

The Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to raise the need for Medicare funding for Ear Clinics staffed by qualified Ear Nurses.

Patients regularly see their General Practitioner for blocked ears due to, ear infections or wax problems. GP's use water syringing to unblock the ear. This method is being funded by Medicare and GP's are continuing to syringe ears against specialist advice. Micro-suction is used by Ear Specialists. This procedure is very safe, gentle, and effective.

This procedure is the recommended method for clearing ears by the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and they do NOT recommend syringing.

There are a small number of Ear Clinics in Melbourne and only a few in Australia where qualified Ear Nurses use micro-suction to clear the patient's ears. The qualification for these Registered Division 1 Nurses is a nationally recognized course in Micro-suction and Aural Hygiene. This involves 120 practical hours and 40 theoretical hours of training.

I have been working as an Ear Nurse for 5 years now with Crystal Clear Ears. Every week at the clinic, we see infections or perforated tympanic membranes from unsuccessful syringing. Medicare is paying for this service, yet not funding the patient to get the damage fixed. Some patients report needing to go to the GP multiple times for the ear to be syringed.

Some people require ear cleaning more often than others. Examples of these people are:

- Hearing aid patients (often on the pension who can't afford to get ears tended to regularly)
- Down Syndrome patients (who have narrow ear canals) – on pension and can't afford to attend regularly
- Indigenous Australians (can't afford to regularly attend)

Additionally, people in regional Australia have no choice but to see their local doctor as there are no such clinics available outside of capital cities.

As qualified Ear Nurses, we have the skills to service this section of the population who are in desperate need of this basic care. Crystal Clear Ears run clinics in such

areas as Geelong and Morwell, and are looking to service areas such as Bendigo and Ballarat.

I ask you to review the funding for Aural Hygiene as Medicare funding is being misappropriated.

This will enable Australians to get the most appropriate care of their ears.

Yours sincerely,

Mardi O'Leary
Registered Nurse Division 1 (Ear Nurse)