



Closing The Gap

There is an urgent need to tackle the high rates of hearing loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the criminal justice system.

AC/DC's Brian Johnson

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I am proud of my deafness. It is not a burden, but a strength

I was diagnosed as deaf and mute when I was three years old. There weren't a lot of expectations about what I could achieve. I was born in Saigon, in Vietnam. People thought I wouldn't finish primary school.

Hearing loss and social engagement

"I'm fine at home but if out and about in a noisy restaurant or party, I can really struggle."

A large body of research has shown an association between untreated hearing loss, social isolation, loneliness, and depression. Hearing loss makes it more difficult to engage with loved ones and colleagues, and socialise, particularly in noisy environments.

Kids

Low-cost earbuds can make newborn hearing screening accessible

Sensitivity to musical rhythm supports social development

Maximising hearing outcomes for Children through improved paediatric audiology

Closing The Gap: addressing the hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system



In the spirit of reconciliation we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Deafness Forum Australia and its members, particularly those in Western Australia, have been involved in various reports to the Australian Government highlighting the high rates of hearing loss amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, advocating for improved funding, resources, and programs to address these health disparities.

Today, there is a pressing need to address the high rates of hearing loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the criminal justice system, with rates as high as 80-95% in some communities.

The Australian Law Reform Commission (2017) report *Pathways to Justice—Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* estimated that the annual economic burden of the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was nearly \$8 billion, with that figure expected to rise to over \$20 billion without appropriate intervention.

As well as the enormous economic burden to society and particularly First Nations communities, Australia's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is currently being neglected, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with hearing loss experiencing unlawful discrimination on a regular basis.

Our justice system remains ineffective in addressing their complex needs and vulnerabilities.

This new report from Deafness Forum aims to provide evidence of the perpetual cycle that exists between childhood ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how it impacts the disproportionately higher rates of incarceration for this population and makes recommendations accordingly.

Download and read [Addressing the Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the criminal justice system.](#)

Life of Brian: AC/DC's Brian Johnson 'wouldn't have minded' dying

By [Christie D'Zurilla](#) writing for The [Los Angeles Times](#)



AC/DC members Brian Johnson, left, and Angus Young perform in Chicago in February 2016. Soon after, Johnson had to leave the band due to hearing loss. (Rob Grabowski / Invision/Associated Press)

There was a time when singer Brian Johnson might have felt better crashing into a wall at high speed than living the rest of his life without being able to perform anymore with legendary rock band AC/DC.

After Johnson was forced to leave the band in 2016 due to a risk of total hearing loss, the "Back in Black" singer turned to the second love of his life after music. That was racing cars, and he found himself winning more than he had in the past.

"People would come up to me afterwards and say, 'Brian, you're fearless!,' but I wasn't fearless," Johnson writes in "The Lives of Brian," his new memoir, via Ultimate Classic Rock.

"I just didn't f— care any more. I'd always thought that the best way to go out would be flat-out around a corner. You'd hit the wall and boom, it would be over, just like that."

In 2016, Johnson said in a press release that the day of his hearing-loss diagnosis was "the darkest day of my professional life." He had been advised that if he continued to perform with what he called "the loudest band in the world," he risked losing what was left of his hearing.

I am proud of my deafness. It is not a burden, but a strength

By Daniel from Ferntree Gully and posted on [ABC Melbourne](#)



I want to be out in the community, helping others. (ABC: Uma Srikantha)

People thought I wouldn't finish primary school, wouldn't learn to speak and should work a simple job.

I was diagnosed as deaf and mute when I was three years old. There weren't a lot of expectations about what I could achieve.

I was born in Saigon, in Vietnam. I remember it being a very dynamic city, busy and colourful. But there were many obstacles. I was judged because of my disability. If it wasn't for my mother's devotion and support I'm not sure where I'd be today. She knows what it's like to live with a disability, having low vision.

I moved to Australia in 2014. Suddenly I felt accepted for who I am. I attend a mainstream school and get extra support from a school for the deaf. The two schools even share a campus.

After school I want to be a teacher or a nurse. I want to be out in the community, helping others.

I started volunteering at a Young Leaders program for Dandenong Council. We've recently finished organising a Youth Summit. And we're working on a project for LGBTQIA+ young people. I really love these weekly meetings.

Everyone here is awesome. It inspires me to keep pushing through the expectations others place on me.

I am fluent in three languages: Vietnamese, English and Australian Sign Language.

I've proven to myself that nothing can stand in my way.

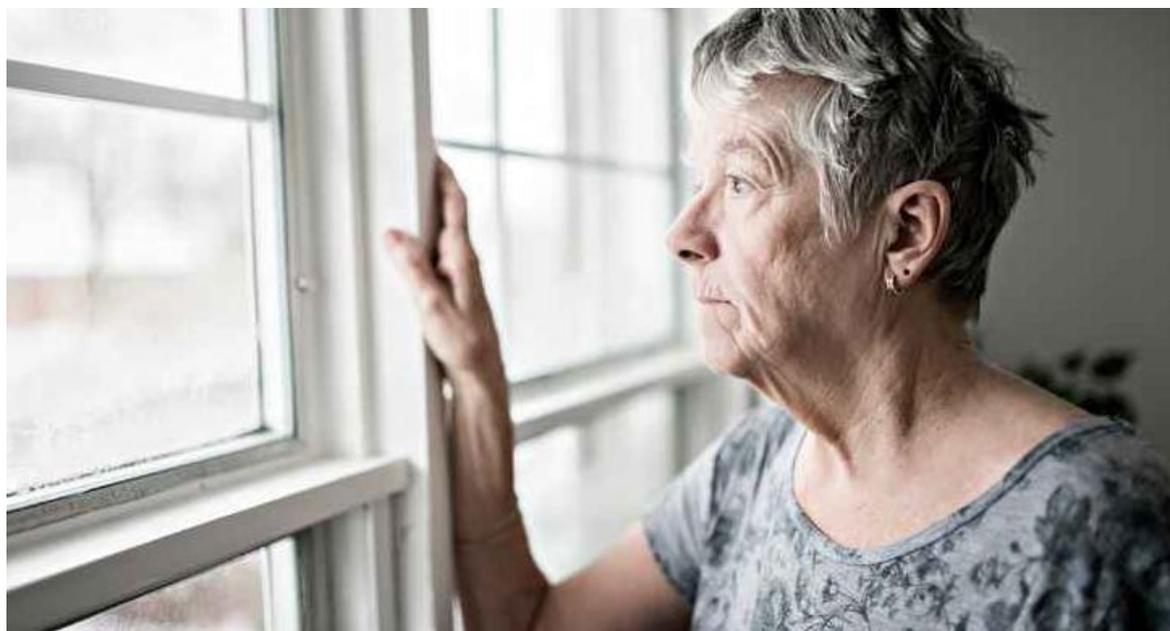
Hearing loss and social engagement, loneliness, and depression

By [Carly Sygrove](#) for [HearingTracker](#)

When Felicity, 70, of South Australia, was diagnosed with hearing loss in her 20s, it impacted much of her life.

"I lived alone and couldn't use a phone or watch TV [it was before captions became law in Australia], and it wasn't unusual for me to go home from work on Friday and not even speak until I went to work on Monday," she told *HearingTracker*.

She remembers, "I always felt isolated and alone. In crowds, I felt invisible in full sight. I lost touch with my children, who lived overseas and interstate. Depression was my companion, and I contemplated suicide because of the loneliness."



Though closely related, there is a difference between being "socially isolated" and "lonely." Social isolation is a lack of social connections, whereas loneliness is defined as a distressing feeling that accompanies the perception that one's social needs are not being met by the quantity or the quality of one's social relationships.

If our capacity to socialise is impaired, we may become socially isolated, and our identity becomes impacted. "When someone is isolated for a long period of time, their sense of self disappears," explains Michael Harvey, a clinical psychologist who specialises in tinnitus and hearing loss.

A large body of research has shown an association between untreated hearing loss, social isolation, loneliness, and depression.

Hearing loss makes it more difficult to engage with loved ones and colleagues, and socialise, particularly in noisy environments. This is the case for Donald. 81, from the UK, who has bilateral moderate hearing loss.

“I'm fine at home but if out and about in a noisy restaurant or party, I can really struggle.”

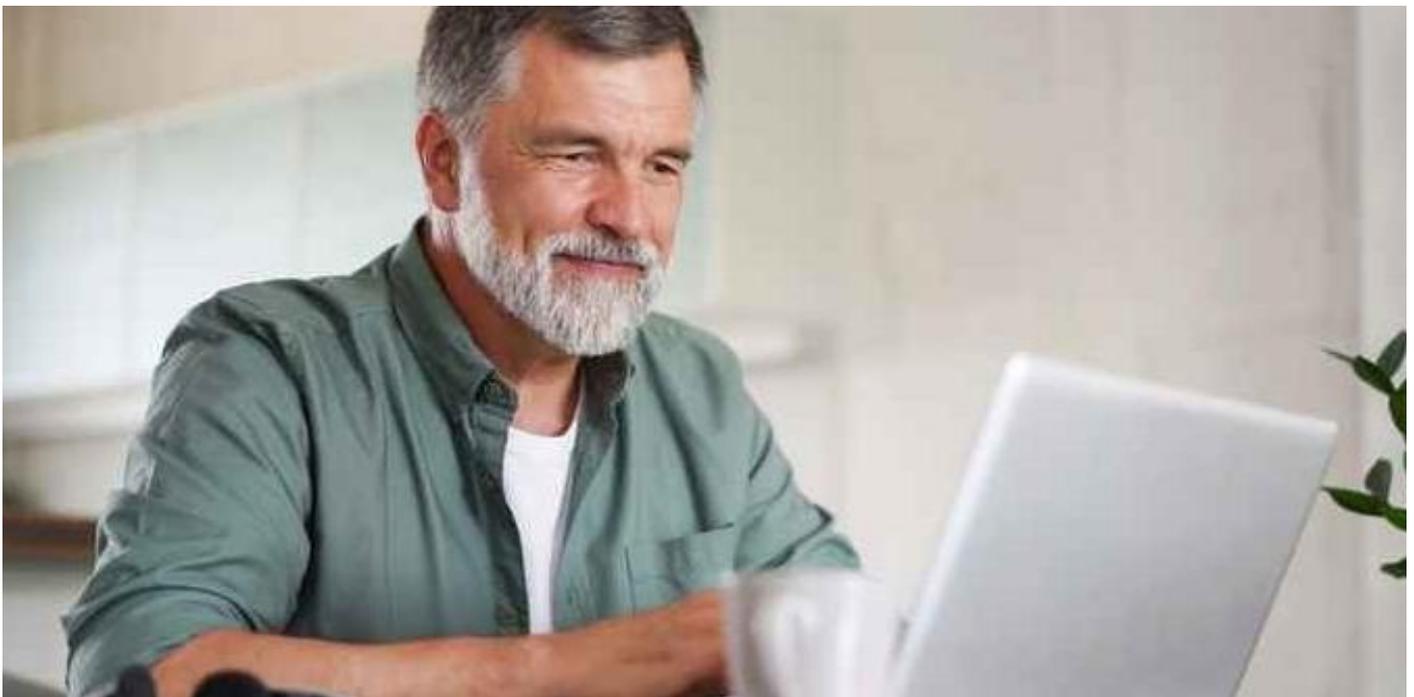
People may forget the communication needs of the hard-of-hearing members of the party, meaning those affected must either keep reminding the hearing members or take a backseat in the conversation.

Loneliness or depression can result in using alcohol or drugs to deal with these feelings. As the addiction worsens, relationships become damaged, causing more powerful feelings of loneliness and isolation. As loneliness fuels addiction, addiction, in turn, causes loneliness.

Harvey points out another type of addiction, namely the internet.

“Many people cope with loneliness and depression by being online for long periods of time. Now, that's good in some respects—there are a lot of incredible benefits to that. But it also can be quite addictive and can deprive people of the opportunity to socialise with real people in real time,” he said.

“The good news is, texting and captioning is a godsend for people with hearing loss because it solves the communication misunderstandings, but it's a double-edged sword...it's a balancing act.”



For people with hearing loss, online captioning and social media channels can be a godsend but can also have its downside, with the potential to detract from the importance of in-person interaction, says Dr. Harvey.

Those experiencing isolation or the emotional impact of hearing loss may benefit from counselling or psychotherapy.

“Often there's a grieving process that happens when people become hearing impaired,” explains Harvey. A therapist can help you address the psychological effects associated with hearing loss.

Many people find comfort and support in connecting with others going through similar experiences. Whether in person or virtual, support groups for people with hearing loss provide a place where you can, share stories, seek, and share advice, and enjoy a sense of community.



Hearing the future conference and dinner

Hearing Australia and the National Acoustic Laboratories are celebrating 75 years of innovating and transforming hearing care. To celebrate this milestone, they are hosting a special conference and gala dinner in Sydney on Monday, 28 November 2022.

The 'Hearing the future' conference at the Hearing Hub Macquarie university is a wonderful opportunity for hearing health care professionals to discuss the key trends and issues in hearing care in Australia and how we can continue to work together to improve the lives of people with hearing loss.

The conference will feature presentations from experts on the latest in hearing health care, research and technology. It will also include a panel discussion with international and national experts on the global challenges and opportunities in hearing health care.

Registration for the conference is free.

The gala dinner held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, is optional and tickets are \$50 + GST.

To register and for more information about the conference program, please visit the [Hearing Australia website](#).

You can also register now via [Eventbrite](#).

For 75 years we've helped Australians with expert hearing care... and now we're making it easier than ever



Better care for Tasmanian kids



The [National Tribune](#)

The Shepherd Centre will be signing their first lease on office space in Tasmania in coming days. This comes after the now Albanese Labor Government committed \$2.5 million during the election campaign for the establishment of two Shepherd Centres, one in Hobart and another in Launceston.

The Shepherd Centre provides support services, including development of speech and communication skills, life skills and emotional resilience, to hearing impaired kids and teens.

The care the Shepherd Centre provides will ensure Tasmanian families can get the critical help and early intervention they need for their kids.

Until recently, Shepherd Centre workers would fly into Tasmania from Melbourne to deliver their vital services.

This commitment will mean the Shepherd Centre is able to provide a comprehensive reach across Tasmania – with hubs in the south and the north of the state.

“Hearing loss is a major disability and it can impair a child’s education and future opportunities in life,” Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Senator Carol Brown said.

“The Shepherd Centre make a practical difference to the lives of kids with hearing impairments and their families.

Having the Shepherd Centre in Tasmania means up to two thousand Tassie kids will have a better, more inclusive, future; that is worth celebrating.”

Timea Tokes, mum of Amilla who receives care from the Shepherd Centre said, “Having the presence of the Shepherd Centre in Tasmania has changed our lives.

Our family, and I know all other Shepherd Centre families, are relieved that Tasmanian kids with hearing impairments will receive the best care – right here in Tassie.”

How low-cost earbuds can make newborn hearing screening accessible

[Sarah McQuate](#) for [University of Washington News](#)



Newborns in the United States and Australia are screened to check for hearing loss. This test is important because it helps families better understand their child's health, but it's often not accessible to children in other countries because the screening device is expensive.

A team led by researchers at the University of Washington has created a new hearing screening system that uses a smartphone and low-cost earbuds instead. Their tool performed as well as the commercial device, and it correctly identified all patients with hearing loss. They [published these results](#) in *Nature Biomedical Engineering*.

"There is a huge amount of health inequity in the world. I grew up in a country where there was no hearing screening available, in part because the screening device itself is pretty expensive," said senior author [Shyam Gollakota](#) at the University of Washington.

"The project here is to leverage the ubiquity of mobile devices people across the world already have — smartphones and \$2 to \$3 earbuds — to make newborn hearing screening something that's accessible to all without sacrificing quality."

For more information, contact tune@cs.washington.edu.

Sensitivity to musical rhythm supports social development in infants

[From Vanderbilt University Medical Center](#)

Engaging infants with a song provides a readymade means for supporting social development and interaction, according to a study published by the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Researchers at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre found that as early as 2 months of age, when infants are first engaging with others in an interactive manner, infants were two times more likely to look to the singers' eyes time-locked to the musical beat.

“Singing to infants seems like such a simple act, but it is full of rich and meaningful social information,” said study lead author Miriam Lense. “Here we show that when caregivers sing to their infants, they are intuitively structuring their behaviour to support the caregiver-infant social bond and infant social learning.”

“This is important because it reveals a remarkable physical coupling between caregiver behavior and infant experience,” said Warren Jones, PhD, the study’s senior author and Nien Distinguished Chair in Autism at Emory University School of Medicine. “Without conscious awareness, something as simple and intuitive as caregiver singing sets in motion a whole cascade of behaviors that alters infants’ experiences.”



Maximising hearing outcomes for Children through improved paediatric audiology

Opinion piece: [The Hearing Journal](#)

Several professionals have reported on the shortage of paediatric audiologists in the US, particularly in rural areas. This shortage results in longer wait times for appointments and makes it particularly challenging for families who reside in rural areas to attend appointments since they must travel great distances to receive hearing health care. This can be particularly challenging for audiological follow up, as most paediatric audiologists work in densely populated areas.

A recent investigation found that many providers lack confidence in their ability to serve the needs of such children, particularly those in early intervention or preschool. Nearly a third reported they received no formal training for working with children who are deaf and that comfort working with children in the birth to 3 years age range was primarily related to information obtained from colleagues and mentors.

Costs associated with the provision of paediatric hearing services likely impact availability of care. It’s more expensive to provide hearing health care to children than adults, since their appointments are typically longer and more appointments are needed to diagnose, treat, counsel, and provide rehabilitative services.

These factors have likely contributed to delays in diagnosis and treatment of infant hearing loss in the U.S. Unfortunately, such delays have negative implications for long-term outcomes obtained by children who are deaf.

Photos from the Libby Harricks Memorial Oration



Prof David McAlpine gave Deafness Forum's 23rd Libby Harricks Memorial Oration in Sydney in October.

Health Minister's budget address



At the Government's Health Budget address in Canberra by Health Minister Mark Butler. In the group photo, from left: Jamie Snashall, Senior Adviser to the Minister for Health and Aged Care; Steve Williamson, CEO of Deafness Forum Australia; and Todd Steele, Chief of Staff to Dr Mike Frelander MP. In the next photo, Minister Mark Butler is with Deafness Forum chair David Brady.

NDIS pre-planning toolkit for young people



This NDIS Pre-planning Toolkit is for people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing entering higher education or Vocational Education and Training.

You may require extra support to complete your chosen course to ensure participation is on the same basis as other students. This booklet, published by the [Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training](#), will help you identify what supports you may need, who is responsible for providing them and how you can access them.

Download the [Pre-planning toolkit in MS Word](#) or [Pre-planning toolkit as a PDF](#).

Deafness Forum's annual general meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the members of Deafness Forum Australia will be held online on Wednesday 30 November 2022 at 3pm AEDT, 2.30pm ACDT, 12pm AWST.

At the meeting, members will have the opportunity to find out and ask questions about Deafness Forum's operations and finances, and speak about any items on the agenda.

Members will be asked to vote to accept the minutes of the last annual general meeting; to accept the annual report, auditor's report and annual financial statements; to appoint and pay an auditor; and to confirm appointments of directors.

The agenda for this meeting and the minutes of the last annual general meeting are posted on our [website](#).

REMEMBRANCE DAY

11 NOVEMBER



Announcement



Kate Jenkins Sex Discrimination Commissioner

I'm writing to let you know about a new website that will help employers and workers address sexual harassment, and will support them to create gender inclusive, safe, and respectful workplaces.

Wherever you work, I hope it can help your workplace, or can support others in your network.

The Respect@Work website is the first of its kind in Australia, if not the world, in bringing together a comprehensive set of over 100 resources to help prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace.

It is a one-stop-shop for information that employers and workers need, and everything on the website is free, easy to access and easy to use.

Visit the website

The website's creation was one of the key recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work Report.

The website is an initiative of the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Respect@Work Council, and can be accessed at <https://respectatwork.gov.au>

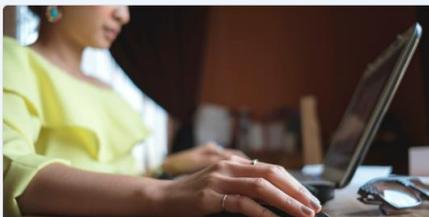
Features include training materials, workplace-assessment tools, information, videos, guidance. All material is free and easily accessible.

I urge you to explore the website and share it with your colleagues and peers. Let's work together to ensure that all Australian workplaces adopt a culture that is safe, respectful and inclusive for all.



[What causes workplace sexual harassment?](#)

Workplace sexual harassment is caused by power imbalances and gender inequality.



[Where to seek help if you've experienced workplace sexual harassment](#)

Interactive tool you can use to help find



[Younger workers](#)

Resources to help young workers understand and address workplace sexual harassment.

Navigating noisy rooms



[Rachael Grahame](#) for [University of Maryland Today](#)

Training can help both those with impaired hearing and those with normal hearing keep track of speedy changes in sound, one of the chief challenges for understanding speech in noisy environments.

Those who struggle to understand someone giving an excited, rapid-fire account of an adventure, or who lose the thread of a conversation during a noisy cocktail party might be dealing with problems detecting rapid changes in sound. New research by the University of Maryland could help.

In a recent [study](#) researchers found that people aged 18-30 and 65-85 with normal hearing - as well as participants from the older age group with hearing impairment - could all be trained to boost their ability to differentiate subtle changes in the speed, or "rate," of sounds. Such changes can make it difficult to understand speech in challenging situations, such as in noisy or reverberant environments, or when listening to people who talk fast.

"We've seen some evidence that these temporal processing deficits might be improved in animal models, but this is the first time we've shown it in humans," said Associate Professor Samira Anderson.

For the training, participants in the 40-person experimental group compared multiple series of rapid tones (think beeps or clicks) in nine sessions over three weeks. Compared to members of the 37-person control group, who were asked to detect a single tone in , those in the experimental group showed overall improvement. Most significantly, older normal-hearing people who undergo training can essentially restore their ability to discriminate fast changes in the timing of sounds to levels similar to those observed for young adults.

The rate discrimination study is the first to show that auditory training promotes neural changes in the brain, known as neuroplasticity. The results offer great hope in developing clinically feasible auditory training programs that can improve older listeners' ability to communicate in difficult situations.

Cultural people with disability face isolation and abuse within their communities

The Disability Royal Commission's recent 29th public hearing examined the experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities.

The five-day hearing had multiple witness statements from CaLD people with disability, including people from the Deaf and Deafblind community who identify as CaLD.

An overarching theme was that CaLD people with disability were often trying to access services that did not understand their cultural needs.

Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, Chin Tan, spoke to the Commission about initiatives to eradicate racism and strategies to promote the inclusion of people with disability from multicultural communities.

He says participants in community consultations described the disability sector as "very European". "Ensuring cultural safety, respect and inclusion for culturally and linguistically diverse people is paramount," says Mr Tan.

This was reflected by witnesses, with refugees and carers saying that services, such as the NDIS, are alienating instead of helping them. Witness Mr Rahman (pseudonym) detailed his experience as an asylum seeker living with a disability and how he was detained on Christmas Island.

"It was humiliating... I felt like I had engaged in a criminal activity just for being a disabled person."

Witnesses from the Deaf, Deafblind and hard-of-hearing community shared their experiences of Auslan or sign language, and the impact of being deprived of language.

Deaf woman Natalie Sandon-Stanhope gave evidence about her experiences in primary school, where Auslan was banned.

"Our hands had to be sat on in class," says Ms Sandon-Stanhope. "We had to use our lips to speak."

Ben McTamane of Deafblind Australia told the Commission how damaging these types of exclusions are, causing young people experiencing hearing impairments to have their options capped prematurely.

"We hear stories of a very firm ceiling being put on children's potential very early on in age.

And that can lead to all sorts of issues," he says.

This sentiment was mirrored by Doctor Breda Carty AO, an expert and lived experience witness, who emphasised the importance of schools for hearing-impaired people.

"Deaf schools are historical and cultural sites for the Deaf community because that's where Auslan is transmitted through generations, from child to child," she says.

"The strength of our language today is because of the existence of those schools."

Submissions close December 2022

Send us your written submission by 31 December.

www.disability.royalcommission.gov.au

Make your submission over the phone by 23 December.

Request assistance to lodge your submission
before 23 December.

Book a time to make your submission in Auslan
to a Royal Commission staff member by 12 December.



We encourage anyone thinking about sharing their experience with the Royal Commission to [contact](#) the Intake, Counselling and Support team. They can discuss the different ways to share your experience with the Royal Commission, and help you decide which way is going to be most comfortable for you. They can also put you in touch with other counselling and advocacy supports available. The team also provides support to people who are participating in a private sessions, public hearings and community engagements.

Blue Knot Foundation provides telephone counselling for people affected by the Royal Commission. Call Blue Knot on **1800 421 468** (9am-6pm weekdays or 9am-5pm weekends AEDT).

To our member organisations

Reminder: all current directors of registered organisations must have a unique ID number by end of November or risk a hefty personal fine. Incoming directors must apply for their I.D. before their appointment.

[Directors need to be signed up for the scheme by 30 November.](#)

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

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

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