

Creating Hearing Health Outcomes for All Australians

It is estimated that 3.6 million or one in six Australians experience some form of hearing impairment. Hearing is immensely personal, and it is individuals who are the primary participants in managing their physical and mental health and communication needs. Australia's world-leading hearing sector has done much to address this challenge. But today we stand at a crossroad.

The strategic challenges and opportunities remain significant. Australia has an ageing population which will increase demand for hearing services and Australia has been failing in providing ear and hearing health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our community, which will slow closing the gap.

Under the previous government, Australia's first Roadmap for Hearing Health was developed. The Roadmap identified key priorities as well as over 140 key actions that needed to occur within Australia in order to achieve over 44 'outcomes'. While it was lauded by many involved in the sector it was difficult in prioritising the actions for Government and for the sector.

Now is the time for the Albanese Labor Government to create its own hearing health priorities, ones that will create once in a generation change for millions of Australians. The hearing health sector is united in the call to the Government that it can take some clear and immediate actions to address the failings of recent approaches, whilst building on the work it has previously led, and integrates with other initiatives.

Prioritising Hearing Health Initiatives

The Albanese Labor Government has an opportunity to create a unique legacy in hearing health. To support this, representing major stakeholders within the hearing health sector, the Hearing Health Sector Alliance (the Alliance) recommends to Government that it focuses on the following five (5) urgent areas:

1. An **ongoing national prevention and awareness communication strategy** including a public awareness campaign
2. **Closing the gap on ear and hearing health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** - particularly developing an integrated national approach to undertaking ear health checks of children aged 0-6 and where annual child health check processes ensures no child 'slips through the cracks'
3. **Significantly enhancing hearing health for older Australians** particularly lifting the quality of assessment and hearing health care in residential aged care facilities
4. **Greater support for vulnerable Australians, including those on low incomes** in accessing affordable hearing health care
5. **Enhance and focus research** to inform the development of public policy.

Refer to Page 2 for the recommended next steps for Government.

About the Hearing Health Sector Alliance (the Alliance)

Founded in 2019, the Alliance is unique in the hearing sector, consisting of seventeen national peak bodies and organisations representing practitioners, consumers, researchers, service providers, and manufacturers working in the hearing health sector.

The Alliance aims to elevate the priority of hearing health and hearing loss in the minds of policy makers, advocate to maximise access to hearing health care within Australia, and for Australians to receive the very best hearing health care and support. The purpose of the Alliance is to represent the hearing health sector in Australia to government.

The Vision of the Alliance is:

(i) all Australians value their hearing, (ii) all Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing live well in the community, and (iii) Australia has a world class hearing health system.

Next Steps

The next steps for the Government and the sector are crucial, but also achievable in this term of Government. To support the Government, the Alliance advocates for the following:

1

An ongoing national prevention and awareness communication strategy including a public awareness campaign

- a) Complete the national 'Gateway' website that provides entry level information on "your hearing journey" and who to contact
- b) Create and place advertising media (ensuring captions)
- c) Review campaign success
- d) Publish outcomes

Note: Funding already committed to commence this initiative.

Likely ROI: Very significant – significant flow on to community and workforce participation as well as flow on impact for dementia and other conditions for older Australians.

2

Closing the gap on ear and hearing health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- a) Develop national reference group
- b) Collate information on all existing ear health programs, determine factors for success, and design a national integrated and culturally safe approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ear health services for children
- c) Develop employment and training pathways in ear health
- d) Create a national data framework for collation of outcomes and data

Likely ROI: Very significant – impacts on school participation, community and workforce participation (noting 93% of incarcerated Aboriginal males in the NT have a hearing loss).

3

Significantly enhancing hearing health for older Australians particularly lifting the quality of assessment and hearing health care in residential aged care facilities

- a) Subject to outcomes from pilot program, hearing awareness training to be provided for all aged care workers and nurses
- b) Implement national hearing screening program on entry to aged care
- c) Expand HSP Program to include all residents in aged care facilities
- d) Aged Care Quality & Safety Commission to include Quality Indicator on hearing health care

Note: Funding already committed to hearing awareness training in aged care pilot program.

Likely ROI: Very significant – impacts of hearing loss for older people include increased hospitalisations from falls, cognitive decline, social isolation and depression.

4

Greater support for vulnerable Australians, including those on low incomes in accessing affordable hearing health care

- a) Expand HSP eligibility to low-income healthcare card holders
- b) Fund hearing supports for vulnerable populations ineligible for HSP/NDIS (e.g. refugees)

Likely ROI: Very significant – considering the estimated \$25.3 million cost of providing hearing aids to 13,523 vulnerable Australians free of charge and the \$311.7 million in productivity gains, the overall benefit to cost ratio was estimated to be 12.3 to 1.

5

Enhance and focus research to inform the development of public policy.

- a) Co-design and implement a hearing health research strategy
- b) Standardise national reporting of hearing loss
- c) Establish national hearing database to capture data on people with hearing loss

Likely ROI: Very significant – where funded research is targeted towards making progress on Roadmap priorities and the research outcomes can be translated for meaningful impact towards those priorities.