

step up.

Welcome to the September edition of HCIA's newsletter **Step Up**.

We need your help.

Follow the link and fill in a survey about *Rehabilitation Plus*. We want to find out how it is working for you.

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/survey-intro.zgi?p=WEB229MLUJG4RA>

It will take no more than 15 minutes.

Your input will be very valuable as we intend to share the results with the OHS.

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Senate Inquiry announced into Hearing Healthcare in Australia

Last week the Senate referred an inquiry into Hearing Healthcare in Australia to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report back by February 2010. Submissions “from interested parties” need to be sent to the Committee Secretariat by 9 October 2009. HCIA will make a submission.

The terms of reference are as follows:

- The extent, causes and costs of hearing impairment in Australia
- The implications of hearing impairment for individuals and the community
- The adequacy of access to hearing services, including assessment and support services, and hearing technologies
- The adequacy of current hearing health and research programs, including education and awareness programs, and
- Specific issues affecting indigenous communities

Senator Siewert – the Greens Health spokesperson from WA - called for the inquiry.

We understand she has been concerned for some time about the “difficulty and expense of getting treatment” and wants to “find out what is really going on”. Her view is that if there are problems “she will hopefully persuade the government to do something about it”.

As said, HCIA will make a submission. If you would like to contribute some comments, please send them through to me on mail@hcia.com.au

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Clinical Pathways – Revised again

In our June newsletter, we shared with you a copy of our submission to the OHS in relation to the Clinical Pathways Initiative and we were hopeful that a number of our suggestions would be adopted.

We were a little too hopeful.

In total the OHS received 137 formal responses between April and June 2009.

The distribution of responses within the main professional groups indicates 61% were received from Audiologists (representing 1,090 practitioners); 31% from Audiometrists (representing 324 practitioners); 1% from GP groups (representing over 46,000 doctors) and 9% from business managers and other health professionals.

We understand that there was a mixed response to the proposed changes, particularly in relation to the role of the medical practitioner and the secondary assessment.

HCIA is disappointed that the OHS has failed to take the opportunity to streamline the process and remove the doctors as gate-keepers. HCIA strongly believes that clients should only be referred to doctors as required – in cases of medical contraindications – as happens in other areas, such as optometry.

HCIA is of the view that GP's have limited expertise in hearing healthcare whereas Audiologists are highly educated and qualified to make recommendations for hearing rehabilitation, including hearing aids, and to determine whether medical intervention is required.

Keeping the GP's in the pathway is at odds with the Federal Government's own policies. HCIA will continue to press this with Government.

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Having received all of these submissions, the OHS identified a number of issues that required further discussion and they included;

- Entry point (role of the practitioners)
- Professional arrangements with medical practitioners (report and referral of clients)
- Referral of clients with non-routine indicators to audiologist (secondary assessment), and Minimum Hearing Loss Threshold.

The Office convened a meeting of a number of key health groups in July to try and reach a position of consensus. They included: the Audiological Society of Australia (ASA); Australian College of Audiology (AcAud); Australian Hearing (AH); Deafness Forum, Attune Hearing; The Neurosensory Unit, Australian Medical Association (AMA,) The Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery (ASOHNS), Australian College of Audiology (ACA); Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP); Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and Hearing Aid Audiometrist Society of Australia (HAASA). The results of that meeting were then to be conveyed to the Minister.

The meeting of 13 July resulted in the formation of no less than five working groups.

The various groups will look at such things as the development of reporting templates for information sharing and alignment with e-health developments; review of the medical and non-medical indicators and a review of the audiolink function and the viability of the 610/810 items in relation to a second opinion (HCIA will have representation of these groups).

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It will also look at the development of training tools for GP's and the development of guidelines to assist medical and hearing practitioners in the application of the Minimum Hearing Loss Threshold. HCIA will seek representation on the working group looking at the development of training tools for GP's - and in relation to the guidelines for MHLT – we have been told that OHS is working with Harvey Dillion and other researchers to try and get something “on paper” which all industry bodies (including HCIA) can comment on.

A review of the new client hearing services voucher and application form for the certification of the client and referral of the client for hearing rehabilitation services had already been finalized in consultation with medical groups. We understand it is now in a print run. HCIA have asked the office for a copy of what has been agreed.

AcAUD Congress 2009

HCIA was delighted to have been invited to attend the ACAUD Congress 2009 and wishes to thank them for their very generous invitation. I met a lot of key players in the hearing care industry and heard some very high quality presentations. Congratulations must go to the organizers. HCIA took the opportunity to informally promote their work – with good feedback from a number of participants.

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Welcome to Teresa Ward at the OHS

Teresa moved into the Director role at the Office of Hearing Services just over a month ago. HCIA has already met with her and is hoping she will continue to engage robustly with HCIA. We enjoyed our brief interaction with Richard Bartlett who moved to a more senior role within the Department of Health.

Welcome to Katie Williams at HCIA

Katie has recently joined the team at HCIA and will be overseeing the survey in relation to Rehabilitation Plus. Katie can be contacted at mail@hcia.com.au

We are keen to receive input from you. If you have any comments please let us know.

Please email your comments to mail@hcia.com.au.