

**The Standing Committee on Health
Aged Care and Sport**

PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Chairperson

Submission to the inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia

I am making this submission because not only do I have age onset hearing loss but I also have friends with varying degrees of hearing loss - up to profound - I am aware of the struggles they have due to ignorance in the community.

I offer the following submission as an index of unmet need and a call for equity for every Australian who lives with hearing loss or impairment, a chronic ear disorder or tinnitus; are Deaf or deafblind; and their families.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Alcock

9 December 2016

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Introduction

We would like to offer comments and recommendations to this Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport Inquiry in relation to some/all of the terms of reference for this inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia.

1. Community awareness, information, education and promotion about hearing loss and health care.

I would like to see hearing health and well being a National Health Priority to raise aware of what is almost an invisible disability. A lot of people disguise their hearing aids - myself included. One reason is safety - deaf people are targets as they cannot hear who's coming up behind them! But more likely, because communication is so difficult and there is still a belief amongst many people that being deaf equates with being dumb. "Dumb" means mute however it can mean stupid and some deaf people when they endeavour to vocalise, can be confused with people with cognitive impairment. This is not fair to either group.

Deaf people do not have the same education or access to news and current affairs; they often have smaller vocabularies because Auslan (Australian sign language) is about communicating concepts. Deaf people often do not have the support they require to campaign for better community awareness because they aren't educated properly in the issues.

I would like to see Hearing Awareness Week include more TV and radio promotions including interpreters signing and stories regarding how difficult it is for deaf people to find work.

Deaf people suffer from a lot of isolation - because they can't hear and live with their own thoughts too often - which becomes a burden on health services. A national approach to hearing loss is important due to the rise in numbers of older Australians, many of whom have hearing loss - whether they admit to it or not.

I would like to see Auslan taught as a second language in every school so that attention is drawn to the deaf population in a positive way and would help prevent isolation.

A Royal Commission or Senate Inquiry is long overdue; let's hear from everyday deaf people - especially those struggling to find employment.