

MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed: August 22, 2011

GOVERNMENT VISION CALL ON HEARING ISSUE

A challenge is being issued today to the Federal Government on behalf of the more than three and a half million Australians suffering from hearing loss at an estimated cost to the economy of over \$20 billion a year.

Using today's launch of Hearing Awareness Week by Federal Minister for Mental Health & Ageing Mark Butler, the challenge comes through the Hearing Care Industry Association.

In thanking the Minister for launching the event at Parliament House, HCIA CEO Donna Staunton congratulated the Government on its continuing commitment to the Commonwealth Hearing Services Program through a difficult budgetary period, but pointed to hearing loss as *"a major issue of productivity; a major issue of fairness; and a major issue of social justice."*

She quoted Access Economics data showing that:

- Of the more than three and a half million Australians with hearing loss in 2005, nearly half were of working age (16-64).
- For those aged between 45 and 65, the chances of being employed were 20% lower for men and 16% lower for women.
- The direct financial cost of hearing loss was calculated at \$11.75 billion, with the largest component being productivity loss.

With one in six Australians suffering some degree of hearing loss, the total economic cost of hearing loss is currently estimated at \$23 billion a year, but without further action the number of those affected is projected to reach one in four by 2050.

In addressing the HCIA challenge to the Minister, Ms Staunton said: *"If politics is about making a difference to the lives of ordinary Australians, here is a problem that only political vision can solve."*

She pledged the assistance of her association, which is dedicated to raising the profile of hearing related issues and better informing policy development.

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