



No one knew how bad the problem was

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A report by the Auditor-General of Western Australia found that many entities were involved in identifying, diagnosing and treating chronic ear conditions in Aboriginal children but did not share patient information.

Ricky McLeod was too embarrassed to tell anyone he was deaf until 10 years ago

McLeod, 52, hears only muffled sounds and communicates by reading lips, speaking and sending text messages.

He was put on a waiting list in New Zealand for cochlear implants in 2015, and unless the public purse can write a bigger cheque, he will never hear again.



Eat your way to healthy hearing

Did you know eating the right things can help prevent hearing loss? In this article by Hearing Australia, here's how to give your ears a boost, the healthy way.



Libby Harricks Memorial Oration

Deafness Forum of Australia and Audiology Australia present the annual Libby Harricks Memorial Oration in Perth, May 2020.

The Oration series raises awareness of issues of hearing health, deafness and ear and balance disorders. The reputation of the series is due to the great contributions of its outstanding Orators who have presented on a wide range of important topics.

Hearing loss part of life as infections take hold



Students Rueben and Reece in Jigalong, WA, where nine out of 10 children in the community of 330 people have chronic ear infections. By [Paige Taylor](#), Indigenous Affairs Correspondent, The Australian.

Chronic ear infections are taking a terrible toll on children in the remote Aboriginal community of Jigalong, on the edge of the Little Sandy Desert.

Hearing loss is so rife teachers have to shout all the time or the students cannot hear them. After one Jigalong teacher needed time off to recover from voice strain in July, Lions Hearing Foundation donated an amplification system for the early childhood classroom. It is an assisted listening device that makes the teacher's voice louder and clearer for all students.

Nine out of 10 children in the community of 330 people have chronic ear infections. Already, that has led to hearing loss for 60 per cent of all children.

The infections were so prevalent that many parents believed that weeping ears were a normal part of childhood.

It is true that all children are likely to experience ear infections but there is a big disparity in the length, severity and consequences of the infections in indigenous and non-indigenous children.

Non-indigenous Australians are likely to endure ear infections for a total of about three months in childhood. Indigenous children are likely to experience such infections for 32 months.

Parents at Jigalong and two other desert communities — Punmu and Parngurr — began working with visiting audiologists from Ear Science Institute Australia to learn how to clean kids' ears and keep them healthy.

Despite reduced funding, Ear Science continues to send medical teams to those communities every six months to treat infections. The institute sends two audiologists and an ear, nose and throat specialist on each trip.

Ear Science chief executive Sandra Bellekom fears her organisation may not be reaching children who need help, while other children are seeing specialists more often than necessary.

She hopes that the Ear Science Institute and Telethon Kids can develop a system that creates order and efficiency.

A report by the Auditor-General of Western Australia in July found that many entities were - involved in identifying, diagnosing and treating chronic ear conditions in Aboriginal children but did not share patient information, even at a de-identified and aggregated level.

Because of this no one knew how bad the problem was on a state-wide basis.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/hearing-loss-part-of-life-as-infections-take-hold/news-story/e96be932ba19eef63b982db27be6e109>



Leading Australian research organisation National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) partnered with The Deaf Society to provide Deaf Awareness training for its researchers and other personnel.



The National Acoustic Laboratories is the research division of Hearing Australia (used to be Australian Hearing).

Since 1947, NAL's research into hearing has opened new ways in which people with hearing problems can be helped.

Government announcement

Video Relay via Skype on the National Relay Service

Video Relay over Skype allows Auslan users to sign their side of the conversation, while the relay officer signs the response of the other person back to the user.

This National Relay Service (NRS) call option suits people who want to make a call using Auslan to someone who speaks English and uses an ordinary telephone.

Things changed this month. If you are a Video Relay user, you will need to save the new Video Relay Skype contact called 'NRS VIDEO RELAY SERVICE' to your Skype Contacts.

From 20 November 2019, the current Video Relay Skype contact called 'NRS VIDEO RELAY' will no longer work and should be removed from your Skype Contacts. Find out more by reading the step-by-step instruction sheet: [Preparing to Make Video Relay calls on Accesshub](#).

The process for making a Video Relay call has been streamlined. You now have the option of starting a call with a quick click, replacing the need to type manual commands such as "!call". Find out more by reading the [Video Relay fact sheet](#) and [instructions sheets on Accesshub](#).

At the start of every NRS call, all parties will receive a message advising that the call may be monitored for quality purposes. This will help the NRS continue to improve the service.

What's coming soon? New Auslan instruction videos are currently in production and will be released on [Accesshub](#) shortly.

The launch of Video Relay on the new NRS app will take place in the coming months.

The remaining NRS options will be transitioned progressively. The next phase will occur on 25 November when NRS Chat (previously known as Internet Relay) will be launched on the web page and on the new NRS app.

Where do I go for help?

Read [fact sheets](#) and [instruction sheets on Accesshub](#) or contact the NRS Helpdesk for more information or assistance. If you experience any issues using the NRS, the Helpdesk is also there to assist.

The Helpdesk is open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm (AEST, excluding national public holidays).

You can leave a message outside these hours and a Helpdesk staff member will get back to you.

Phone: 1800 555 660

TTY: 1800 555 630

Fax: 1800 555 690

SMS: 0416 001 350

Email: helpdesk@relayservice.com.au

Deaf man hopes sharing his life of isolation will turn up the volume for others

By Sam Kilmister

He would chase his nine siblings around the barren slopes of Raetihi in New Zealand, and spend hours holding a spotlight for his father as he tinkered under cars.

His childhood was no different to any other kid in the remote central North Island heartland, or so Ricky McLeod thought. He never understood why others made fun of him.

He got his first inkling when he was at Ruapehu College. The class began like any other, until he noticed suddenly there was silence and everyone was staring at him.

"Why didn't you answer my question?" asked the teacher, with a smirk, as if he had caught the boy out napping.

But McLeod hadn't heard any question. He moved himself to the front row, fearing his affliction had just been outed to his schoolmates. But he said nothing.

If he didn't acknowledge classmates when they called out in the corridor, he was berated for being rude. When he missed an answer in class, they told him he was an idiot. He still said nothing.

It would be another 25 years until he finally confided in someone that he was profoundly deaf.



Ricky McLeod was too embarrassed to tell anyone he was deaf until 10 years ago.

McLeod, 52, suffers from conductive hearing loss, which occurs when sound is not conducted efficiently through the outer-ear canal to the eardrum and the tiny bones, called ossicles, of the middle ear.

He hears only muffled sounds and communicates by reading lips, speaking and sending text messages. He has never learnt Sign Language.

McLeod was put on a waiting list for cochlear implants in 2015, and unless the public purse can write a bigger cheque, he will never hear again.

Days are spent alone in a secluded warehouse, stripping cars for scrap metal, a place he knows is sheltered from the bigotry of others and where he won't have to socialise, to pretend to hear.

He makes a modest income, but it's his space and no-one can make him feel inferior. He makes the rules, albeit for a solitary game.

"It's been a mission. Lonely, frustrating ... those words say it all."

But McLeod doesn't want pity. He's not starting a Givealittle page, and he's not campaigning for a cochlear implant for himself. He'd rather it go to someone else. Someone younger.

But he does want to show what a life of segregation looks like, and what children with hearing impairments are at risk of enduring into adulthood, if they, too, fall through the cracks.



McLeod spends most of his days in the safety of a secluded warehouse stripping cars for scrap metal.

A survey by an international deaf support website, Hear-it, found 28 per cent of those with hearing loss choose to keep their impairment to themselves. They fear prejudice and misconceptions, assumptions they are "less intelligent" or "mentally ill", or "they only hear what they want to hear".

McLeod is a loner but he is no stranger in Raetihi. The locals know him well. Most of them leave their old cars at his warehouse which he will either fix or strip for parts.

He has limited contact with anyone, except one friend, Sandy Brett, who makes phone calls and communicates for him when needed.

She says it's a basic human right for people to feel like they belong in society and they shouldn't be ashamed or hide who they are. She dreams of the day she can call out "Ricky", and not have to throw a stone to catch his attention.

At times, she fears for her friend's safety and, in such a small town, she says it is only going to get harder as he gets older.

"He can't hear alarms going off in his own house. I've scaled the gate of his house when he's not answered my texts, thinking something has happened to him. People like Ricky deserve to hear. He is a good man and I've seen him struggle. I want Ricky to be able to hear."



A rural town with a population of 1000 people, Raetihi was a minor industrial hub until the 1950s. McLeod recalls it becoming the focal point for travellers going between Whanganui and Waiouru. The treacherous 90-kilometre drive to Whanganui was not for the faint-hearted and was infamous for its primitive tracks and long falls if you strayed from the road.

Due to its close proximity to popular ski-fields, Raetihi is kept alive by tourism, with several accommodation providers and cafes to cater for the swelling number of visitors. There is a school, museum and a handful of shops.

"It's nice and quiet. It's home and everyone knows me."

He is often seen with his head buried in a broken down car on the side of the road or fixing someone's flat tyre. His love of cars developed almost before he could walk, ever since he held the torch for his partially blind father who fiddled about in the garage for hours on end.

"After four or five years I told him: 'Move over and let me do it'. Ever since then, he trusted me to fix his car."

But McLeod's dream of becoming a qualified mechanic was crushed when health and safety regulations ruled those with hearing impairments were a risk to themselves and others. Work and Income New Zealand set him up with the odd job, but he would often misinterpret instructions and make mistakes. Workmates would call him an idiot. Next thing, he was out of a job. It became a cycle.

"I used to get quite angry. It was frustrating. I never told anyone I was deaf and that was the problem. I was too embarrassed. I was afraid they would all talk behind my back and I just couldn't handle that anymore."

He feared he wouldn't be employable and that others wouldn't accept him. McLeod reflects on a night at the pub, drinking with a small group of friends when he momentarily looked away. As he turned back, the group erupted into laughter but he had already missed the joke.

"I hate that. They're all having fun and I'm left out. I don't want to give them a false laugh."

Once left out, he finds it difficult to catch up to the conversation. He tries to say something relevant, but it's greeted with his old foe. Silence.

"I just left it at that. I felt a bit bummed out. I just don't go out drinking with my mates much now."



Sandy Brett is one of McLeod's few friends.

What we take for granted is also a common problem for those with hearing difficulties. While McLeod can read lips, people often forget they must face him directly and speak slowly otherwise he is unable to make out what is said. Some turn away, cover their mouths or look at others while they are talking.

They know he's deaf, but they just forget.

"I can't hear them, because I can't read them. It's only natural because you're used to hearing and having conversations with everyone – three or four at the same time – but I can't. I can only have one conversation, one-on-one."

For years McLeod relied on his primary school sweetheart, Julie, to guide him through interactions, appointments and take phone calls.

But their relationship came to a tragic end when, in September, 2006, the mother of his five children died after a motorbike crash on State Highway 49 that McLeod was found criminally responsible for.

They had been at the Cold Kiwi motorcycle rally on a farm at Tangiwai and opted to return to Raetihi when the band shut down for the night.

McLeod lost control of his home-built tricycle and went off the road. His partner was thrown from the pillion seat and suffered serious chest injuries from which she later died.

McLeod later pleaded guilty to careless driving causing death and driving with excess blood alcohol.

McLeod didn't want to talk about the conviction, only heartache, which stayed with him for years. Without Julie, he was exposed to the frightening prospect of navigating the world by himself again.

"She was my soul mate. We were together for 24 years. She helped me out. She did everything for me. I gave up on everything [after her death]. It was very hard and I missed her a lot, but I survived with a few tears here and there. I try to adapt and I've survived this long."



McLeod's profound hearing loss makes it difficult to communicate with others, impacting on his ability to find employment.

Although he now accepts his situation, he still feels ostracised.

He has been fired from jobs, called an idiot and lost close friends. But the emotional hurt of enduring that has always been easier than admitting he was broken or different.

Cochlear implants, or surgically embedded neuroprosthetic devices, would restore his hearing and solve all his troubles. Once implanted, a cochlear bypasses the normal acoustic hearing process, instead replacing it with electric signals which stimulate the auditory nerve. With training, the brain learns to interpret those signals as sound and speech.

McLeod allows the idea to linger, the dreams of walking into the Ohakune Club on Wednesday night and being able to laugh with his mates, to line up a ball on the pool table and still stay in the conversation - to steer clear of the silence.

"It would be something new. It would be wonderful to hear someone say hello behind me and for me to turn around and say hello back. I'd love to do that instead of walking away from them and being called an idiot."

McLeod could hear birds sing and people call his name. He could go to the pub and not offer fake laughter at jokes that passed him by. He could watch television without subtitles, and perhaps even fulfil his childhood dream of becoming a qualified mechanic.

He could live like the rest of us.

FUNDING COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

There are just 40 publicly-funded cochlear implant surgeries performed each year, and even fewer surgeries are done privately, with each costing \$50,000.

But McLeod's friends say budgets and numbers shouldn't overshadow the human cost.

McLeod has trialled seven different hearing aids, each at \$700, without success.

His friends believe service provision for deaf people must prioritise their human value as a precursor to bottom lines and budgets.

Deaf people deserve services because of their rights as people and because societies ought to strive for humanistic values in attending to people's needs.

It is an idealistic suggestion – some would say lofty – but it is not an impossible one.



Southern Cochlear Implant Programme is funded by the Ministry of Health to perform surgeries and all post-implant care and receives more than 200 referrals each year. But only 5 per cent are accepted onto the surgical waiting list.

Based on the programme's existing referrals there could be more than 500 adults waiting for an implant within four years.

It is important the programme advocates for people who are profoundly deaf as they are unable to pick up the phone or sit with politicians themselves.

Associate professor Patrick Dawes, who is also the president of New Zealand Society of Otolaryngology says the existing funding model condemns most deaf adults to a life without

hearing. He wrote a letter to Health Minister David Clarke earlier this year stating an urgent review is needed.

"There is an immediate need for funding to address the backlog," says Dawes.



Sandy Brett travelled with McLeod to Christchurch when he underwent tests four years ago to determine whether he was eligible for a cochlear, and she vows to one day return with him when a device is made available to him.

Until that day comes, she'll keep fighting for him.

https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/115638672/deaf-man-hopes-sharing-his-life-of-isolation-will-turn-up-the-volume-for-others-with-solitary-worlds?fbclid=IwAR0JCK_k7OnWjfiKJCRvNIOyMSDHfVZF4Id2w5w5H6pT8t9eChfDs5PvLRA

David Brady re-elected Deafness Forum chair in 2020

David Brady was elected chair of Deafness Forum of Australia for another term following the organisation's Annual General Meeting and board meeting earlier this month,.

David said there was plenty be done in the sector and he was up for the challenge.

"We have the Roadmap on Hearing Health to be rolled out, Parliamentary Friends of Hearing Health and Deafness groups to organise, a World Hearing Day project in the NSW Parliament next year, a new CEO of the NDIS to get to know," he said.

There is the continuing need to be the voice for all Australians who are deaf, hearing impaired, have a ear or balance disorder, their families and all the services that support them," he said.





**HEARING MATTERS
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PRESENTS

LIBBY HARRICKS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2020

DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE IN THE COMMUNITY WHO HAS BEEN ABLE TO MANAGE A HEARING LOSS TO ACHIEVE PERSONAL SUCCESS?

This person should be

- Over 21 and living in Australia
- Hearing impaired, and communicating orally

This award is not limited to members of Hearing Matters Australia.

All nominations must include:

1. Name, address and phone number of the person making the nomination
2. Name of the person nominated
3. A short description of up to 250 words of why this person is being nominated, what challenges they faced and an overview of their achievements

Nominations must be received at the following address no later than the last day of January

Hearing Matters Australia

Board of Management

Post: Australian Hearing Hub, ground floor suite 600, 16 University Ave, Macquarie University NSW 2109; or by email to admin@hearingmattersaustralia.org

The winner is announced at Hearing Matters Australia's Annual General Meeting in April.

About Libby

Libby Harricks AM was a founding member of SHHH Australia and its President for a number of years. SHHH is now known as Hearing Matters Australia.

Libby became profoundly hearing impaired as a young adult but persevered with her career as a Pharmacist while raising two children. As a driving force behind SHHH, she helped it to become an effective volunteer organisation and was also widely known and admired as a dynamic advocate for access for hearing impaired people. She was made a member of Order of Australia in 1990 in recognition of her work for the hearing impaired. In 1998 Libby Harricks passed away aged 52.

Email: admin@hearingmattersaustralia.org

Website: <https://www.hearingmattersaustralia.org/>

Eat your way to healthy hearing



Did you know eating the right things can help prevent hearing loss? In this article by Hearing Australia, here's how to give your ears a boost, the healthy way.

Eat your greens

Mum was right, greens are good. Dark leafy greens, broccoli, peas and asparagus, even Brussels sprouts for the brave, are all rich in **folate**, which is proven to protect against age-related hearing loss. This B vitamin helps produce new cells and maintain good circulation, essential for healthy ears.

Go bananas

Potassium has been shown to protect our hearing, attributed to its role in regulating the fluid in our ear that is associated with hearing. Potassium levels naturally decrease as we age so making sure you're getting decent dietary intake is important for preventing age-related hearing loss.

Veg out

Also found in fruit and vegetables, **magnesium** helps protect delicate hairs in the inner ear from the shock of loud noises and buffering against the biggest culprit when it comes to hearing loss – noise damage.

Think zinc

Looking for an excuse to indulge in chocolate? Thought to be an effective treatment for tinnitus, and shown to increase the inner ear's resistance to hearing loss, **zinc** can be found in beef, lamb, seafood, garlic, chickpeas and our favourite, dark chocolate. Zinc is important for immune function too, so it can help ward off nasty ear infections.

Read the complete article at <https://www.hearing.com.au/Hearing-loss/Prevention/Eat-your-way-to-healthy-hearing?fbclid=IwAR2QuSB6dY3XPtRcr51T6VEeMwQbsyEyEVE596pAuYspD2L67VLBJFfquktk>



The 23rd International Congress on the Education of the Deaf 2020 (ICED 2020) will take place in Brisbane in July 2020.

This not-to-be-missed Congress provides a collaborative learning environment and networking opportunities.

<https://iced2020.com/>

The Congress Theme, *Power of Connection*, will see this 4-day program centered on:

- Hearing and deafness – audiological/neurological perspectives on development and functioning
- Language and communication development and skills – spoken, sign and written language
- Technology – new developments for identification, access and education
- Education in classrooms, schools and systems
- Early childhood, primary, secondary and post-school education
- Curriculum, instruction, assessment and achievement
- Families, peers and friendship groups
- Parent advocacy, associations and support
- Resilience, wellbeing, self-advocacy and mental health
- Communication access through technology, interpreting, environment and media
- Deafness, disability and diversity in society, law and politics (national and international)
- Specialist teachers – their role, training, continuing education and professional associations

Interested in interpreting for ICED 2020? Expressions of interest are now open for Auslan and International Sign interpreters: visit www.iced2020.com/access

Want to be kept up to date with all things ICED 2020? Join the mailing list today by visiting www.iced2020.com.au or [click here](#)

Libby Harricks Memorial Oration



audiology australia

Deafness Forum of Australia and Audiology Australia present the annual Libby Harricks Memorial Oration.

The Oration series raises awareness of issues of hearing health, deafness and ear and balance disorders. The reputation of the series is due to the great contributions of its outstanding Orators who have presented on a wide range of important topics.

Date: Sunday 3 May 2020

Time: 4.30 – 5.45pm

Venue: Crown Ballroom, Crown Towers Perth WA.

Entry to the 2020 Libby Harricks Memorial Oration is **free**. [Register here](#)

The series honours the memory of the first President of Deafness Forum of Australia. For her work on behalf of hearing-impaired people, Libby Harricks was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1990.



Federal Parliament sitting calendar for 2020

If you would like to know when your MPs and Senators are meeting in Canberra next year, this is their calendar.

https://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Events_Calendar/Events_Search_Result#range=yearly&display=calendar&from=2020-01-01&to=2020-12-31&senate=1&house=1&estimates=0&sb=0&sa=0&ss=0&committees=0&sh=0&hh=0&jh=0&sc=0&ir=0&visit=0&tr=0&se=0&ex=0&od=0&general=0&pubhol=1

Know someone who might like to get their own One in Six?

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

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, and to elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the challenge of overcoming high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people and its role in Closing the Gap. We acknowledge the risk to indigenous sign languages and the importance of Auslan.

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