



7 July 2023

**Mr Luke Turner**  
**Assistant Secretary**  
**NDIS Review Secretariat**  
**Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet**

Dear Mr Turner

## **Commentary on hearing services that are provided through the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the way to improve the service.**

When the Australian Government initially discussed its plans to transfer existing hearing services to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we received assurances from both the NDIA and Department of Health & Aged Care that service quality and timeliness would be maintained, with the goal of improvement. They also assured us that the costs to the Commonwealth would not exceed the current expenses at that time. However, neither of these assurances have been fulfilled.

At present, 26,600 individuals, including adults and children, who experience significant hearing loss, receive support through the NDIS, with hearing loss being their primary disability. This group represents the fifth largest cohort at four percent of the total NDIS participants. The average cost of services provided to adults under the NDIS is understood to be currently ten times higher than the average cost of services provided under the Hearing Services Program.

There is a need for reform in the provision of hearing services by the NDIS to enhance outcomes for participants, providers, and taxpayers. The existing system is complex, inefficient and leads to inconsistencies across the country.

Adult NDIS participants who exclusively rely on the NDIS for hearing supports face disadvantages in terms of accessing services and achieving their desired outcomes compared to NDIS participants eligible for the Hearing Services Program. For instance, adults typically wait only 1 or 2 weeks to undergo a hearing assessment through the Hearing Services Program and, if necessary, receive hearing aids within the subsequent 2 weeks. In contrast, NDIS participants must wait up to 11 weeks for their initial NDIS Plan to be approved before being able to consult a hearing service provider.

The Hearing Services Program offers a more streamlined pathway for participants compared to the NDIS. It can accommodate changes in participant circumstances more effectively, without the need for lengthy request forms and significant client delays. Additionally, the Hearing Services Program achieves compliance monitoring and positive client outcomes without the need for the time-consuming and expensive provider audits that are required by the NDIS.

Given these circumstances, a service delivery model should be adopted that ensures easy access to high-quality and consistent hearing services at a reasonable cost to the government. The Hearing Services Program also offers a streamlined pathway for adults with complex hearing needs through the highly regarded specialist Community Service Obligations (CSO) program delivered by Hearing Australia.

## OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Adult NDIS participants with hearing loss as their primary disability should have access to the CSO program provided by Hearing Australia as their preferred supplier.

The CSO program allows eligible clients to access advanced technology, individual communication training programs, supplementary devices, and ongoing education and support. It also covers the provision of interpreters, ensuring equal access for all participants, which is crucial.

We hope this feedback is useful to the Review.

Yours faithfully,



Stephen Williamson

Chief Executive

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Deafness Forum Australia is the national hearing consumer peak body | Foundation Member of the WHO World Hearing Forum | Member of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People | Associate Member of World Federation of the Deaf | Foundation Member of Australian Federation of Disability Organisations.

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