

step up.

Welcome to a special edition of HCIA's newsletter *Step Up for Hearing Awareness Week 2012*.

Hearing Awareness Week commences on Monday 20 August.

On Tuesday 21st August, HCIA will host a **Parliamentary breakfast in Parliament House**. The Hon Mark Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform will attend and speak, as will Professor Harvey Dillon from the National Acoustic Laboratories. We have also invited the Chair of the Deafness Forum, David Brady and Pete Halsey, CEO of The ACT Deafness Resource Centre to join us in a panel discussion about the challenges of living and working with hearing impairment. We are particularly interested in understanding the communication difficulties faced in social and work environments.

HCIA will acknowledge that the Australian Government provides world class assistance for younger and older Australians, but we will call on them to consider expanding their support for people who are still in the workforce, or who are trying to enter it.

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We believe this would;

- Allow a greater number of people to remain productive and maintain their income earning potential, and
- Alleviate government expenditure on disability benefits and minimise the social and mental health issues associated with hearing loss.

HCIA also believes that the Government needs to focus on employment outcomes for people aged between 45 and 65 who suffer from hearing loss. These people have substantially lower participation in the workforce, i.e. half of them are not in paid work, compared to less than a third of those without hearing loss. HCIA made a submission to Government about this as part of the Federal Budget considerations.

We have just published a new brochure to distribute to all parliamentarians and the media during Hearing Awareness Week. [Click here to download a version.](#)

You will see our new brochure focuses on hearing loss as a major health issue – it is more prevalent than cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma, cancer and mental health (all of which are National Health Priorities)

We also propose a number of policy options for Government to consider, noting that the average age of people accessing hearing services under the OHS program is 79 years old, yet half the people in Australia with hearing loss are under the age of 65.

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Outcomes of the Australian Government Hearing Program

A survey conducted by Professor Harvey Dillon, Professor Louise Hickson and Tony Lloyd from the Department of Health and Ageing during 2010 concluded that the non-use rate of hearing aids has markedly decreased from 2006. The non-use rate was 25% in 2006 as opposed to 13% in 2010. That is very good news and speaks highly of the quality of the work being done by practitioners all over Australia.

The survey also showed;

- “need” is the major determinant of benefit, although hearing loss (moderate or greater) plays a significant part
- Top-up hearing aids lead to a small but significant increase in benefit.

Engagement with the Office of Hearing Services

HCIA continues to work closely with the Office. It is also represented on the Hearing Services Consultative Committee. This followed an invitation to do so from Minister Mark Butler.

During the years, we saw implementation of the 2011/12 Budget Measures which meant the service voucher period was changed from two to three years;

Additional funding was granted under the Community Service Obligation to expand eligibility for services under the CSO to young people aged between 21 and 25 years and

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improvements were made in IT to enhance the interface between OHS, service providers and clients.

The Hearing Services Online Project is a particularly exciting project which will lead to reduced manual application processing; a call centre to refer clients to a web portal for online registration, eligibility checking and application and a freeing up of the current call centre to provide extra information and assistance to those who need it.

HCIA has also made significant contribution to a review of Rehabilitation Plus; A review of the Audit and Compliance Framework and we prepared a detailed submission in relation to the review of the Regulatory Framework for Hearing Services. We suggested in that submission that the very fact that something is unregulated or unlicensed is not of itself sufficient reason to regulate it – rather there should be a risk associated with failing to do so. The Office will consider all submissions and make a recommendation to the Minister about what changes should be made to the regulations.

HCIA has also worked very closely with the Office in relation to the changes to the Service Provider Contract and the Rules of Conduct. These new contract and the new rules took effect on 1 July 2012. The process was a very constructive one.

HCIA is also on a number of working groups established under the Hearing Services Consultative Committee.

They are as follows;

A working group on hearing service delivery in residential aged care facilities

A working group on hearing loss prevention awareness and education campaigns, and



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A working group on rehabilitation plus.

I also chaired a working group looking at Working Age, Low Income Hearing Services Eligibility. That work is currently under consideration.

Please feel welcome to contact us.....we are always looking for suggestions about what you would like to hear about.

Donna Staunton