



**Why Do
People
Assume
Everyone
With
Hearing
Loss Can
Sign?**



Dismantling disability rights and education: a warning sign for all civil liberties.

From an article by Sara Nović

Twelve days before Donald Trump took office, Charlie Kirk, media personality and right wing activist, complained on his eponymous show about the presence of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters at emergency press briefings for the Los Angeles fires.

Another right wing activist, Christopher Rufo, took his cue on X, calling interpreters “wild human gesticulators” who turned briefings into a “farce”. The right wing theorist and Origins of Woke author Richard Hanania, quote-tweeting Rufo, declared ASL an “absurdity”.

To those with less knowledge of disability history, these attacks might read as gross, but ultimately toothless. Activists, though, quickly sounded the alarm: the incoming U.S. Government administration would be coming for disabled people.

“To the deaf community, the fight for accessibility is nothing new,” said Sara Miller, deaf educator and community advocate.

However, Miller said she had seen a burgeoning movement against accessibility from conservatives with large platforms, including

during the first Trump administration, when the National Association of the Deaf had to sue to have ASL interpreters during Covid briefings.

“But when looking at the history of the first term of [the Trump] administration, and how diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) is now being targeted, it’s not hard to see the correlation.”

Manufacturing cultural outrage to justify policy that would have previously been considered too cruel or damaging is a staple of the far-right playbook: most recently, the US has seen the move used to bolster book bans and outlaw Black history and gender-affirming care.

Fast forward to 21 January 2025, when the accessibility page and all ASL content were removed from the White House website. Then, real-life interpreters were removed from the White House and across multiple federal agencies whose accommodations divisions were dismantled under Trump’s anti-DEIA orders.

Simultaneously, disabled children’s right to education is under fire. On 20 March, Trump signed an executive order to dismantle the Department of Education. The department funds early intervention and post-high school transition programs, and organisations like the American Printing House for the Blind and the Special Olympics.

It also enforces the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the law that gives disabled kids the right to a “free and appropriate public education”. A child’s needs and services are documented in a legally binding agreement known as an Individualised Education Program, providing services like speech, physical and occupational therapy, and the use of specialised curriculum. Accommodations like closed captions, ASL interpreters, ramps and elevator keys, braille materials, preferential seating, audio books, use of a laptop or notetaker, and movement breaks can also be included.

Without these plans, disabled students may be inside the classroom, but they will not be meaningfully educated.

The canary in the coalmine

Historically, the way a government treats disabled people can be an early indicator of its broader social policy intentions.

Leaving disabled people behind is not new to the American political landscape; the US has a history of eradicating the disabled. Eugenics – the pseudoscientific belief that humans should breed for “desirable traits” and suppress the undesirable ones – rose to popularity in the US and globally during the late 19th century.

Securing change through activism

There is a long history of skilled, effective activism by disabled people to leverage non-disabled people’s discomfort around disability in the fight for equal rights and legal protections.

In the 1988 [Deaf President Now protests](#) at Gallaudet University, students took advantage of the misconception of disabled innocence and hot-wired school buses to block university gates, shutting down the school until their demands for self-determination – a deaf university president and majority-deaf board – were met.

Many battles are already being waged in the legal system, with disabled and non-disabled

lawyers and organisations like the National Association for the Deaf, ACLU, and Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund working together on legal filings as pushback.

Outside the courtroom, activists are running public awareness campaigns on social media, encouraging people to call their representatives and attorneys general.

“The most practical thing non-disabled people can do is stay informed and recognize the power of their voice,” said Jordan Christian LeVan, a disability advocate and founder of the educational advocacy organisation Fighting for My Voice. “In our current climate, the last thing those in power want is for people to understand the impact of their advocacy. Contact your representatives, show up at school board meetings and support disabled-led organisations. Call out policies that harm disabled people. Your voice matters more than you want to believe.”

“You shouldn’t have to personally know a disabled person to care about disabled issues.”

“Disabled people were not always marginalised; we were incorporated into society in the ancient past,” said Dr Alexandra F Morris, a lecturer in classical studies at the University of Lincoln who studies disability in ancient Egypt. “We have the means to create and return to a more equitable society if we wish to, but it is our modern-day thinking that sees disability as marginalised ... and a burden.”

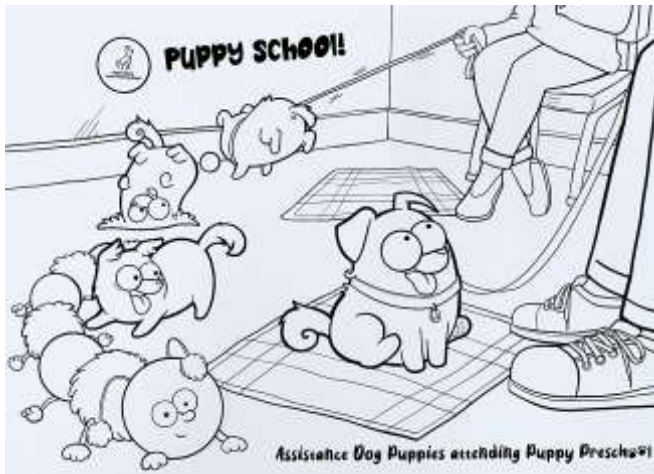
“If you live long enough, chances are you’ll experience disability yourself. While we’ve made huge strides in disability rights over the past few decades – those protections are under attack. If we don’t fight back now, it sets a dangerous precedent for the future.”

- The author, [Sara Nović](#) is a deaf organiser and the author of the novels True Biz and Girl at War

From [The US right is coming for disabled people. Here’s why that threatens everyone.](#)



National Hearing Dog Day is a chance to recognise the life-changing impact of Hearing Assistance Dogs and the independence they bring to people who are deaf or hard of hearing.



National Hearing Dog Day was established in 2020 to celebrate the life-changing impact of Assistance Dogs on the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community, and to mark the 40th anniversary of Australian Lions Hearing Dogs.

In April 2024, ALHD delivered its 700th Hearing Assistance Dog, Yannis.

National Hearing Dog Day continues to shine a light on the vital role these remarkable dogs play in building a more inclusive and supportive society.

Each dog placed with a Deaf or hard-of-hearing recipient represents the unwavering commitment of ALHD's trainers, volunteers, and supporters, who make it possible to continue transforming lives through the gift of a highly skilled Hearing Assistance Dog.



Here is a picture of Chris Blackham-Davison with his hearing assistance dog, Frodo. Chris is a member of the board of directors for Deafness Forum Australia.

Apple AirPods: Don't Toss Your Audiologist Yet

[Josh Taylor](#) writing for [The Guardian](#)



Apple's AirPods Pro 2 can for the first time be used as hearing aids for moderate hearing loss in Australia – but despite benefits, such as reducing social stigma and lowering costs, experts warn they are not suitable for everyone.

After approval from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in December, Apple this month pushed out an update to AirPods Pro 2 devices in Australia allowing users to test their hearing and use the Bluetooth headphones as hearing aids for mild to moderate hearing loss. It is only TGA approved [for people aged 18 and older](#).

The company said the hearing aid capability of AirPods is similar to over-the-counter hearing aid devices, but the Pro 2s, at \$399, are significantly cheaper than the thousands of dollars people can pay for hearing aids.

Steve Williamson, the chief executive of the peak body for the hearing health and deafness sector, Deafness Forum Australia, said his organisation welcomed anything that encourages earlier intervention and makes hearing assistance more accessible.

“But we must ensure that consumers are well informed and receive the appropriate professional care when they need it,” Williamson said.

The price could “break down financial barriers and make hearing assistance more accessible to people with mild hearing loss”, he said.

“The high cost of traditional hearing devices in Australia is among the leading reasons people do not address their hearing issues in good time. Imagine having a way to address a \$300 hearing problem instead of feeling forced to find \$3,000.”

It would also be a less-stigmatised entry point for people with mild hearing loss, Williamson said, but people should understand that the devices may not be suitable for everyone.

“While we see the potential benefits, we also stress the importance of professional guidance,” he said. “These devices are not a substitute for a comprehensive hearing assessment by an audiologist.”

Dr Nicky Chong-White, the National Acoustic Laboratories principal engineer, said the AirPods would suit situations like trying to hear in a restaurant or while watching TV rather than all-day wear for hearing aids, and without the stigma of wearing hearing aids given people wear AirPods out in public all the time.

She said the overseas experience – where the hearing aid feature is already available – has been that while audiologists were initially concerned about the impact it would have on their industry, it had led to more people testing their hearing and getting professional support.

Apple's hearing test and hearing aid features were subject to clinical studies prior to approval.

People can take the hearing test and adjust hearing settings by tapping Hearing Assistance in the AirPods settings on the device the headphones are connected to. The hearing test can also be started through the [Health](#) app.



Hearing Devices are Unlocking Better Health and Stronger Relationships

New research highlights the transformative impact of hearing devices on Australians' lives, while also shedding light on the barriers to adoption and the reasons many delay seeking treatment.

A study by WS Audiology surveyed 518 Australians and revealed that hearing aids significantly enhance users' quality of life. The study found that hearing aids can lead to:

Stronger Relationships and Better Social Well-being

66% of users reported an improvement in their social life, and 78% said their ability to communicate with others had been enhanced. Among couples, 60% agreed that hearing aids had significantly improved their relationship with their partner.

Professional Success and Financial Stability

76% of full-time workers who use hearing aids reported greater job satisfaction, and 55% said their hearing aid had either increased their paid work or boosted their income. On average, respondents attributed an annual income increase of \$5,884 to their hearing aid use. In particular, WS Audiology believes that younger Australians stand to gain from early

intervention. Apparently, by addressing hearing loss sooner, they can improve their earning potential and long-term career prospects.

Barriers to Treatment

Despite the potential benefits, many Australians hesitate to seek help for hearing loss.

Recent surveys conducted by Cochlear and Audika Australia point to several factors contributing to this reluctance:

Cost Concerns

More than two-thirds of adults over 55 who aren't currently receiving treatment cite the expense of hearing aids or cochlear implants as a major deterrent (Cochlear).

Denial and Lack of Awareness

An Audika Australia survey revealed that while 84% of Australian respondents aged 40+ know that untreated hearing loss can affect mental health, only 21% consider getting their hearing checked annually.

A significant 74% haven't had a hearing check, believing they don't need one.

Stigma

Outdated stigmas surrounding hearing aids prevent many from taking action (WS Audiology). Some view hearing loss as an age-related issue they'd rather not confront (Audika Australia).



Despite its links to many other problems such as falls and social isolation, awareness around hearing loss and what you can do about it is low.

“Hearing health is just as important as looking after your heart or other parts of your body, especially as you get older, with hearing loss affecting more people than heart disease,” explains Eleanor McKendrick, an audiologist, speech pathologist and Head of Cochlear Implant Services at [NextSense](#), a not-for-profit organisation supporting people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind or have low vision.

According to Eleanor, rallying around someone with hearing difficulties can make a big difference.

“Helping a loved one act on hearing loss is one of the best gifts you can give. Encourage them to seek treatment early and support them to make informed decisions and harness technologies to help improve their daily lives. There is support out there, but some people need a hand to access it.”

Hearing loss can significantly affect relationships



According to a survey by Hearing Australia, one in three Australians report that their partner's hearing loss makes communication difficult.

Karen Hirschausen, Principal Audiologist with Hearing Australia, emphasised the importance of communication.

"Communication is the foundation of any healthy relationship. If one partner can't hear well and misunderstands what is being said, it will cause a breakdown in communication".

Untreated hearing loss can have several detrimental effects on relationships. These include increased frustration and resentment between partners, feelings of loneliness and missing out on companionship, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions and activities.

“It can lead to a decrease in intimate conversations and light-hearted joking within the family, a loss of shared activities and companionship, and a general reduction in communication, with conversations becoming brief and functional,” Karen Hirschausen said.

These issues cause significant strains on personal relationships, affecting both partners. The person with hearing loss may experience cognitive overload, making it difficult to focus on conversations, especially in noisy environments. This can cause misunderstandings and a perceived lack of interest, further exacerbating relationship problems.

Myths about hearing loss we need to stop believing

Many of us view hearing loss as inevitable – an embarrassing sign of ageing. We feel that if we have hearing loss, we must be getting old, leading to denial.

Some people who are aware their hearing is deteriorating delay seeking testing and treatment because they are concerned about how others will perceive them if they use a hearing device. Others have a misperception that the devices will not be effective, or don't know where to seek advice.

Despite the potential benefits of treating hearing loss, the average person waits almost nine years from when they first notice problems before seeking assistance and treatment. For many other health conditions, this would be unthinkable.

What makes us behave differently when it comes to our hearing?

Many misconceptions contribute to the reluctance to seek help. Here are some common myths debunked:

- **Myth: Hearing loss only affects older people.** While age-related hearing loss is common, noise-induced hearing loss is on the rise, especially among younger Australians. Protecting ears from excessive noise is crucial at any age.
- **Myth: Hearing aids are big, bulky, and obvious.** Modern hearing aids are small, discreet, and can include features like Bluetooth connectivity and noise filtering.
- **Myth: If you had hearing loss, you'd know about it.** Not so! Hearing loss often develops gradually, making it easy to miss. These signs include difficulty understanding speech on the phone or in noisy environments or feeling like people are mumbling.
- **Myth: Hearing loss isn't a big deal.** Untreated hearing loss can significantly impact mental health, relationships, and overall well-being, and is linked to social isolation, depression, and cognitive decline.
- **Myth: Hearing aids will fix everything.** Hearing aids amplify sound and improve clarity but don't restore hearing to perfect levels. Adjustment time is often needed.
- **Myth: You can't prevent hearing loss.** Many causes of hearing loss are preventable. Protecting ears from loud noise, maintaining good ear hygiene, and getting regular hearing checks can help preserve hearing.

Overcoming the Barriers

Both the WS Audiology study and the Cochlear/Audika Australia surveys emphasise the need for increased education and awareness about the importance of hearing health.



Ravin Nand, General Manager of Australia & New Zealand at Cochlear (pictured), emphasises that financial barriers shouldn't deter individuals from seeking treatment, as funding options exist in Australia for cochlear implants and other hearing devices, including health insurance, government health schemes, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

GPs as a source of help

As with many health conditions, GPs play a pivotal role in the early detection and management of hearing loss. Unfortunately, there is a lack of awareness among GPs, who are already extremely busy, and this can lead to delayed diagnosis and inadequate support. For example, research by Macquarie University shows that just three in every 1,000 GP consultations in Australia with patients aged 50 or older involves management of hearing loss.

If GPs are to better assist patients, they need better evidence-based decision-support tools. Two international initiatives may help here: guidelines detailing who should undergo testing and referral for a cochlear implant, and a World Health Organisation (WHO) training manual on ear and hearing care for primary care providers.

For GPs to offer better-informed and more empathetic hearing care to patients, there is also a need for holistic education and training programs that cover the technical aspects of diagnosis and treatment, and the psychosocial implications of living with the condition.

Data has an important part to play

[Professor Bamini Gopinath](#) is the Inaugural Cochlear Chair of Hearing and Health at Macquarie University Hearing.



Loud and clear: Using artificial intelligence to analyse patient hearing data could lead to more personalised hearing treatment and better health outcomes, says Professor Gopinath, pictured.

She explains that improved collection and sharing of information across healthcare providers, hearing clinics and research studies would bring a better understanding of how people are using hearing services, and the barriers to treatment, both for individuals and in the health system.

“If we can collect information from large numbers of patients and take advantage of aspects of artificial intelligence and statistical modelling to analyse the data, it could lead to more personalised hearing treatment and better health outcomes.”

Today, there is no central information point for Australians with hearing loss. However, Bamini Gopinath and Macquarie University aim to address this gap by developing an online support service to provide access to evidence-based, person-centred information and a range of resources such as peer-support forums and online self-assessment tools.

Regulating audiologists to align with other healthcare professionals

Deafness Forum Australia wanted to capture the experiences of receiving or delivering hearing services in Australia.

In its recent survey, it found there is confusion among consumers about the roles of audiometrists and audiologists, with some expressing uncertainty about the expertise each profession possesses.

Terms like ‘audiology professionals’, ‘audiology profession’ and ‘audiology clinics’, and ‘hearing care professional’ are often used in advertising which can contribute to consumer confusion about the qualifications of different service providers.

Hearing services in Australia currently operate under a patchwork of partial regulations and self-governing bodies.

A key survey finding was the support by both consumers and providers for regulating audiologists to align with other healthcare professionals.

Deafness Forum Australia and Independent Audiologists Australia believe that establishing a consistent, independent national standard for both audiologists and audiometrists, supported by strong governance structures and evidence-based data, could help ensure that consumers receive accurate information.

This approach aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their hearing health care.

Implications

Untreated hearing loss can severely impact personal, social, and professional aspects of life, often leading to isolation, distress, and challenges with mental health (WS Audiology, Audika Australia).

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The Audika Australia survey highlighted a disconnect between general health consciousness and hearing health prioritisation: While 80% of Australian respondents aged 40+ visit their GP regularly, and 75% undergo routine health checks like blood tests or eye exams, only 30% prioritise hearing assessments.

As the Australian wellness industry continues to boom, valued at AUD \$173 billion, it's crucial that hearing health becomes an integral part of the conversation around overall wellbeing and preventative care (Audika Australia). By addressing the barriers of cost, stigma, and lack of awareness, more Australians can be encouraged to seek timely treatment for hearing loss, ultimately improving their quality of life and overall health outcomes.

From [Starts at 60](#) , [6 myths about hearing loss you need to stop believing](#), [Quiet Crisis](#), [Listen up: We need to talk about hearing](#), WS Audiology media release, [One in three Australians say their partner's hearing loss makes communication difficult](#).





Paid advisory opportunities

Deafness Forum Australia is looking for individuals to join our bi-monthly online advisory groups to support our work around the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Our two groups:

NDIS Citizen Advisory Group

For NDIS participants who are 18 years or older who are D/deaf, Deafblind or have hearing loss.

NDIS Parents Advisory Group

For parents or guardians of children (under 18) who are D/deaf, Deafblind or have hearing loss who are NDIS participants.

This is a one-year role. Group members will receive financial compensation (\$50 an hour) for their time and expertise.

Meetings will be held out-of-work hours and Auslan and captioning will be provided.

To learn more, please contact:

hayley.stone@deafnessforum.org.au before 15th April.



Avatars

Sign language avatars are emerging as a promising technology to improve accessibility for Deaf communities worldwide. These digital tools translate spoken or written language into sign language using animated characters.

Globally, avatars are being integrated into various systems to enhance accessibility. Kara Technologies in New Zealand used avatar technology during the COVID-19 lockdowns to translate information into New Zealand Sign Language. In public transport systems, “TransportSign” by SignAvatar has introduced avatars that translate audio announcements and on-screen text into sign language at airports and train stations, helping Deaf travellers navigate more independently.

In education, platforms like NVIDIA’s “Signs” use AI-powered avatars to teach American Sign Language interactively. These tools provide real-time feedback on signing techniques, making them particularly useful for families of Deaf children and learners seeking to acquire sign language skills. GenASL uses generative AI to create expressive ASL animations for video conferencing and online courses.

Successes of Avatar Technology

Sign language avatars offer flexibility by allowing users to adjust signing speed and style, catering to diverse audiences with varying fluency levels. Advances in motion-capture technology have also improved the realism of avatar movements, making them more engaging and effective for users.

Educational applications have shown early signs of success. NVIDIA’s “Signs” platform uses 3D avatars to teach American Sign Language interactively, while SignLLM employs generative

AI to create photorealistic animations that mimic real signing videos.

Technology for Technology’s Sake?

No way. Here in Australia, there is a very significant shortage of qualified Auslan interpreters that won’t be fixed within a decade. The same is likely to be true in most parts of the world.

It is hard to imagine avatars replacing human signers, at least for a generation. But it has to be said that avatars may play a crucial role in addressing the critical need for improved access to interpreting services for the Deaf community.

Challenges

Despite apparent successes, challenges remain. Research involving focus groups of Deaf participants has revealed mixed feedback on avatar performance. Not surprisingly, many native signers find avatars unnatural or robotic due to insufficient facial expressions and emotional depth—key elements of sign language grammar. Translation accuracy is another hurdle; some systems struggle with conveying nuanced meanings inherent in signed languages.

Cultural adaptation is also a significant challenge. With over 300 different signed languages worldwide, each with unique grammar and gestures, creating universally accepted avatars may be a bridge too far.

Potential

Looking ahead, sign language avatars hold immense potential for integration into virtual reality, live broadcasts, and public services like transportation systems.

While the technology is still evolving and may never be satisfactory for all users, its potential for improving accessibility and foster inclusivity makes it a valuable tool for bridging communication gaps between Deaf and hearing communities.

Making Hearing Aids More Personal and Precise

The Australian Government-owned National Acoustic Laboratories has launched a new version of its hearing aid fitting formula called NAL-NL3. It is the first major update in 15 years. This new formula helps audiologists fine-tune hearing aids more accurately for individual needs, rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach.



Hearing aid fitting formulas are used to decide how much amplification (volume boost) a person needs at different sound frequencies, depending on their hearing loss. The goal is to make speech easier to hear while keeping sound comfortable.

The previous version of the hearing aid fitting formula is currently the most used fitting formula worldwide. The new version builds on it

by using advanced technology, including neural networks (a type of artificial intelligence), and real-life feedback from hearing aid users. This feedback was collected through smartphones, where users shared how their hearing aids worked in everyday situations.

This means the update can give more precise results, especially for people with less common types of hearing loss, like reverse slope hearing loss (better hearing at high frequencies than low ones) or mixed hearing loss (a combination of inner and middle ear problems).

National Acoustic Laboratories has also introduced two new optional tools (called modules) designed for people with specific needs:

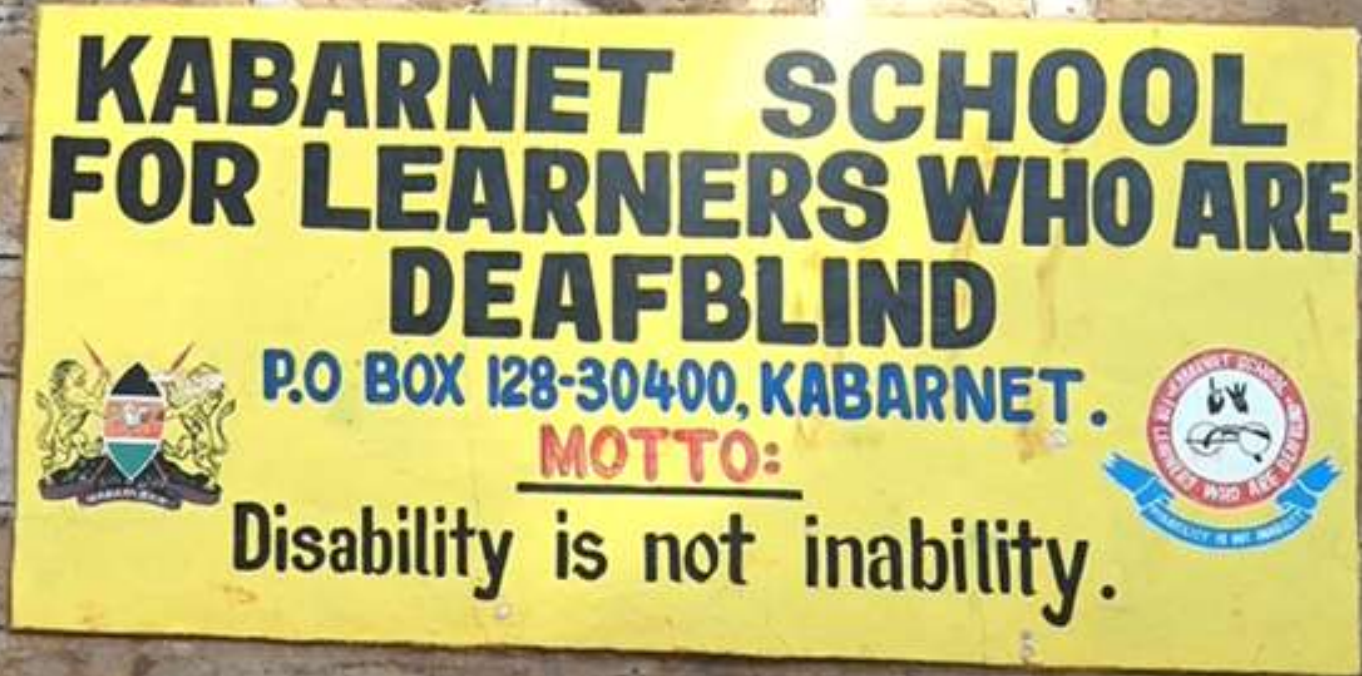
- Minimal Hearing Loss (MHL) Module: For people who struggle to hear but have test results within the “normal” range. This is a common issue that can affect millions.
- Noise Module: Helps people hear better in noisy places without making things too loud or uncomfortable.

Future modules may focus on areas like improving music listening or supporting those with severe hearing loss.

Since its early versions (starting in 1999 with NAL-NL1), National Acoustic Laboratories’ fitting formulas have used large amounts of research data to improve accuracy. So far, NAL-NL3 is being tested in clinics across Australia. Feedback from audiologists and patients has been positive.

The new formula and modules encourage audiologists to move beyond basic “best-fit” solutions and instead offer more tailored care. This is especially important in light of growing competition from online and over-the-counter hearing aid options. By using NAL-NL3, professionals can show their expertise and better support their patients’ unique hearing needs.

From [Hearing Tracker](#)



Kabarnet School for the Deaf and Blind is the largest institution of its kind in East and Central Africa. It extended a heartfelt invitation to lovers across the nation on Valentine's Day.

While February 14th is traditionally a day for celebrating romantic love, the school called on individuals and couples to share their love with those often forgotten: the 75 deaf and blind students under their care.

For more than two years, this vital institution has faced severe neglect from the government, receiving no capitation funds. Despite being a government institution under the Ministry of Education, the school has been forced to rely on the generosity of donors to survive. This precarious situation has left staff struggling and children, who require specialised care, sometimes going without basic necessities like food.

The school's understaffing has been further compounded by the inability to pay casual staff, who were hired to supplement the efforts of the few remaining teachers. The absence of government funding has turned the daily operation of the school into a constant struggle.

On Valentine's Day, [the school](#) organised a 5km walk to raise much-needed funds.

Baringo Governor Benjamin Cheboi (below) made a fervent call for support, urging lovers to share their affection on Valentine's Day by bringing smiles to the faces of those the government has overlooked.



Mr Cheboi appeal highlights the urgent need for government intervention to alleviate the plight of Kabarnet School for the Deaf and Blind and its deserving students.

From [TV4 Digital](#)

[Facebook](#)

Cochlear Fast-Tracking Hearing Care in China

Australian medical technology companies are finding new ways to deliver healthcare to people in China, thanks to recent changes in how foreign products are approved. A new set of fast-track policies allows advanced treatments to reach hospitals more quickly, cutting years off the usual wait times.

In the past, overseas medical companies had to undergo a lengthy approval process that could take more than three years. China's National Medical Products Administration managed this process. Through the Hong Kong-Macao Drug and Medical Device Connect policy, approval can happen in as little as 40 days. This gives companies a faster way to bring medical solutions to Chinese customers.

One of the companies using this opportunity is Cochlear, an Australian pioneer in hearing technology. Cochlear has been working in China since 1995 and holds a strong position in the country's implantable hearing device market. Its products have been implanted in more than 50,000 people.

In 2023, Cochlear became the first company in its field to operate under the Connect policy in the Greater Bay Area, which includes Hong Kong, Macau, and major cities in southern China. The company quickly began offering its latest hearing solutions across 10 regional hospitals. Nearly 1,000 patients have received support through Cochlear's advanced systems, including

new hearing implants and sound processing devices.

Xinyu Li, General Manager of Cochlear China, says the Connect policy has had a major impact.

"It allows us to deliver high-quality care much sooner than before.

"People can benefit from the latest global products and professional services without waiting years."

Another path that has helped Australian companies reach patients in China more efficiently is the Hainan Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone. Introduced in 2018, this zone allows medical devices and medicines to be used before they go through national approval, offering faster treatment options in urgent situations.

Cochlear was one of the first companies to operate in this special zone. Since then, it has introduced over 10 advanced technologies, such as implants that work through bone vibrations and devices designed to support hearing when nerve damage occurs.



From [AusTrade](#)

New Gene Therapy for People Born with Hearing Loss



By Juntendo University Research Promotion Center

A promising medical discovery from Japan may help people born with genetic hearing problems. Scientists have found a way to fix a faulty gene linked to a common type of inherited hearing loss.

This method uses a precise genetic tool to repair the DNA and restore normal function in the ear.

Changes in a gene called GJB2 cause many cases of hearing loss from birth. This gene creates a protein called Connexin 26, which helps form tiny bridges between inner ear cells. These bridges, called gap junctions, allow important signals and substances to move between cells. The ear cannot process sound properly when these connections are broken or missing.

In some people, the GJB2 gene carries a specific change called a dominant-negative mutation. This means the faulty version of the gene blocks the healthy one from working as it should. Regular gene replacement treatments don't work well in these cases, so researchers needed a more advanced approach.

Dr. Kazusaku Kamiya and his team at Juntendo University, along with Dr. Osamu Nureki from the University of Tokyo, developed a special gene-editing method to fix this problem. They focused on one common mutation, R75W, which interferes with normal hearing.

The team used a harmless virus called AAV (short for adeno-associated virus) to reach the cells inside the ear. This virus acts like a delivery truck, carrying the gene-editing tool into the cells. Because AAV can only take small loads, the scientists created a compact tool called a base editor. This tool makes precise changes to DNA by switching just one letter, helping avoid damage to the rest of the gene.

Once the base editor was delivered into the ear cells, it corrected the R75W mutation. The repaired cells were then able to rebuild proper gap junctions and send signals usually, which is essential for the ear to detect sound.

To confirm the treatment's success, the scientists tested it in specially bred mice with the same genetic issue as humans. After treatment, the ear cells in these mice looked and worked like those in healthy animals.

Dr. Kamiya explained that this all-in-one delivery method may lead to safer, more affordable treatments. It also simplifies the process of developing therapies for other gene-related hearing conditions.

This research offers a possible cure for one of the most common forms of inherited hearing loss.

From [Mirage News](#)



Why Do People Assume Everyone With Hearing Loss

Can Sign?

By [Shari Eberts](#)

We would love you to make videos to reach a hearing loss audience, the media rep suggested.

“Sure, that sounds good,” I replied, “assuming the videos would be captioned, of course.”

“But wouldn’t you just sign in them?” she asked with some confusion.

I stopped dead in my tracks in surprise. “Most people with hearing loss, myself included, don’t know sign language,” I explained, “particularly if we acquired our hearing issues later in life.” “I didn’t know that,” she said.

This was an intelligent, educated person working in media for a patient advocacy company. If she doesn’t know this basic fact about people with hearing loss, imagine the ignorance of the general public.

Sign Language is Beautiful

Sign language is a beautiful language that works well for people in the Deaf community, but as someone who developed hearing loss later in life, it is not a workable option for me, unless I

wanted to change almost everything about my life. I prefer to augment my residual hearing with technology to remain firmly in the hearing world.

Even so, I have always been curious about sign language — ever since learning how to finger spell in grade school, well before my hearing issues began.

A hearing loss friend and I took several sign language lessons a few years ago. It was fun but also challenging.

[American Sign Language](#) (ASL) does not mirror spoken English in sentence construction which made it hard for us to translate our thoughts into this new visual way of communicating. Between lessons, we also lost a lot of what we had learned since we didn’t have any consistent practice partners. Eventually we stopped the sessions.

Sign Language ≠ Accessibility For Most People With Hearing Loss

At first I shrugged off my experience with the media rep with a roll of my eyes and a chuckle, similar to the times when people have told me that [I don’t look deaf](#), but upon further reflection, this mistake seemed different. The misperception that people with hearing loss generally know sign language could have serious ramifications for accessibility.

According to [Wikipedia](#), there are 250,000 – 500,000 people using American Sign Language today in the United States (Ed: around 16,000 native signers in Australia), including a number of children of deaf adults. This represents about 1% of the estimated 48 million people in the United States with hearing loss, meaning sign language is not the norm for the vast majority of people who have trouble hearing.

Much education about how to make things more accessible for people with hearing loss is needed. Sometimes, when people with hearing loss ask for an accommodation at a hospital or museum, they are told that the only available option is a sign language interpreter. This should not be the case.

As people with hearing loss outside of the Deaf community, we must continue to raise awareness with legislators, leaders at cultural institutions, medical facilities, and schools as well as with the general public about the accessibility options that work best for us. These include things like [assistive listening devices](#) (i.e., pocket talkers, FM or infrared systems), [captioning](#) of all types, and [hearing loops](#). Even paper and pencil can be helpful when used effectively. The one accommodation that will not work for most of us is sign language.

From [Why Do People Assume Everyone With Hearing Loss Can Sign?](#)

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We recognise the unacceptably high rates of ear and hearing conditions that continue to impact First Nations communities, particularly their children, at rates far greater than the general population. We honour the leadership and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in addressing these challenges and their unwavering commitment to improving the hearing health of future generations. We commit to listening, learning, and working in genuine partnership to support community-led solutions that are culturally safe and driven by the wisdom of First Nations peoples.