



**Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission**

*everyone, everywhere, everyday*

The Hon Justine Elliot, Minister for Ageing and Hearing Services  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

CC: The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's  
Services  
RG87 House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

31 October 2008

## **Letter of support for the “Let Us Hear” committee of the Deafness Council of NSW**

Dear Minister

I am writing to endorse the submission made by the “Let Us Hear” committee of the Deafness Council of NSW, in support of expansion of availability of services and equipment from Australian Hearing. As you would know, beyond 21 years of age, eligibility for services and equipment ceases other than for a number of classes of social security beneficiaries.

The role of Australian Hearing in meeting the audiological needs of Deaf and hearing impaired children and young people, as you would be well aware, is critically important in enabling these young Australians to participate as fully and effectively as possible in education and in other aspects of community life.

With higher levels of education and training now being sought and attained in our community, it is of course increasingly common for young people aged 21 to still be in full time education or in the early stages of employment, rather than having attained economic independence.

Investment in education and training is rightly seen as an investment in our future. In my submission, investment in services to enable equal access for education and employment opportunity for Deaf and hearing impaired Australians ought to be seen in the same light.

This would, of course, also be consistent with the Government’s pursuit of improved employment opportunity and outcomes for people with disability through

development of a National Mental Health Disability Strategy - and with the more general development of a National Disability Strategy to implement the commitments entered into through ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I note that the Let Us Hear committee do not propose a general and unconditional entitlement to services and equipment through Australian Hearing as the sole option for consideration. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, similarly, calls on governments to take appropriate measures to ensure that assistive technologies are available and affordable, including innovative technologies, without displacing the need for governments themselves to determine what the most appropriate measures would be.

A number of models based on other areas of assistance by the Commonwealth might bear examination in this area: including a general entitlement based on assessed need, with or without a modest co-payment; or eligibility subject to means testing; or a HECS style scheme of assistance subject to a requirement to make contributions only on attainment of a specified level of earnings.

I would however urge the Government to consider the most expansive and effective assistance possible. If I understand correctly recent statements from the Prime Minister and Treasurer and the Government's economic advisers, the present economic circumstances (in calling for fiscal stimulus which so far as possible should have benefits in enhancing productive capacity, while not having unduly long lead times) offer an ideal time to invest in the productive use of the abilities of all of Australia's people through removal of barriers to participation by Deaf and hearing impaired Australians.

Yours sincerely,



Graeme Innes AM

Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Commissioner

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