



# Deafness Forum Australia

## *Voice for All*

### Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024

#### **Who we are**

***Voice for All:*** Deafness Forum Australia is a Voice for All.

We are the peak body representing the views and interests of the 4 million Australians who live with hearing loss, have ear or balance disorders, people who also communicate using Australian Sign Language, and their families and supporters.

We are the trusted, national, independent consumer voice for the whole hearing health and deafness sector – the impartial advocate representing all voices that need to be heard.

Our mission is to make hearing health & wellbeing a national priority in Australia.

Hearing loss occurs across the life course, from the womb to late age. And it does not discriminate – a favourable postcode won't help.

It is the biggest disability per head of population in adulthood. It affects 1 in 6 Australians today and 1 in 4 by 2050.

The annual financial cost to Australia exceeds \$30B and is rising.

***Member Driven:*** Deafness Forum Australia is a membership-based body, which elects its Board of Directors from among its consumer representative member organisations, ensuring equal representation of each group to provide balance and fairness across our large and diverse sector. Within our limited resources we work hard to meet our members' expectations.

Our membership also includes people and organisations which provide services that promote hearing health.

***Peak Body:*** Deafness Forum Australia prides itself on being the peak representative body in Australia for people with hearing loss, ear and balance disorders, people who also communicate using Australian Sign Language, and their families. We are trusted by governments, public sector organisations, the hearing health sector, the general health sector and the disability sector to represent this constituency.

We are also a part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people - an essential component of *Closing the Gap*. We work with indigenous advocates to achieve hearing health for indigenous persons.



**International Representative:** We represent Australians in the World Hearing Forum, a global network of stakeholders auspiced by the World Health Organization.

We are the Australian member of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People.

## **We are Unique**

Deafness Forum Australia is different to other consumer peaks in the sector because it represents ALL consumers, in an impartial and non-partisan way. This is why Deafness Forum Australia enjoys the trust and support of all consumers and others within the hearing health, general health and disability sectors of Australia.

We speak at the national level on behalf of all consumers.

## **What We Do**

**Our Vision** is *“All Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing live well in the community everywhere throughout Australia.”*

**Our Mission** for the next three years is *“To make hearing health & wellbeing a national priority in Australia”.*

We stand by this bold statement as we strongly believe a national priority is the only way to have a true national conversation involving everyone inside and outside the deafness sector.

## **Our ‘scope of work’**

Social problems demand social solutions - it’s not just about hearing devices. We work to end negative community attitudes to deafness, hearing loss, and ear/balance disorders. We lead the discourse about how we can create a positive community where hearing loss is recognised and supported, and one in which strengths of individuals and groups are acknowledged and celebrated, supported by effective public policy and systems.

While we prioritise what we focus on in any one strategic period, Deafness Forum Australia will advocate in all areas, including public policy, that impact on people experiencing hearing related issues.

We address environmental factors that inhibit peoples’ participation in society. Our strategy and approach align with *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-31* and *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, viewing people not as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection but rather, as full and equal members of society, with human rights.

Our work encompasses the full human experience and includes advocacy for:

- accessibility in communications
- accessibility to the made environment
- human rights



- justice
- education
- employment
- transport
- health
- aged care
- equitable access to quality innovation and technology
- hearing services accessibility and affordability.

Just one example is our advocacy to ensure that improvements in speech recognition technology translate into reducing the communication barriers. We advocate to encourage that, as technology develops, it is widely used at public meetings, local council meetings, Parliament for visitors etc. Such widespread use of speech recognition has the real impact of allowing people to be more active in public life.

### **Top 7 Achievements in its last strategic period 2019 to 2021**

- Maintained public visibility on behalf of members via newsletters, social media and websites
- Advocated for community awareness of hearing health and issues including promoting World Hearing Day/ Hearing Awareness Week
- Provided significant input into a review of the Australian Government's Hearing Services Program
- Was an active participant in the Hearing Health Sector Alliance, promoting the positive work the sector is doing to improve Australia's hearing health and advancing the Hearing Health & Wellbeing Roadmap
- Contributed to development of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031
- Contributed to both the Aged Care and Disability Royal Commissions
- Advised the National Disability Insurance Agency on matters of consumers' concern including advising on the transition of the Hearing Services Program to the NDIS in 2020.

### **Purpose of this Strategic Plan**

Being strategic is important for all organisations and it is critical for Deafness Forum Australia. This new strategic plan will, in a large way, direct our work priorities over the next 3 years. Each year for the next three years this plan will be operationalised by our Board in an Annual Work Plan. Our achievements against the annual work plan will be reported to our members through the Annual General Meetings and National Deafness Sector Summits.



## How this Plan was developed

We aimed for a strategic planning process that was inclusive, engaging and stimulating. We continued to use evidence (including the evidence of lived experience) to guide the development of our strategies and this Plan.

Key stakeholder groups were engaged through personal contact by board members and the chief executive officer. Stakeholder views were also captured in a strategic survey. Evidence based research was undertaken to ensure this plan meets the voiced needs of our consumer constituency.

The 4 phases in developing this Plan were:

1. Stakeholder engagement & high level factual research
2. Synthesis of key needs and evidence for action
3. The drafting of the plan
4. Stakeholder feedback and finalisation of Plan.

In phase 1, survey respondents were encouraged to report on a number of key areas affecting people experiencing hearing related issues including social changes, demographic trends, economic issues, technological innovations, government policy, departmental funding, philanthropy, sector developments etc. Both 'opportunities' for consumers, as well as 'threats,' were identified. Key documents were also taken into account in the development of this Plan including the *Roadmap For Hearing Health 2019*, *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 - 2031*, *Australia's Long Term National Health Plan (2019)* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol*.

This information and feedback was assessed and acted on by the Board.

This Plan will be reviewed annually by the Board (including seeking input from members) and updated as required.

For more information about this plan and how you can support us to achieve even more please contact our chief executive officer via email to [Steve.Williamson@deafnessforum.org.au](mailto:Steve.Williamson@deafnessforum.org.au)

**Come join us. Please support us!** Although we work tirelessly, we are a volunteer based organisation with a very limited budget – and there is much to be done. We look forward to welcoming you onboard.

**Focus areas for this strategic period:** see overpage.



## Agreed focus areas for this strategic period

### Strategic Focus 1: Advocacy to influence decision makers

*“Changing for the better the lives of our people by changing policies and systems at the national level.”*

#### Priority 1.1: **Achieve hearing health and wellbeing as one of the Government’s National Health Priority Areas:**

##### Strategy:

- a) Achieve being recognised by the Commonwealth Government as a Health Peak that can provide sector-wide advice.  
Success Indicator: Peak Status achieved.
- b) Continue to actively lobby the main political parties and the Government on this key health and disability priority.  
Success Indicator: Production of a register highlighting campaigns, meetings, representations, and impact result.

#### Priority 1.2: **Drive the implementation of the Hearing Health Road Map with increased funding and better reporting:**

##### Strategy:

- a) Advocate to ensure the national Hearing Health Roadmap is a ‘voice for all’, with additional funding, demonstrating that it provides significant value for consumers, including indigenous peoples.  
Success Indicator: Member feedback on the content of the Roadmap; and additional funding secured to meet Roadmap goals impacting consumers.
- b) Advocate to ensure the national Hearing Health Roadmap will be better reported to consumers.  
Success Indicator: Government agreement to report annually on implementation progress.



## **Strategic Focus 2: Facilitating consensus**

*“Changing for the better the lives of our people by developing sector-wide knowledge and support for action at the national level.”*

### **Priority 2.1: Work to continually know the issues and needs of our members:**

Strategy:

- a) Actively engaging members through forums and feedback so Deafness Forum Australia maintains and enhances its authority to speak on behalf of sector issues and concerns.  
Success Indicator: Report of member engagement and results including listing identified key 'issues' and 'asks'.
- b) Forming action groups to act on this knowledge.  
Success Indicator: Production of register of task groups, and highlights of their achievements.

### **Priority 2.2: Work to achieve awareness and sector consensus & support around the clear asks of consumers**

Strategy:

- a) Continue to be a leading consumer voice within the Hearing Health sector, facilitating public and government awareness and support for consumer priorities.  
Success Indicator: Representation in various, influential Government and non-government groups to promote the voice of consumers in decisions that will impact on them.
- b) Facilitate strategic alliances with both commercial and government agencies to gain their support for consumer priorities.  
Success Indicator: Public register of strategic alliances, its purpose, and results.

## **Strategic Focus 3: Ensuring Deafness Forum Australia's sustainability to maintain its commitment to consumers**

*“Changing for the better the lives of our people by ensuring Deafness Forum Australia continues as a thriving forum for their voices.”*

### **Priority 3.1: Grow the membership of Deafness Forum Australia to demonstrate legitimacy, relevance and financial sustainability:**

Strategy:

- a) Implement a tailored membership drive targeting new members.



Success Indicator: Secure a broad representation of the deafness sector organisations.

- b) Implement a tailored membership drive targeting current and previous members.  
Success Indicator: 75% of members maintain their membership.

**Priority 3.2: Ensuring good governance by Deafness Forum Australia including achieving more sustainable financing:**

Strategy:

- a) Research and prepare a submission for a peak funding grant.  
Success Indicator: Submission lodged with outcome reported publicly.
- b) Increase the number of sponsors and donors and the amount of financial support from them.  
Success Indicator: Donor income increased by 20%.
- c) Enhance the governance processes even further, focussing on strategy implementation, compliance, and governance documentation.  
Success Indicator: A strategy focussed Board, with improved compliance processes and documentation.
- d) Develop a succession plan for new board members.  
Success Indicator: Succession plan produced which involves buy in from Members.