

Tom Ravlic

17 December 2016

Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport  
PO Box 6100,  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted by e-mail:

Dear Committee Secretary

**Hearing health and wellbeing of Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this parliamentary inquiry looking at the issue of deafness in the community and the standard of technologies and services that help people like me with a certain level deafness enjoy a better quality of life.

I was diagnosed with nerve deafness in primary school and was first fitted with a single beige behind-the-ear unit for my left ear – the ear with the greatest degree of deafness - by a helpful audiologist. You know the style. They sat on the ear like a plastic slug and were more than a little noticeable in the schoolyard. It came with the usual playground fringe benefits that you might expect. I can laugh today but at that time things were difficult. Difference was something the children around me found challenging to handle. I found it challenging to handle the reaction to differences back then. Early life experiences like those breed a certain level of resilience that has without doubt served me well later in life. I guess I had to go through that pain early in the piece.

It was only in the mid-1990s that I was assessed by an independent audiologist and ended up following through on a recommendation that I be fitted with two hearing aids. These ones were obviously smaller and less prominent than the beige slug that accompanied me through primary school, secondary college years and my university years studying journalism at RMIT University.

These devices cost a small fortune at the time and the amount was close to \$10,000. About a decade later I bought another set of hearing aids that cost just over \$7,000 for the pair. I remembered thinking that the technology could surely be cheaper. I was still under the care of an independent audiologist at the time.

Let me skip a few years and bring you to November 2015. My first visit to a Costco Warehouse had me questioning the cost of the technology supplied to those of us with a hearing impairment. I went to see this as more of a novelty because I saw no point in becoming a member of a warehouse of any kind to go shopping. It was not 'my thing'.

Costco Moorabbin has a hearing centre with two of those soundproofed booths that audiologists lock you up in to test your hearing, which you are able to get done as a Costco member. My hearing was tested within 24 hours of my first visit during which I learned that the cost of a pair of hearing aids bought from Costco would be \$1,899. After several visits to get the mould made and the hearing aids fitted I had improved technology at a price I had never thought was possible.

I enjoy music and enjoy playing musical instruments. I am eternally grateful to audiologist Laura Hill for her assistance in ensuring that my hearing aids were set up for me to enjoy my past time and also to be able to have conversations with people in a normal setting.

It is worth the committee exploring the various costs that are encountered by those of us with hearing impairments further so that a full account is able to be given to the government about the options available. I might have found myself paying much more for a new set of hearing aids if I had not become aware of Costco and the substantial savings. The Costco membership also entitled me to unlimited appointments to ensure my hearing aids were working as intended. I had five appointments during the first 12 months alone and there was no additional charge. The Costco membership cost me \$60 a year.

I thank the committee again for inquiring into this important area and wish the committee all the best in finalising its recommendations to the Federal Government.

Kind Regards

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