individual careers but also enhances the standing of the profession.

Watch the video and read the transcript from his presentation at [From Clinic to Courtroom: Navigating Forensic Audiology with Dr. Robert Traynor](#)





David Brady retires today (27 NOV) after nearly 13 years at the helm of Deafness Forum Australia.

David's retirement as Chair is a significant moment in our organisation's history. His visionary leadership and dedication steered our organisation through pivotal changes and remarkable achievements.

While we will greatly miss his guidance, we are grateful for the strong foundation he has built.

Message from the Honourable Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health and Aged Care.

“My first meeting with David Brady was way back in 2011.

“As the new chair of Deafness Forum Australia, David even then championed a significant proposal to extend eligibility to the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. He had a compelling vision and made a really effective case that aligns with our Government's commitment to hearing health.

“In our time working together, we extended the eligibility for the Hearing Services Program, a change that has since provided critical support for many young Australians. This adjustment has proven essential in helping people with hearing challenges navigate critical life transitions.

“However, I know there is still more work to be done. And I know that David and the Deafness Forum are building a case for the further expansion of the eligibility of that important program.”



Health & Aged Care Minister, Mark Bulter.

“Under our Government's stewardship, the Hearing Services Program has remained a cornerstone of our health infrastructure. David's advocacy has helped ensure the Program's continuation and its enhancement. His efforts have supported our policy and led to impactful changes that benefit the community.

“As David prepares to step down after an amazing 13 years as chair, I really look forward to continuing our work with Deafness Forum Australia. Together, we can ensure David's legacy is honoured and built upon.”



David Brady

A Chair's Farewell.

Like many things in life, I knew this moment would come when it was time to pass on the baton and step down as Chair of the Deafness Forum Australia board.

However, when I was elected to the Board in 2011, I did not know that within a few months, my fellow Directors would hand me the honour and privilege of chairing our organisation.

Looking back, I could never imagine how much we, the members, directors, and staff, achieved and how we navigated some of the most turbulent periods in our sector's history. This was not achieved through luck but because of the people, the passion, and their perseverance to champion the issues and concerns of four million Australians who are Deaf, have hearing loss or have an ear or balance disorder. The many families who support them matter. It matters not just in the political arena in Canberra but also within their schools, workplaces, the NDIS, their communities, and some within their families.

Our bold move was to become a recognised health peak because our members told the Deafness Forum board and staff that people view losing their hearing as a health matter. It is one of my proudest moments to have led the

campaign, engaging many members and people across Australia to make this happen. The campaign required incredible efforts from many individuals and donations to make it real. This was a substantial legislative reform, and I know that in 2030, the impact of the work of a few of us will be appreciated by many Australians.

We knew back then, as now, that the NDIS would not have the capacity to cover all Australians with hearing loss or ear health challenges. For us, as for many organisations, the NDIS was a political challenge and, more importantly, an immense change in how eligible people would access funding and how organisations would provide support.

We saw winners from the NDIS and losers, with some long-standing organisations closed their doors because change did not work as well for them as for others.

Despite the challenges, many Australians with hearing loss who were eligible for the NDIS gained a new lease on life. They found independence and opportunities for themselves and their families.

Regardless of the good or bad of the NDIS, we know it is here to stay. With the new Foundational Support concept being created, our sector will, as always, find its way through changes and come out the other.

Aside from the advocacy and political impacts attained under my time as Chair, I will never forget the contributions from many incredible Australians and those who continue to make real strides to ensure no Australian with hearing loss, Deaf, or an ear/balance disorder, and their families are left behind. Thank you to the many Board Directors who shared their time, intellect, and experience. I want to thank our CEO, Steve Williamson, our program managers, Hayley Stone and Jane Lee, and the many people and organisations that supported our staff in their extensive roles.

To our member organisations and individuals, from when I started to today, you have been the lifeblood of Deafness Forum Australia, the front-line lived experience and the connection to millions of Australians. To all of you, thank you for your friendship, time, and service.

Our great and I think, unique strength is the volunteers who inform and support our programs. Deafness Forum was represented in 2023 - 2024 in numerous committees and advisory groups by a highly competent group of caring and expert volunteers. My heartfelt thanks to the many members of our various community advisory groups for their insights and guidance on issues that are important to you and the community. Others offered support when it was most needed.

I am so proud to have had the privilege of leading a great team of fine directors over the years. Each has generously given their time and energy and belief. I thank them for their passion and dedication, and I hope they know they have had an impact.

It is important also that I acknowledge the Australian Government in funding Deafness Forum Australia to be a national disability peak, the lead in NDIS Advocacy and a national health peak organisation with a focus on hearing loss prevention. This enables us to promote ear and hearing health, balance disorders, prevention programs, and advocate for policies that underpin living well in the community.

When I began as Deafness Forum's Chair, I was a single man trying to find his feet in the world, angry at the injustice and barriers in Australian society to me and many others with hearing loss. Today, with the NDIS, hearing health is given national status, and our country is slowly understanding more about hearing loss. And I have a gorgeous family who gives me joy and hope every day.

Thank you, everyone. It has been a privilege to represent you. There is much more work to be done, and you can count on Deafness Forum to be a voice for all.



David N Brady
Chair, 2011 - 2024



The soon-to- retire Minister for the NDIS, Hon Bill Shorten MP, congratulates David Brady on his service to Deafness Forum Australia and the disability sector.

Hearing Health Elevated



"Can you hear me?"

A familiar question with growing urgency. What if the threats to our hearing go beyond the loud sounds we hear daily and include hidden dangers like some infections or medications? These risks are real and can be especially harmful to children's developing ears.

Let's have a conversation about this.

The Summit: Fostering Conversations

On November 15, 2024, we did.

Through the successful National Deafness Sector Summit.

The Summit is part of a series of ongoing hearing health conversations, aspiring to a broader vision: **hearing health for all, at every stage of life.**

With this Summit, "*Protecting Young Ears: Navigating Disease & Medication Risks*," we brought you leading experts: Dr. Duaa Gaafar from Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and A/Prof Hayley Smithers-Sheedy, Kath Swinburn, and Pam Rogers from Cerebral Palsy Alliance.

Joined by about 100 participants, they shared the impact of congenital cytomegalovirus (cCMV) and antibiotics on children's hearing—and, importantly, discussed prevention strategies.

Learnings from the Summit

- 34 million children globally suffer from hearing loss.
- 40% of children treated with certain antibiotics may experience permanent hearing loss, but no national guidelines exist to mitigate this harm.
- 20-30% permanent sensorineural hearing loss in young children is caused by cCMV—but it can be easily preventable.

Preventing irreversible hearing loss is more than protecting hearing; it's preserving a child's ability to thrive, learn, and connect.

Dynamic Platform: A Catalyst for Change

The Summit is more than just an event—it's a platform for change. We're **making hearing health a national priority** through engagement and information and breaking down barriers to participation and learning.

In Case You Missed It . . .

No worries—we've got you [covered](#):

- Watch the [recording](#)
- Read the [transcript](#)
- View the presentations ([Antibiotics/CMV](#)).
- Explore our Summit [reflection paper](#)

Looking Ahead: Conversations that Matter

Healthy hearing is often key in how we experience the world, connect, and live life.

Our first Summit demonstrates with the right knowledge, we can create a quality future for all.

But it's just the beginning—conversations spark action. And future discussions will keep shaping our approach to hearing health.

Share the topics you want from future Summits [here](#). Then watch for updates.



Earbus co-founders Dr Lara Shur & Paul Higginbotham with inventor Dr Tamsin Holland-Brown (centre).

Earbus Foundation in Western Australia strives to be at the forefront of innovative interventions to support impactful hearing health outcomes for Aboriginal and at-risk children.

This is particularly important for those living in regional and remote communities, where access to services and devices can be challenging and expensive.

Earbus co-founders Dr Lara Shur & Paul Higginbotham reached out to Dr Tamsin Holland-Brown early this year, leading to an exciting opportunity to trial a device she invented. Dr Holland-Brown, a British paediatrician and award-winning health entrepreneur, has created an affordable bone conductor headset which could be a game changer in helping children hear and learn.

Over the last six months, Earbus Audiologists have tested the headset on Aboriginal children in remote schools. The results so far have been positive, news we were excited to share when Earbus ran into Dr Holland-Brown as delegates at the 36th World Congress of Audiology in September.



Deafness Forum Australia announces our support for the National Lung Cancer Screening Program, set to launch in July 2025.

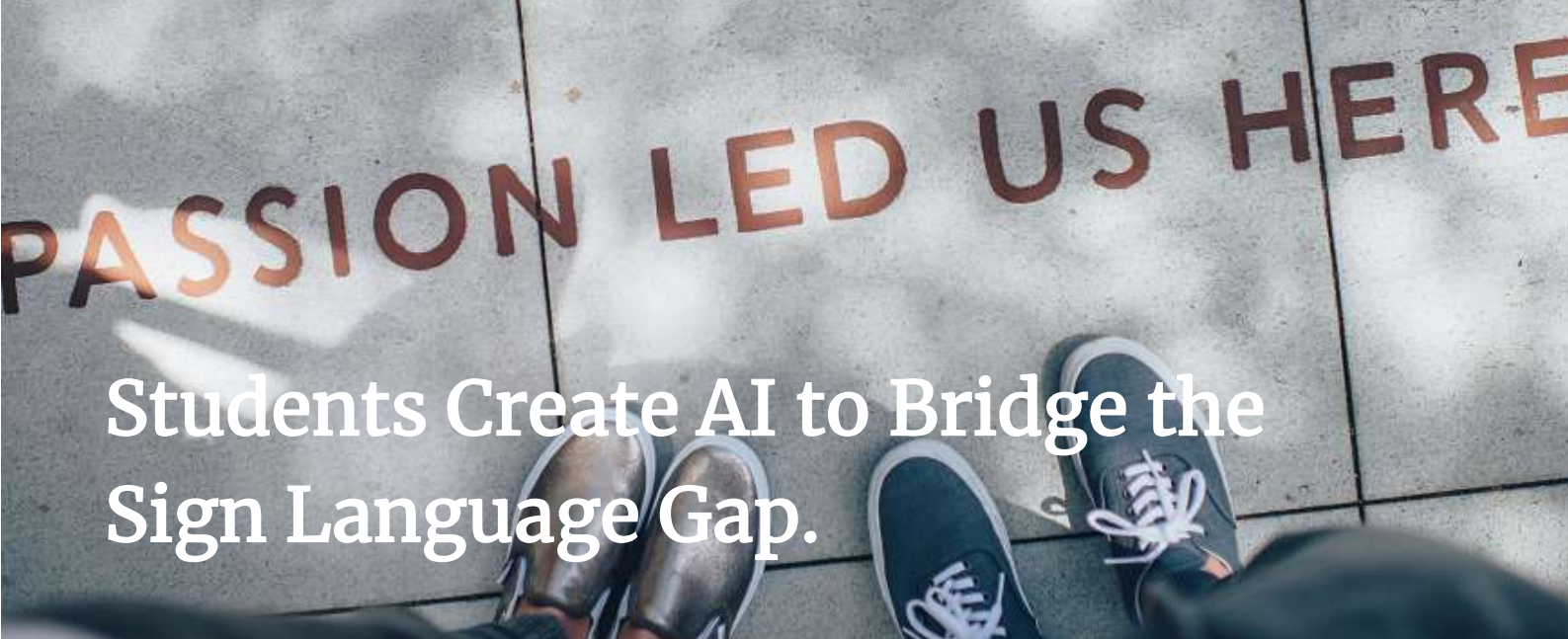
This vital initiative will offer free lung scans every two years to eligible Australians aged 50-70 with a significant smoking history. Early detection means a better chance of successful treatment!

The Department of Health and Aged Care, NACCHO, Lung Foundation Australia and Cancer Australia are working together to ensure that priority populations, including those living in rural areas, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and the LGBTQIA+ community, have access to the screening program.

If you have personal experiences or perspectives about the program, we encourage them to share them.

The survey is a chance to influence future steps in making the screening program inclusive and safe. It takes about 20 minutes to complete and is open until January 16, 2025. Your individual input can make a significant impact!

[Access the survey here](#)



Students Create AI to Bridge the Sign Language Gap.

Students at India's Plaksha University have developed an artificial intelligence product to assist people who are hard of hearing and those unfamiliar with sign language.

The new software, Indri.yeah (Ed: brilliant name), promises to significantly ease communication barriers by enabling seamless translation between spoken language and Indian Sign Language (ISL), and vice versa.

The brains behind this innovative tool are the founders of Thinklude, a startup initiated by Prerit Rathi and Pranjal Rastogi. While juggling their engineering studies, the enterprising duo has created software that uses advanced generative techniques and computer vision to facilitate mass interpretation of sign language.

Scheduled for market release following successful pilot testing, Indri.yeah is a licensable software that has already begun to attract attention.

“Launching this software while studying and starting a business at 20 has been a challenging but rewarding journey,” Prerit said.

Despite the challenges, their dedication has paid off as they navigate the early stages of venture capital fundraising and engage in a pre-seed funding round to support their startup’s growth.



The need for innovation is stark. India has the world’s largest deaf and non-speaking population, estimated at 63 million. Yet, the country has only 314 certified ISL interpreters.

The project’s potential and impact have not gone unnoticed. Indri.yeah was recognised at the National Innovation Dialogue event hosted by the United Nations Development Program and the National Institution for Transforming India Aayog, where it won the category for top startup in disability assistance technology in 2024.

Looking forward, Thinklude aims to reach 10 million hard-of-hearing individuals across India within the first quarter of the product’s launch.

From [Varsity students develop software to bridge communication gap for hearing impaired.](#)

Charlotte Young Champions Inclusivity



Charlotte Young, a youth and disability advocate, was named the overall winner at this year's Asian-Australian Leadership awards.

While studying full-time, Ms Young also works as an inclusivity consultant to national and international organisations including UNICEF and the US Embassy.

Ms Young has a Chinese father from Hong Kong and a Lebanese Australian mother.

While Ms Young said she has never experienced feeling like an outsider in Australia, she acknowledges that the barriers faced by the women above do indeed exist.

"However, I feel that the acceptance of multiculturalism in our society has given me agency to work in what interests me without having to navigate identity politics," she said.

Over the years, Ms Young said she has watched both her parents embrace their cultures "wholeheartedly", allowing her to do the same.

Being diagnosed with a hearing loss at four-years-old, Ms Young said it was her mum who was her biggest champion while navigating doctors and diagnoses.

"My mum kept advocating relentlessly against doctors who wouldn't believe her when she said I had a hearing loss," she said.

"Without that kind of advocacy from mum, I probably wouldn't be where I am today."



The Asian-Australian Leadership Awards celebrate the valuable contributions that Asian-Australians bring to the country. The Awards recognise the achievements and leadership of young Asian-Australians across numerous categories.

From [Asian Australians including Penny Wong say their heritage has been a barrier to success.](#)

Advancements in Hearing Health Innovation Backed by Government Funding in Western Australia

Western Australian health research is taking significant strides with government-backed initiatives focusing on innovative treatments for hearing-related conditions.

Leading researchers in the field, Dr. Christo Bester and Dr. Filippo Valente, have received grants through the state's Future Health Research and Innovation Innovation Fellowships program.



Dr. Bester has been awarded \$137,000 to explore new diagnostic approaches for cochlear implant recipients. His research aims to understand the healing processes that affect the usage of cochlear implants.

This funding will support the development of treatments and counselling strategies that enhance a patient's experience with cochlear implants throughout their life. The project also opens the door to developing drug therapies to improve patient outcomes.



Dr. Filippo Valente received \$143,316 to propel the manufacturing and clinical trials of ClearDrum, a prosthetic eardrum device potentially poised to revolutionise the treatment of chronic ruptured eardrums. Developed by the Ear Science Institute Australia and invented by Professor Marcus Atlas, ClearDrum is a silkworm-based implantable device designed to repair damaged eardrums, a condition prevalent in Indigenous populations in WA and globally. It could replace traditional surgical methods for severe or chronic eardrum perforations.

These projects highlight Western Australia's commitment to fostering medical innovation and providing researchers with the necessary resources to translate scientific discoveries into clinical applications. Both initiatives are expected to have far-reaching impacts on hearing health treatment locally and worldwide, enhancing the state's vision for a leading role in global biomedical advancements.

Participate in a Hearing Wellbeing Study

Does hearing loss impact your wellbeing?

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores the potential of an online Hearing Wellbeing Program to provide meaningful support for the social and emotional challenges associated with hearing conditions.

As a participant, you'll have the opportunity to:

- Access the online Hearing Wellbeing Program, where you'll be randomly assigned to one of two program options. You can complete the program at your own pace over a three-month period.
- Complete short questionnaires about your wellbeing, health, and hearing before starting the program, after completion, and three months post-program.

Some participants may also be invited to join a short online interview to share feedback on their experiences with the Hearing Wellbeing Program.

Who Can Participate?

You can participate if you are 18 years or older, experience self-reported hearing difficulties, and have internet access.

Participants who complete the study may choose to be entered into a draw to win one of five \$150 gift vouchers.

How to Sign Up

Get more information [here](#).

[Here](#) is where you go to participate.

For questions, reach out to [Dr Emma Laird](#).

Improving Care for Children with Usher Syndrome

UsherKids Australia and the University of Melbourne investigated how much healthcare clinicians know about Usher syndrome.

It is a rare genetic condition that causes deaf-blindness, affecting approximately 1 in 6,000 people worldwide. The condition involves hearing loss, progressive vision progressive vision deterioration, and sometimes problems with balance.

In this study, researchers asked what healthcare professionals know about Usher syndrome and its symptoms, and which healthcare professionals were essential for managing the condition. Researchers found that many didn't know about the critical roles of speech pathologists, geneticists, and genetic counsellors. And they were not entirely aware of specific care aspects related to their own discipline.

To ensure the best care possible, a team of different healthcare professionals is needed. The research found that by increasing awareness and knowledge, healthcare clinicians can support individuals with Usher syndrome and their families more effectively.

Future research should focus on developing effective educational tools to enhance awareness among healthcare professionals and improve the quality of care for those living with Usher syndrome.

You can [read the research report](#), and learn more by visiting [UsherKids Australia](#).

Australian Lions Hearing Dogs Transform Lives

Australian Lions Hearing Dogs has gifted ‘furry ears’ to hundreds of Australians since 1982, thanks to the generous support of donors and Lions Clubs nationwide.

In Beerwah, near Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, resident Robyn Thompson became the latest recipient of this life-changing initiative.

Ms Thompson lives alone with diminishing hearing. Concerned about her ability to live independently, she applied for the Australian Lions Hearing Dogs (ALHD) program and was thrilled to be selected.

“I feel incredibly blessed. I’m still shocked that I was chosen to have a fully funded hearing assistance dog,” she said.

“He’s a beautiful dog, and I look forward to now having him as a lifelong companion who can help me live safely in my home.”

Each hearing assistance dog costs nearly \$40,000 to train, deliver, and support, yet ALHD and Lions Clubs of Australia provide them free of charge to recipients as a gift.

Beerwah Lions Club President Rod Layt expressed the club’s joy at supporting a resident.

“We are so pleased to have this great Lions initiative support someone in our local community,” he said.

Gumpy, an 18-month-old Labradoodle, is trained to recognise ten familiar household sounds and alerts Ms Thompson by gently touching her leg and guiding her to the source.

For emergency alerts, such as smoke alarms, Gumpy signals by lying down, indicating the need to evacuate. A local Lions Club sponsor supports each ALHD placement.

For emergency alerts, such as smoke alarms, Gumpy signals by lying down, indicating the need to evacuate. A local Lions Club sponsor supports each ALHD placement.

An Australian Lions Hearing Dog offers a vital support layer for people with severe or profound hearing loss, complementing existing hearing aids or cochlear implants.

For over 40 years, [Australian Lions Hearing Dogs](#) has provided more than 700 hearing assistance dogs across Australia. Today, with one in six Australians experiencing hearing loss – a figure set to increase to one in four by 2050 – the demand for these dogs continues to grow.

By Sonia Isaacs, [Hearing dog hero](#).





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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Members of Deafness Forum Australia will be held online on Wednesday 27 November 2024.

This year's meeting is the final AGM under the leadership of our retiring chair, David Brady.

Join David for the 2024 AGM at:

- 12.00 pm Western Australia
- 1.30 pm Northern Territory
- 2.30 pm South Australia and the Yancowinna County in NSW which includes the city of Broken Hill
- 3.00 pm Eastern States

For the agenda, reports, and meeting access information, please go to:

<https://www.deafnessforum.org.au/our-annual-general-meeting-of-the-members/>