



2022-23

ANNUAL REPORT.



Chairperson's Report.

It is my pleasure and privilege to present this Annual Report for the 2022-23 financial year on behalf of the board of directors and staff.

I am pleased to share with you that Deafness Forum Australia enjoys the trust and support of citizens and others in the hearing health and disability advocacy sectors in Australia. Our 24 years of existence has developed and maintained a wide network and deep relationships which brings profile and real results for the millions of Australians we represent.

We consistently provide advice to help governments improve their public policy for the benefit of people with a lived experience of hearing loss, ear or balance disorders, and those who use Australian Sign Language.

All Australians have a right to be included in their communities, education institutions, workplaces, and support their families in whatever their role may choose.

Deafness Forum Australia is funded by the Australian Government to be a national disability peak and a national health peak organisation (with a focus on hearing loss prevention), which enables us to cover both the promotion of ear and hearing health, prevention of hearing loss and to advocate for programs and policies that underpin living well in the community everywhere throughout Australia.

In May 2023, Deafness Forum's board of directors was in Perth for a series of events to meet our members & friends in the West.

The visit was an opportunity to learn about the work being done by supporters; and of the issues that concern them such as citizen engagement in research, tackling a shortage in Auslan interpreters, and what some feel is the failure of the Closing the Gap program to improve the ear and hearing health of First Nations Peoples.

There were visits to [Access Plus](#), [Shenton College Deaf Education Centre](#), the [Earbus Foundation](#), [Telethon Speech and Hearing](#), and [Ear Science Institute Australia](#).



Deafness Forum board members with visit Shenton College Deaf Education Centre in Perth.

We were privileged to attend a dinner to mark the 10th anniversary of WA's [Earbus Foundation](#).

I wish to thank the CEO of Telethon Speech and Hearing Mark Fitzpatrick and my fellow directors in WA, Raelene Walker and Barry McKinnon, for making the visit such a success.



Deafness Forum was represented on numerous committees and advisory groups by a highly competent group of expert volunteers including Christine Hunter, Keith Shinn, Margaret Dewberry, Margaret Furphy, Ann Porter AM, Emily Shepard, Barry MacKinnon, Mark Fitzpatrick, Emma Scanlan, Basil Turner, Andrew Stewart, Suzanne Robertson, Dr. John Byrne, Paul Higginbotham, Damien Howard, Tony Whelan, Joe Symons, Rod Power, Chi Lo. There were others who offered support when we needed it and I hope they will forgive me if I have not included their names in the honour list.

Just some of the organisations we engaged with in the period were the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Department of Social Services, National Disability Insurance Agency, the state governments of NSW, ACT, and Western Australia, and the World Health Organisation.

We promoted Australia's [Hearing Health & Wellbeing Roadmap](#) and contributed to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

We participated in the Commonwealth Health Department's Diversity Consultative Committee, aided the Government's Hearing Services Program, and assisted the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations and the World Hearing Forum.

We championed hearing loss prevention strategies and Australia's Disability Strategy.

I am so proud to have had the privilege of leading a great team of fine directors: Michelle Courts (SA), Raelene Walker and Barry McKinnon (WA), Dwin Tucker, Rhonda Locke, Jennifer Clemesha, and Catherine Morgan (NSW). Each has given generously of their time and knowledge to ensure good governance, prudent financial oversight, and active stewardship of our strategic plan. I thank all of them for their dedication and the support they have given me and each other.

I would like to thank our CEO Steve Williamson and the many people and organisations that supported him in his extensive role.

Looking back on the year, it was a difficult time to be heard in what will be remembered as a hectic year in public life. A new Federal Government led by Anthony Albanese had its head down implementing the policies and promises that brought it to power. The call for Indigenous constitutional recognition and representation was ramping up. The Disability Royal Commission stirred the public conscience.

This is our collective challenge. It is of paramount importance that the voices of the people with lived experience are not drowned out by the cacophony of competing interests. The active and meaningful participation of the people is the cornerstone of good governance. This means not only listening to the concerns and aspirations of citizens but also ensuring that their voices carry the weight they deserve in shaping public policies and decisions.

There is much more work to be done and you can count on Deafness Forum to be a voice for all.

Best wishes

David N Brady
Chairperson



Connect, Collaborate, Impact.

Deafness Forum Australia is the trusted, national, independent citizen voice for the whole hearing health and deafness sector – the impartial advocate representing all voices that need to be heard.

Hearing loss occurs across the life course. It is the biggest disability per head of the population in adulthood. It affects 1 in 6 Australians. The annual financial cost to Australia exceeds \$30B and is rising.

Our Vision.

“All Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing live well in the community everywhere throughout Australia.”

Our Mission.

“To make hearing health & wellbeing a national priority in Australia”.

Deafness Forum Australia is the peak body representing the views and interests of the more than 4 million Australians who live with hearing loss, people with hearing difficulties, have ear or balance disorders, people who communicate using Australian Sign Language, and their families and supporters.

Member Driven.

Deafness Forum Australia is a membership-based body, which elects its Board of Directors from among its member organisations, ensuring equal representation of each group to provide balance and fairness across our large and diverse sector. Within our resources, we work hard to meet our members’ expectations.

Our membership also includes people and organisations that provide services that promote hearing health.

Peak Body.

Deafness Forum Australia is the peak representative body, trusted by governments, public sector organisations, the hearing health sector, the general health sector and the disability sector to represent this constituency.

We are also a part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people – an essential component of *Closing the Gap*. We support indigenous advocates to achieve improved hearing health in indigenous communities.

International Representative.

We represent Australians in the World Hearing Forum, a global network of stakeholders coordinated by the World Health Organization.

We are Australia's member of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People and an associate member of the World Federation of the Deaf.

We are Unique.

Deafness Forum Australia is different to other consumer peaks in the sector because it represents ALL consumers, in an impartial and non-partisan way. Through consensus, it develops public policy and actions to improve the lives of 4 million Australians. This is why Deafness Forum Australia enjoys the trust and support of all consumers and others within the hearing health, general health and disability sectors of Australia.

We speak at the national level on behalf of all citizens.

Our 'scope of work'.

Social problems demand social solutions – it's not just about hearing devices. We work to end negative community attitudes to deafness, hearing loss and hearing difficulties, and ear/balance disorders. We lead the discourse about how we can create a positive community where hearing is recognised and supported, and the strengths of individuals and groups are acknowledged and celebrated, supported by effective public policy and systems.

While we prioritise what we focus on in any one strategic period, Deafness Forum Australia will advocate in all areas, including public policy, that impact on people experiencing hearing related issues.

We address environmental factors that inhibit peoples' participation in society. Our strategy and approach align with *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31* and *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, viewing people not as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection but rather, as full and equal members of society, with human rights.

Our work encompasses the full human experience and includes advocacy for:

- accessibility in communications
- accessible environments
- human rights
- justice
- education
- employment
- transport
- health
- aged care
- quality innovation and technology
- hearing services accessibility and affordability.

Three areas of strategic focus.

Read about them [here](#).

A set of principles guide our strategies and daily work.

You can read about them [here](#).

Four Goals.

To achieve our mission to 'support all Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing to live well in the community by making hearing health & wellbeing a national priority' we have four goals and you can read a summary [here](#).

Our network of influence.

Read the list of our [influential member organisations](#) representing all facets of the hearing health and disability advocacy sectors.

Deafness Forum is a member of:

- Australasian Newborn Hearing Screening Committee
- National Disability Insurance Scheme CEO Forum
- Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
- Australian Electoral Commission Disability Advisory Committee

- Standards Australia committees
- Transport for NSW Accessible Transport Advisory Committee
- ACCAN Standing Committee on Disability Issues

Deafness Forum created the:

- Federal Parliamentary Friends of Hearing Health and Deafness
- NSW Parliamentary Friendship Group for Hearing Health and Deafness
- Western Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group for Hearing Health and Deafness



Deafness Forum is a Registered Charity. Donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible. You may [make a donation here](#).

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community.

We pay respect to them and their cultures, to elders past, present and future.

We aim to be part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and we understand that it is an essential component of Closing the Gap. We also understand the risk of the disappearance of indigenous sign languages and the cultural loss it would cause.





Leadership and Governance.

Our Members.

Deafness Forum Australia is membership organisation. This grants us authority and legitimacy. It enhances our reputation and allows us to exert influence and leadership, helping us shape the direction of hearing healthcare and community inclusion.

[Our members](#) provide us with invaluable networking opportunities. Being part of a larger community of like-minded organisations and individuals allows us to forge connections, share knowledge, and collaborate on common goals.

Hon Life Members.



[Honorary Life Members](#) appointed in 2022: Barry MacKinnon (WA), Ann Porter AM (NSW) and Margaret Dewberry AM (NSW).

Board of Directors.

The [Board of Deafness Forum](#) sets the policy on key issues, based on the consensus of our members. It ensures the organisation is focused on its purpose and strategic objectives and manages its resources efficiently and effectively.

The composition of the Board reflects the broad nature of the deafness sector. The various life experiences and interests of directors, coupled with the Deafness Forum's consultative processes, ensure the organisation is citizen-driven and with the authority to represent the interests and concerns of the entire sector.

- **David Brady**, chair and executive group member, nominated by Hearing Matters Australia.
- **Jennifer Clemesha**, co-opted for a term of one year.
- **Michelle Courts**, vice chair, nominated by Aussie Deaf Kids.
- **Rhonda Locke**, nominated by Better Hearing Australia Brisbane.
- **Barry MacKinnon**, nominated by Deafness Council of Western Australia.
- **Catherine Morgan**, executive group member, nominated by Hearing Australia.
- **Dwin Tucker AM**, vice chair, executive group member, treasurer, nominated by ClearaSound.
- **Raelene Walker**, nominated by West Australian Foundation for Deaf Children.

A small group of directors, the Board Executive meets to advance matters between board meetings. Its members were David Brady, Raelene Walker and Dwin Tucker.

The Board has a permanent Audit and Finance Committee headed by its treasurer.

Staff.

Deafness Forum operations are managed by chief executive Stephen Williamson. He represents the organisation in the:

- International Federation of Hard of Hearing People
- World Hearing Forum, a group within World Health Organization
- Editorial committee of the WHO publication, “News from the World Hearing Forum”
- National Disability Insurance Scheme CEO Forum
- Australian Federation of Disability Organisations.

Governance.

Deafness Forum’s governance arrangements are reviewed annually.

- Board Code of Conduct and Ethics
- Policy & procedures to deal with potential conflicts of interest
- Risk management strategy

The organisation has established policies and procedures:

- Board Delegations policy and schedule Communications
- Electronic ballots
- Epidemic pandemic
- Grievances
- Persons holding external representative positions
- Sponsorship
- Travel and Reimbursement
- Workplace discrimination and harassment

The [Strategic Plan](#) was updated in the period in consultation with members and a new corporate logo depicting a dragonfly was created in consultation with key stakeholders.

Financial management.

Deafness Forum seeks financial support from various sources, such as grants, sponsorships, project funding, membership fees and donations.

Deafness Forum maintains its financial records in accordance with the recommendations of its auditor, and lodged all required advice and reports required by law.

The Board of Directors, through its Treasurer is provided with comprehensive monthly reports.

Budgets are prepared for Board review before approval.

Later in this Annual Report you can read the auditor’s report and annual financial statements.

Special Acknowledgements.

Our national advocacy work was made possible by funding from the Australian Government. The National Disability Insurance Agency funded our co-design contributions to improving the NDIS for people with hearing challenges. Funding from the Department of Social Services enabled our contributions to the Disability Royal Commission and programs advocating for a more inclusive community. Funding from the Department of Health and Aged Care underpinned our work in hearing loss prevention.



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Hearing Australia



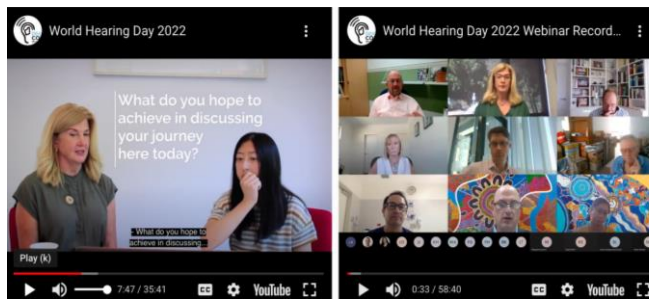
Events and Campaigns.

Tinnitus Awareness Week.

[Tinnitus Awareness Week](#) is observed throughout the world in the first full week of February and the purpose of it is to educate the public about the symptoms of tinnitus and how it affects people.

World Hearing Day.

[World Hearing Day](#) is held on 3 March each year to raise awareness of how to prevent deafness and hearing loss, and to promote better ear protection and health across the world.



World Hearing Day aims to:

- Promote public health actions for ear and hearing care
- Stimulate intersectoral partnership for ear and hearing care
- Raise awareness on hearing loss and care at national and community levels across the world.

Deafblind Awareness Week.

Deafblind Awareness Week in the last week of June honours leading humanitarian Helen Keller's birthday. Besides commemorating Keller's accomplishments, the week is a chance to raise awareness of the condition and make the world a more deafblind-friendly place.

Safe Listening Week.



AVOID THE RISK OF NOISE-INDUCED HEARING LOSS AND HELP PRESERVE YOUR HEARING AS YOU AGE.

In the last week of August, we promote [safe listening habits](#) to protect our hearing.

Australians with good hearing health are better able to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

It is important to take care of your hearing to prevent hearing loss and related health problems. Our hearing is precious and fragile so it needs to be protected throughout our lives.

2022 Libby Harricks Memorial Oration.

Since its inception in 1999, the [Libby Harricks Memorial Oration](#) series has featured distinguished speakers from around the world and gained international recognition for its exceptional presentations.

The series is an annual event that serves as a tribute to the memory of the first President of Deafness Forum Australia – scroll to the bottom of this page to read more about the remarkable Libby Harricks. The series is dedicated to carrying forward Libby Harrick’s commitment to raising awareness of issues related to hearing loss.



Prof. David McAlpine (pictured) presented the **23rd Libby Harricks Memorial Oration** in October 2022. Our thanks to Hearing Australia for its support.

David McAlpine is Distinguished Professor of Hearing, Language & The Brain, the Department of Linguistics, and Academic Director of Macquarie University Hearing, Faculty of Medicine, Health and Human Sciences at The Australian Hearing Hub, Macquarie University in Sydney Australia.

Click to download Prof David McAlpine’s [23rd Libby Harricks Memorial Oration presentation](#).

International Week of the Deaf and Day of Sign Languages.

The International Week of the Deaf is celebrated annually in the last full week of September. It is a time of various activities by Deaf Communities all around the world.

During the Week, International Day of Sign Languages is a unique opportunity to support and protect the linguistic identity and cultural diversity of all Deaf people and other sign language users.

National Safe Work Month.

October is [National Safe Work Month](#), a time to commit to building a safe and healthy workplace.

For everyone’s safety, work safely. Noise can damage your hearing if it’s too loud. Both sudden, loud noises, like an explosion; and constant, loud noises, like working near industrial machinery or blaring background music, can damage your hearing.

The person conducting a business must reduce their workers’ exposure to noise as much as possible. A safe and healthy workplace benefits everyone.



Throughout October, we ran a social media campaign to raise community awareness and to promote [SafeWork Australia](#)’s workplace safety regulations, codes of practice, and managing risks information resources.

Representations to Government on behalf of the community.



Our report provides evidence of the perpetual cycle that exists between childhood ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how it impacts the disproportionately higher rates of incarceration for this population and makes recommendations.

There is a pressing need to specifically address the high rates of hearing loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the criminal justice system, with rates as high as 80-95% in some communities.

As well as the enormous economic burden to society and particularly First Nations communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with hearing loss experience unlawful discrimination on a regular basis.

Download and read [Addressing the Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the criminal justice system](#).

A win for captions.

Chair David Brady met with the NSW Parliament Speaker and the President of the Upper House to congratulate them on implementing live captions in the NSW Parliament.

In Western Australia, advocacy by our local members encouraged the state government to mandate captions and Auslan interpreters for all government announcements on television.



Watchdog to conduct spot audits on TV broadcasters' closed captioning obligations.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority announced that it will shift from investigating individual complaints to conducting spot audits to determine whether TV broadcasters are obeying their captioning rules.

This follows several years of lobbying the ACMA to make the change.

Captioning of TV programs is essential for many audiences to access and enjoy television.

Citizen participation in research.

We aim to encourage greater consumer [participation in research](#) into the hearing health of Australians.

Researchers share challenges in identifying suitable research candidates and the costs and risks of delays and poor design.

Working with Sydney University and Macquarie University, we are conducting a national conversation about what might be done to help facilitate consumer engagement in research.

Addressing the burden of hearing loss among vulnerable groups in the community.

The Australian Government's Hearing Services Program should ensure that vulnerable groups, those requiring specialised programs to address their hearing needs, and people on low income have access to high-quality hearing services at no cost or minimal cost. Eligibility of the Program should be extended to:

- People on a Health Care Card, or Low-Income Card
- Seniors Health Care Card Holders
- Children of immigrants
- People in the criminal justice system
- People in Aged Care

[Read our recommendations.](#)

Hospital crisis in Children's cochlear implants.

Two state government investigations were subsequently conducted and changes to policies and practices were introduced. You can read what we had recommended:

- [Cochlear implant crisis at Adelaide Children's Hospital.](#)
- [Two stood down as QLD health investigates cochlear crisis.](#)

Creation of a new eligibility category for Aged Care under the Community Service Obligations component of the Australian Government Hearing Services Program.

Residents of aged care facilities are currently unable to access the hearing services they need under the Voucher Program component of the Hearing Services Program (HSP). These clients have complex needs and research has shown that residents in aged care require a different model of service delivery than is available through the Voucher Program.

[Read our recommendations.](#)

Testing to detect noise-induced hearing loss in the workplace.

Occupational hearing loss and deafness is a completely preventable injury. It is a serious injury that has a profound impact on an individual's quality of life.

Deafness Forum Australia, Unions NSW, The Australian Workers Union (NSW Branch), and affiliate unions believe it is important to test a worker's hearing at the commencement of their career to provide a baseline measurement as a reference for future audiometric test results. Once this is done, early identification of changes to hearing due to noise is the most effective way of assessing the effectiveness of any control measure in place and in turn preventing hearing loss, which can take place over a long period of time or can in some cases be instant. Follow-up testing should occur every two years. Testing should occur well into the work shift so that any temporary hearing loss can be picked up. More frequent audiometric testing may be needed if exposures are equal to or greater than 100dB(A).

[Read our report.](#)

Read Our Lips Australia.

Deafness Forum's online learning program includes eight lessons to teach you lipreading techniques.

Feel more connected to conversations and the world around you with video lessons (with captions for hearing accessibility) to help you start, or build on, your ability to lipread.

Its aim is to help you feel more confident about your ability to communicate in challenging listening environments by learning to identify common lip movements.

Our thanks to the Department of Social Services and NDIS for seed-funding this program.

READ OUR LIPS AUSTRALIA
Level 1 - Introductory Lipreading Course
NEW Level 2 - Advanced Word Practice
BUNDLE & SAVE!
www.readourlips.com.au
READ OUR LIPS AUSTRALIA | SELF-PACED E-LEARNING | SEE SPEECH. FEEL CONNECTED.
An initiative of: **DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA**

Other Noteworthy Actions.

A submission to Australia's Disability Strategy 2023 Implementation Report.

A submission, 'Hearing services provided through the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the way to improve them' was presented to the NDIS Review conducted by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

We were active in promoting the Australian Government's hearing awareness campaign, Get Help With Your Hearing.

Assisted Australian HealthCare Associates with its investigation into the need for Auslan interpreters in primary care settings.

Provided advice on development of a National Disability Data Asset.

Contributed to the review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

Conducted a review of a publication, A Guide to Understanding Hearing Aid Technology, for National Acoustic Laboratories on behalf of its client, Department of Health & Aged Care.

in a multi-party submission under the name Assistive Technology For All group, in response to the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care's report on Assistive Technologies & Home Modifications Scheme for In-Home Aged Care.

Contributed to the Assistive Technologies and Home Modifications Scheme for In-Home Aged Care discussion paper.

Provided advice to researchers at Macquarie University for their project examining employment barriers for people with hearing loss and the role of stigma.

To inform the National Dementia Action Plan, we contributed views on the role of care partners in medical visits of older adults with hearing loss and dementia.

A Pre-Budget submission to the Federal Treasury on improvements to services available to vulnerable community groups via expansion of eligibility for the Government's Hearing Services Program.

Participated in ANZ Hearing Community Guidelines workshops to increase access to hearing healthcare for adults, and to obtain high quality population-based outcomes.

Made a presentation to Unions NSW Work Health & Safety & Workers Compensation Committee Meeting about industrial noise, hearing protection and World Hearing Day.

Provided advice to a review of the sign language interpreter employment category in relation to the next national Census.

Participated in a 'National Health Literacy Strategy Framework Consultation' survey of the strategy's aims, vision and principles.

Provided feedback on NDIS Participant Employment Strategy – Action Plan 2023.

Consulted Deafness Forum's Parent Advisory Group members about the Health Department's Medical Services Advisory Committee consultation on genetic testing for childhood hearing impairment.

Conducted member consultation to present issues to the NDIS Jobs and Skills Forum hosted by the Minister for the NDIS Bill Shorten (Aug).

A submission to the Reforms of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.

Participated in workshops to review the World Health Organization's Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities.

