



**2023-24
ANNUAL REPORT.**



Chair's Report.

David Brady

Like many things in life, I knew this moment would come when it was time for me to pass on the Chair's baton and step down as Director and Chair of the Deafness Forum Australia Board.

However, when I was elected to the Board, I did not know that within a few months, my fellow Directors would hand me the honour and privilege of chairing our great organisation in 2011.

Looking back, I could never imagine how much we, the members, directors, and staff, achieved and how we navigated some of the most turbulent periods in our sector's history. This was not done through pure luck but because of the people, the passion, and the perseverance to champion the issues and concerns of four million Australians who are deaf, have hearing loss or have an ear or balance disorder. The many families who support them matter. It matters not just in the political arena in Canberra but also within their schools, workplaces, the NDIS, their communities, and some within their families.

Our boldest move was to push to become a recognised health peak because our members told the Deafness Forum board and staff that people view losing their hearing as a health

matter. It is one of my proudest moments to lead. It is one of my proudest moments to have led the campaign, engaging many members and people across Australia to make this happen. The campaign required incredible efforts from many individuals and donations to make it real. This was a substantial legislative reform, and I know that in 2030, the impact of the work of a few of us will be appreciated by many Australians.

We knew back then, as now, that the NDIS would not have the capacity to cover all Australians with hearing loss or ear health challenges. For us, as for many organisations, the NDIS was a political challenge and, more importantly, an immense change in how eligible people would access funding and how organisations would provide support.

We saw winners from the NDIS and losers, with some long-standing organisations closed their doors because change did not work as well for them as for others.

Despite the challenges, many Australians with hearing loss who were eligible for the NDIS gained a new lease on life. They found independence and opportunities for themselves and their families.

Regardless of the good or bad of the NDIS, we know it is here to stay. With the new Foundational Support concept being created, our sector will, as always, find its way through changes and come out the other.

Aside from the advocacy and political impacts attained under my time as Chair, I will never forget the contributions from many incredible Australians and those who continue to make real strides to ensure no Australian with hearing loss, Deaf, or an ear/balance disorder, and their families are left behind. Thank you to the many Board Directors who gave their time, intellect, and experience, including the current ones. I want to thank our CEO, Steve Williamson, our exceptional program managers, Hayley Stone and Jane Lee, and the many people and organisations that supported our staff in their extensive roles.

To our member organisations and individuals, from when I started to today, you have been the lifeblood of Deafness Forum Australia, the front-line lived experience and the connection to millions of Australians. To all of you, thank you for your friendship, time, and service.

Our great strength is the volunteers who inform and support our programs. Deafness Forum was represented in 2023 - 2024 in 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, Emma van Wanrooy, David Harricks, Jenny Rosen AM, Samantha Harkus, Andrew Stewart, Suzanne Robertson, Dr John Byrne, Paul Higginbotham, Tony Whelan, Joe Symons, Rod Power, and Chi Lo. My heartfelt thanks to the many members of our various Community Advisory groups for their insights and guidance on issues that are important to you and the community. Others offered support when it was most needed, and I hope they will forgive me if I have not mentioned them.

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 generously given 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.

It is important that I acknowledge the Australian Government in funding Deafness Forum Australia to be a national disability peak and a national health peak organisation with a focus on hearing loss prevention. This enables us to promote ear and hearing health, prevent hearing loss, and advocate for programs and policies that underpin living well in the community throughout Australia.

When I began as Chair, I was a single man trying to find his feet in the world, angry at the injustice and barriers from Australian society to me and many with hearing loss. Today, with NDIS, hearing in health, and our nation slowly understanding more about hearing loss, I have a gorgeous family who gives me joy and hope every day.

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
Chair, 2011 - 2024

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.

Deafness Forum Australia represents the views and interests of the 4 million Australians with hearing loss, hearing difficulties, ear or balance disorders, people who communicate using Australian Sign Language, and their families and supporters.

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”.

Member Driven

Deafness Forum Australia is a membership-based body that elects its Board of Directors from among its member organisations. This ensures 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.

Deafness Forum 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 part of the effort to overcome the unacceptably high ear health issues among First Nation people - an essential component of *Closing the Gap*. We support Indigenous advocates in achieving improved hearing health in Indigenous communities.

International Presence

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

We are Australia's member and represented on the Board of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People and an associate 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 and balance disorders.

We lead the discourse on creating a positive society where hearing health is recognised and supported, and the strengths of individuals and groups are acknowledged and celebrated, bolstered 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 of public policy that impact people experiencing hearing-related issues, 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 whole 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.

A set of principles guide our strategies and daily work

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

Three areas of strategic focus

Read about them [here](#).

Four Goals

- **Raise awareness and inclusion:** Promote understanding and inclusion for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Prevent hearing loss:** Advocate for measures to prevent hearing loss across all age groups.
- **Improve identification and management:** Enhance the early detection and management of hearing issues.
- **Close the gap:** Improve ear and hearing health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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

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

We respect them, their cultures, and their Elders, past and present.

We aim to contribute to the effort to overcome the unacceptably high levels of ear health issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We understand that this 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.



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

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Leadership and Governance.

Our Members

Deafness Forum Australia is a membership organisation. This grants us authority and legitimacy, 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

- [JOHN BARTLETT, SA](#)
- [MARGARET DEWBERRY OAM, NSW](#)
- [ALEX JONES, NSW](#)
- [PETER LINDLEY, QLD](#)
- [BARRY MACKINNON, WA](#)
- [ANN PORTER AM, NSW](#)
- [MARGARET ROBERTSON, VIC](#)
- [BRIAN ROPE OAM, ACT](#)
- [JENNY ROSEN AM, NSW](#)
- [ANDREW STEWART, NSW](#)
- [ROBERT QUAIL, QLD](#)

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 has the authority to represent the interests and concerns of the entire sector.



Directors who served in 2023-24

- **David Brady**, Chair and executive group member, was nominated by Hearing Matters Australia. During the period, David attended all board meetings. He lives in Sydney.
- **Michelle Courts**, Vice Chair, was nominated by The Shepard Centre. Michelle attended two of the three board meetings. She resides in Adelaide.

- **Rhonda Locke**, an executive group member, was nominated by Better Hearing Australia Brisbane. She attended all meetings and lives in northern NSW.
- **Barry MacKinnon** was nominated by the Deafness Council of Western Australia. He attended two of three meetings and resides in Perth.
- **Catherine Morgan**, nominated by Hearing Australia. She lives in Sydney.
- **Dwin Tucker AM**, Treasurer and executive group member, was nominated by ClearaSound. Dwin attended all meetings and resides in Sydney.
- **Raelene Walker**, Vice Chair and executive group member, was nominated by the West Australian Foundation for Deaf Children. Rae attended two of three meetings and lives in Perth.

In addition to formal board meetings, four meetings were held during the year to deal with issues and make decisions.

A small group of directors, the Board Executive, met to advance matters between board meetings.

Governance

Deafness Forum's governance arrangements are reviewed annually:

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

The organisation has established policies and procedures:

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

Deafness Forum's [Strategic Focus, Strategies and Principles](#) were reviewed and updated in consultation with members.

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 according to the recommendations of its accountant and 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.

Staff

Deafness Forum's Hearing Health Program, which focuses on prevention, is led by Ms Jane Lee.

Ms Hayley Stone leads our National Policy and Advocacy Program.

Chief Executive Mr Stephen Williamson manages operations.

Special Acknowledgements.

Our national policy and advocacy programs were 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 advocating for a more inclusive community.

Funding from the Department of Health and Aged Care underpinned our work in hearing loss prevention.



Hearing Loss Prevention.

Deafness Forum Australia advanced its hearing loss prevention initiatives during the year, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health & Aged Care and aligned with the National Preventive Health Strategy and Roadmap for Hearing Health.

This comprehensive program, which aims to promote safe listening practices, early intervention, and equitable access to hearing health resources, centres on citizen empowerment, community engagement, and expert-led health advocacy.

Our program represents a proactive approach to hearing loss prevention and community support, reinforcing the Deafness Forum's commitment to fostering a health-conscious society.

Consumer Empowerment Initiatives

Deafness Forum engaged citizens/users in multiple projects, fostering informed choice. Collaborations with leading institutions, such as the Macquarie and Curtin universities, Cochlear, and Google, will provide adults with hearing loss access to tailored online support, education, and peer networks. These partnerships underpin a commitment to evidence-based support for hearing health.

Social Media Campaigns and National Awareness Events

Deafness Forum launched campaigns like Safe Listening Week, International Day of Sign Languages, and World Hearing Day, distributing educational materials across diverse media platforms.

These campaigns targeted high-risk groups, including rural communities, culturally diverse populations, and Indigenous Australians. Safe Listening Week reached over 4,000 citizens, amplifying safe listening messages while providing accessible resources.

Deafness Forum's targeted approach aligned with the World Health Organization's "Make Listening Safe" initiative and Australia's Preventive Health Strategy, creating valuable opportunities for widespread citizen education.

Provide Well-Informed and Impartial Advice on the Australian Government Hearing Services Program

Deafness Forum continued to strengthen the Australian Government Hearing Services Program by providing consumer-focused enhancements and expert advisory support.

We engaged with clients and vulnerable groups to gain knowledge to help the program be accessible, effective, and responsive to their needs. Through stakeholder consultations, the Deafness Forum gathered critical consumer

feedback on Program materials, identifying opportunities for refinement and improvement.

Sector Leadership and Expert Contributions

As Australia's citizen representative in the WHO World Hearing Forum, the Deafness Forum contributed to global hearing health dialogues, offering insights into Australian public health needs and best practices.

Deafness Forum supported campaigns with WHO standards, assessed small grant applications, and collaborated on international initiatives to standardise safe listening.

These contributions underscore the Deafness Forum's role as a critical resource in the sector, bridging local insights with global best practices.



Jane Lee is the National Manager of Hearing Health Programs at Deafness Forum Australia: she is pictured with ABC Health Reporter Dr Norman Swan.

Policy Development and Government Advisory Role

Deafness Forum actively advised the Australian Government on hearing-related policy, participating in reviews and consultations.

Submissions such as “Navigating Barriers and Promoting Inclusivity” highlighted the unique challenges culturally and linguistically diverse communities face, promoting inclusive practices within the Hearing Services Program.

Deafness Forum also addressed critical issues like telecoil retention and equitable service access, contributing to a consumer-centred approach to hearing health policy.



Systemic Advocacy.

Deafness Forum Australia’s disability-related advocacy underscores its commitment to advancing equity and inclusion in hearing health.

The Forum’s collaboration with government bodies, educational institutions, and organisations strengthens its position as a key advocate for individuals with hearing challenges, enhancing societal understanding and supporting a more inclusive Australia.

Throughout 2023-2024, Deafness Forum Australia undertook substantial advocacy and policy initiatives to promote equitable treatment and support for Australians who are Deaf, have hearing loss or experience ear or balance disorders. These activities were aligned with governmental responses to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability and the ongoing review of Australia’s Disability Strategy, contributing to systemic change across safety, health, education, justice, and accessibility domains.

Policy and Advocacy for Inclusive Services

Deafness Forum provided impactful submissions to both federal and state entities on critical issues, including:

- Contributions to Australia’s Disability Strategy Implementation Report on safety, rights, and community attitudes, emphasising the rights and wellbeing of people with hearing disabilities.
- Recommendations for including hearing loss as a target within the Closing the Gap framework, recognising its impact on First Nations incarceration rates.

Consumer Engagement and Feedback Integration

To ensure citizen voices are informed of national disability strategies, the Deafness Forum conducted consultations and prepared a comprehensive report for the Draft National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing. This report detailed consumer insights on effective engagement and advocated for fair compensation for participation, underscoring the importance of lived experience in public health policy development.

Culturally Inclusive Advocacy and Indigenous Engagement

Deafness Forum addressed the intersection of hearing health and social justice for Indigenous Australians by collaborating with the ACT Government on addressing hearing loss among incarcerated Indigenous individuals.

Strategic Collaborations and Research Initiatives

Partnerships with leading academics and organisations facilitated vital research projects and resource development, including:

- Advocacy for regulating the audiology profession under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, submitted to State and Territory Health Ministers to improve the quality of hearing care.
- Support for hearing and digital inclusion research, in cooperation with Western Sydney University and Curtin University, advancing Deaf and hard-of-hearing access to digital resources and services.

International and Cross-Sector Contributions

Deafness Forum played a vital role in global advocacy, contributing to international policies on cochlear implant access and participating in the World Hearing Forum. The Forum's ongoing work ensures that Australia's hearing health needs are represented internationally while fostering knowledge exchange with global experts.



NDIS Minister Bill Shorten pictured in Parliament with the Prime Minister.

National Disability Insurance Scheme Advocacy.

In 2023-2024, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) underwent significant changes following the Independent Review. In response, Deafness Forum Australia, with its unique position as a recognised Disability Representative and Carers Organisation, intensified its advocacy efforts for Deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Collaborating closely with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the Deafness Forum prioritised the interests of its community, navigating the rapid pace of reforms with a dedicated focus on clear communication and participant-centred advocacy.

Collaborative Co-Design and Policy Influence

As a recognised Disability Representative Organisation, Deafness Forum worked alongside senior Department of Social Services and NDIA staff to co-design reforms that consider the unique needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Despite the challenging speed of reform rollouts, the Deafness Forum contributed insights on behalf of its members to key initiatives and policies, ensuring participant interests remained central throughout the process.

Information Dissemination and Community Engagement

Deafness Forum informed its community on NDIS developments through frequent updates in the *One in Six* newsletter and social media channels. By providing timely analysis of proposed changes, the organisation enabled Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals and their families to understand the potential impacts of NDIS reforms on their funding and support. This proactive communication strategy, which underscored the Deafness Forum's commitment to transparency and accessibility, was a key element of our advocacy efforts.

Strategic Relationships and Collaborative Advocacy

Deafness Forum solidified strategic alliances with NDIA staff and peer organisations, enhancing its advocacy's impact. These partnerships bolstered the organisation's ability to represent its members effectively, particularly on complex issues like NDIS provider and workforce registration. Discussions with key stakeholders addressed concerns about affordability, administrative burdens, and the feasibility of incorporating audiologists under national registration to maintain consistent standards.

Member-Driven Representation and New Advisory Group

Ensuring that Deaf and hard-of-hearing voices are integral to the NDIS reform dialogue was a priority for the Deafness Forum. In response to growing community engagement, the organisation laid the groundwork for its first NDIS-focused Citizen Advisory Group. This initiative will support sustained advocacy and provide a structured platform for ongoing participant input into NDIS policy.

Advocacy Milestones and Legislative input throughout the year, Deafness Forum contributed to high-impact submissions on NDIS reform, including a formal submission to

the Independent Review of the NDIS and a policy position statement advocating for co-design as a legislated requirement. Engagements with key figures, including Minister Bill Shorten, emphasised the importance of participant autonomy, consistent service standards, and transparency in eligibility assessments.

This dedicated advocacy across 2023-2024 highlights the Deafness Forum's role in shaping a more inclusive NDIS, safeguarding the interests of Deaf and hard-of-hearing Australians, and strengthening its voice within the broader disability community.



Hayley Stone is the National Director of Policy and Advocacy for Deafness Forum Australia.



Events and Campaigns.

Deafblind Awareness Week

[Deafblind Awareness Week](#) in the last week of June honours leading humanitarian Helen Keller's birthday. The week raises awareness of the condition and make the world a more deafblind-friendly place.

International Week of Deaf People

The global Deaf community celebrates the [International Week of Deaf People](#) during the last whole week of September, serving as a focal point for raising awareness about the Deaf community's rights, culture, and achievements.

Libby Harricks Memorial Address

Professor Kelvin Kong AM delivered the 25th Libby Harricks Memorial Address at Parliament House Canberra in March 2024.

- [Watch the video.](#)
- Watch the [video with Auslan.](#)

Kelvin, a proud Worimi man, is Australia's first Indigenous ENT surgeon and an inspiring advocate for hearing health. In 2023, he was honoured as the NAIDOC Person of the Year. In 2024, he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for [his work with Indigenous children at risk of hearing loss.](#)

Since the first Libby Harricks Memorial Address in 1999, the series has featured renowned speakers worldwide and gained international recognition for its exceptional presentations on important hearing health and advocacy issues.

The series honours the memory of the late Libby Harricks AM, the first President of Deafness Forum Australia.



Prof. Kelvin Kong (pictured) presented the 25th Libby Harricks Memorial Address.

An Elegant Solution

Professor Jim Patrick AO, Chief Scientist, Professor Emeritus, Cochlear, presented the 24th Address in 2023. Jim is a world authority on cochlear implants.



Jim retired from Cochlear in December 2016 but continues contributing to an emeritus role.

[Watch his video.](#)



National Safe Work Month

October is [National Safe Work Month](#), a time to commit to building a safe and healthy workplace. Both sudden, loud noises, like an explosion, and constant, loud noises, like working near industrial machinery or blaring background music, can damage your hearing.

Safe Listening Week

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

Tinnitus Awareness Week

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

World Hearing Day

[World Hearing Day in Australia](#) 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 throughout the world.

Four million Australians live with hearing loss. As the population ages, this figure is predicted to increase to 9 million by 2050.

Over one billion young people face the risk of permanent hearing loss due to prolonged exposure to loud sounds during recreational pastimes, such as listening to music and playing video games.

How we hear in the future depends on how we care for our ears today. Many cases of hearing loss can be avoided through the adoption of safe listening and good hearing care practices.

Early identification and access to timely rehabilitation are essential for people with hearing loss to achieve their highest potential.

You can take steps today to ensure good hearing health throughout life.



A Federal Human Rights Act: a Crucial Step Towards Equality For All

One of the key recommendations of the recent Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability was increased legal protections through a new federal Disability Rights Act.

Australia's formal recognition of human rights for people with disability is a critical step towards full equality.

But don't we already have access to human rights in Australia?

But don't we already have access to human rights in Australia?

Australia, as a signatory to various United Nations treaties and conventions, including the [Convention on the Rights of People with Disability](#), has international obligations to uphold the human rights of its citizens. Yet, there is no legally enforceable national duty to consider people's fundamental human rights in Australia. Victoria, Queensland, and the ACT have state-based Human Rights Acts, but these only cover their residents, so it's up to you to decide where you happen to live.

But what about federal anti-discrimination laws and other mechanisms?

Our Constitution protects some rights expressly and implicitly, but its scope is limited. Australia has various federal anti-discrimination acts, which go some way towards ensuring that

certain groups of people get fair protections in some states, but the problem is that they are also limited in scope and it's possible for the discriminating party to argue that there are extenuating circumstances why they shouldn't be required to comply.

An additional problem is that anti-discrimination laws require a wrong first – and it's then up to the individual who has been wronged to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission, which many can't, or choose not to do, for various reasons. Even if a complaint is proved, the most the complainant might receive is some form of compensation or a letter of apology. There's no way for the Australian Human Rights Commission to enforce compliance or compel broader systemic change.

So, what would be different with a Rights Act?

So, what would be different with a Rights Act?

A National Human Rights Act would ensure that everyone's rights were protected at all times and would require people's human rights to be considered in the development of any policies, laws, or practices at the time they are created as a positive duty of all decision-makers.

It would also, for the first time, articulate people's human rights and provide legal remedies when they are breached.

Australia is the only liberal democracy in the world that does not have a national act or charter of rights. Every Australian should be able to know what their rights are as Australian citizens and know that their rights will be protected irrespective of where in Australia they live.

Deafness Forum Australia supports introducing a Human Rights Act as crucial to realising the full rights and freedoms of the communities we represent.



ENDORSED BY

**Parliamentary
Friends of Hearing Health**

First Nations Roundtable

March 2024: Deafness Forum Australia hosted a roundtable meeting with a select group of influential stakeholders with the shared aim of helping to address prevention measures, care and hearing health disparities in First Nations communities.

It was a rare opportunity for Aboriginal community groups and organisations in the ear care and hearing health domain to come together to discuss what is working and why, what else needs doing, and how to make it happen.

Deafness Forum Australia and its members want to help eliminate hearing health disparities. They are committed to making connections and maintaining dialogue between people and organisations that share this critical goal.

The gathering was led by Prof Kelvin Kong AM (pictured above at Parliament House Canberra).

Kelvin is a Worimi man and a powerful advocate for ear care and hearing health.

The Roundtable assembled a richly diverse and authoritative representation, spanning an extensive array of networks and expertise:

- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Team, Australian National University
- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW
- Metro South Health QLD's Southern Qld Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- Kalwun Development Corporation QLD
- National Rural Health Alliance
- Earbus Foundation WA
- Hearing Australia
- Winnunga Nimmityjah (Strong Health) Aboriginal Health and Community Services, Canberra
- Orange Aboriginal Medical Service (NSW)
- Telethon Speech & Hearing
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Hearing Health, National Acoustics Laboratories
- Aboriginal Children's Hearing Health Program at Macquarie University
- Hearing Australia's First Nations Unit
- Department of Health & Aged Care First Nations Health Division.



Deafness Forum Australia arranged a private meeting for Kelvin Kong to brief Australia's Minister for Health & Aged Care Mark Butler.

The Roundtable was characterised by a collaborative spirit, with participants from diverse backgrounds contributing insights and proposals for systemic improvements. There was a shared understanding of the challenges and complexity and a commitment to pursuing innovative solutions prioritising person-centred care, cultural sensitivity, and accessibility.

Conversations

The meeting underscored the necessity of a multifaceted approach to address these complex issues, emphasising collaboration and innovation in policy and practice.

The discussions were extensive, covering a broad spectrum of issues related to the pressing need for systemic change in healthcare referral pathways.

Discussions centred on critical issues in hearing healthcare access and delivery, focusing on the shortage of ENT surgeons, highlighting an audiologist-led model in Newcastle NSW that reduced waiting lists significantly, suggesting a potential blueprint for broader application.



The importance of creating a 'demand map' for service provision was underscored, aiming to improve service allocation by surveying healthcare providers across various sectors. Innovations in audiologist deployment were discussed, including extending services to prisons and juvenile detention centres and integrating in-house audiologists within Aboriginal Medical Services, emphasising a holistic approach to health that sees the whole person.



Kelvin Kong with Julie Tongs OAM and Beth Sturgess from Winnunga Nimmitjiah (Strong Health) Aboriginal Health and Community Services.

The necessity of revising traditional referral pathways was broadly supported to expedite care and avoid bureaucratic delays, advocating for a model that fosters ongoing relationships between patients and audiologists. Concerns were raised about the current healthcare Key Performance Indicators potentially obscuring the true extent of waiting lists, suggesting a shift

towards outcomes that more accurately reflect patient wellbeing.

Participants explored enhancing regional service provision, including the concept of a 'mobile operating truck' to bring surgical services closer to remote communities, addressing the disorientation and logistical challenges faced by those needing to travel to major cities for care. The discussions also covered the critical need for cultural safety in services, emphasising responsiveness and inclusivity in healthcare delivery.



Gaps in the Hearing Services Program were identified, notably the lack of coverage for First Nations people between 26 and 50. The broader issue of hearing aid accessibility, including the potential for second-hand hearing aids as a temporary solution was also highlighted, albeit not preferred.

The importance of supporting individuals throughout their hearing care journey was discussed, with a call for enhanced wrap-around support from Aboriginal Medical Services and capacity building among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers.

The need for workforce cultural sensitivity training was discussed, recognising the value of effectively engaging with community members and the importance of reflective practices in healthcare training. Debates on funding models touched on support for community-endorsed hearing testing models.

Applying lessons from the Newborn Hearing Screening program, there was consensus on the potential to replicate its success in Indigenous ear health, emphasising the importance of an integrated care pathway from birth. The discussion extended to the potential for a national database to track children's health trajectories, with a view towards system-wide change akin to the NDIS model.

Cross-government collaboration, especially between health, education, justice and social services, would ensure comprehensive support for children's engagement in education and overall wellbeing.

From the Roundtable, an official report was published: [Meeting Communique – Addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Hearing Healthcare MAR-2024](#)

To augment the communique, we prepared a report that aligns the Roundtable outcomes with Closing The Gap Agreement priorities and the Roadmap for Hearing Health: [Aligning Strategies with National Priorities](#).

Design Guidelines for Access and Inclusion in Residential Development

Deafness Forum provided feedback to the Australian Human Rights Commission on its new guidelines for creating more inclusive and accessible homes.



Our feedback highlights the importance of designing homes that meet the unique needs of people with hearing loss, including those who communicate using Auslan.

Our submission discusses how people with hearing loss or deafness experience their environment differently, often relying more on visual and tactile cues for orientation and safety. The proposed design features aim to create comfortable and functional spaces for them, such as larger open-plan living areas, wide hallways, and visual or tactile alerts for safety threats like fires.

We emphasised the importance of involving people with lived experience of disability in the design process to meet basic needs and enhance quality of life.

No Research About Us, Without Us

Our contribution to an Australian Review of Citizen Involvement in Health and Medical Research.

The *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research*, created by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Consumers Health Forum of Australia, guides research institutions, researchers, members of the community and citizen representative organisations, on the active involvement of citizens in all areas of health and medical research.

Our submission to a review of the *Statement* outlines the importance of citizen involvement and its benefits to the research process. It explores various levels and types of involvement, and addresses several implementation issues.

Read, [No research about us without us – NHMRC](#)



No research about us, without us.

Our contribution to a Review of the *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research 2016* (Position Paper).

Deafness Forum Australia, May 2024.



Introduction

The *Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research*, created by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Consumers Health Forum of Australia in 2016, guides research institutions, researchers, members of the community and citizen representative organisations, on the active involvement of citizens in all areas of health and medical research. It outlines the importance of this involvement and its benefits to the research process, explores various levels and types of involvement, and addresses several implementation issues.



Special Editions of our National Newsletter

Editions celebrating achievements of brilliant Australian researchers and a tribute to the talent, resilience and wisdom of Aboriginal Women in Hearing Healthcare and Advocacy.



29 MAR 2023



6 MAR 2024



Alcohol and Other Drugs, Disability, & Over-representation in the Criminal Justice System

A national online event.



Australian Alcohol & Other Drugs Council



National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder



This webinar explored innovative and collaborative responses to the range of intersecting issues contributing to the overrepresentation of particular population groups in the criminal justice system, including people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people who use alcohol and other drugs.

Deafness Forum's contribution was: Hey, Hear Me Out! Voices of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Mob on challenges at the interface of the NDIS, AOD services and the justice system.

We would like to thank our partners, Australian Alcohol and Other Drugs Council, National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Phoenix Consulting, Jody Barney: Deaf Indigenous Community Consultancy, and Smart Recovery Australia.

Get Help with Your Hearing

This was a public awareness campaign created by the Australian Government to encourage people with untreated or developing hearing loss to proactively manage their hearing health.

Left untreated, hearing loss can have a big impact on everyday life.

The campaign message: If you are concerned about your hearing or are experiencing hearing loss, a test by a hearing care professional can help determine the type of hearing loss and how much it has progressed.

Deafness Forum promoted the campaign in all its communication channels and via its member organisations.



Tips for talking to people with hearing loss



Tips for communicating when you have hearing loss

10,000 stories: Disability Royal Commission

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability published its final report.

4.5 Years

Final report released on
29 September 2023

32 Public Hearings

17,824 Phone Enquiries

7,944 Submissions



222 recommendations across **12 volumes**

The report was based on 10,000 stories from people who have experienced violence, neglect, and abuse. Many of these stories will never see justice.

It recommended phasing out segregated education and so-called special schools by 2051, segregated employment by 2034, and group homes by 2038.

The inquiry also recommended:

- Establishing a new complaints mechanism
- Creating a national disability commission
- Improving accessibility to information and interpreters
- Increasing culturally safe supports for First Nations people and removing barriers to the NDIS in remote communities.

Urgent Need for More, Qualified Auslan Interpreters

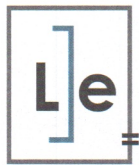
Deaf Australians face an enduring shortage of qualified interpreters, exacerbated by demand from the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

This stems from a need for more national coordination and varied state efforts in promoting interpreter training.

Educational pathways for interpreters have expanded, and the visibility of interpreters during the COVID-19 pandemic has spiked interest in Auslan. However, growing interest faces challenges like needing more qualified teachers and the complex, lengthy certification process.

The sector urgently needs a unified strategy to enhance training and increase the number of Auslan instructors, meeting the critical demand for interpreters. This comprehensive approach should ensure interpreters are available across all regions, facilitating better accessibility and inclusion within the Deaf community.





Independent Audit Report to The Members Of Deafness Forum Ltd Association

We have audited the special purpose financial statements of Deafness Forum Ltd for the year ended 30 June, 2024. The association's directors are responsible for the financial statements. We have conducted an independent audit of these financial statements in order to express an opinion on them to the members of the association.

Our audit has been conducted to provide reasonable assurance whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement. Our procedures included examination, on a test basis, of evidence supporting the amounts and other disclosures in the financial statements, and the evaluation of accounting policies and significant accounting estimates. These procedures have been undertaken to form an opinion whether, in all material respects, the financial statements are presented fairly, satisfy statutory requirements, present a view which is consistent with our understanding of the association's financial position, the results of its operations and its cash flows.

The audit opinion expressed in this report has been formed on the above basis.

Qualification

It is not practical to establish control over receipts until their initial entry into the accounting records. Our audit was therefore restricted to the amounts recorded as received.

Audit Opinion

Subject to the foregoing reservations, in our opinion, the financial statements of Deafness Forum Ltd Incorporated are properly drawn up:

- I. so as to give a true and fair view of:
 - A. the association's financial position as at 30 June 2024, and income and expenditure for the year ended 30 June 2024;
- II. to satisfy the requirements of subsection 72(2) of the Associations Incorporation Act to be dealt with in financial statements.

Les Ellis & Associates Pty

Les Ellis FIPA
10 September 2024

Profit and Loss

DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA For the year ended 30 June 2024

	2024	2023	VARIANCE
Trading Income			
Consultancy Income	343,249	70,844	272,404 ↑
Gift Fund Income	12,408	10,153	2,255 ↑
Grants Received - governments and agencies	267,000	197,821	69,179 ↑
Interest	10,964	299	10,664 ↑
M'ship Fee Complimentary Consumer	-	245	(245) ↓
M'ship Fees-Consumer Orgs	-	1,963	(1,963) ↓
Membership Fees Income	5,602	3,366	2,236 ↑
M'ship Fees-Services Providers	-	315	(315) ↓
Organisations	-	12,245	(12,245) ↓
Project Income	-	48,500	(48,500) ↓
Subscriptions Income	3,539	3,317	222 ↑
Total Trading Income	642,762	349,068	293,693
Gross Profit	642,762	349,068	293,693
Operating Expenses			
Accounting/Audit Fees	8,090	972	7,118 ↑
Advertising & Promotion	876	693	184 ↑
Bank Charges	92	226	(134) ↓
Client Support Services/Cons (caps,Interp,loop)	(3,525)	725	(4,250) ↓
Computer Expenses	702	2,803	(2,101) ↓
Consultancy Fees	-	37,278	(37,278) ↓
Contractors	87,755	87,477	278 ↑
Depreciation-Plant & Equipment	4,767	3,940	827 ↑
Fees & Licenses	-	4,428	(4,428) ↓
Fundraising Expenses	371	465	(94) ↓
Hire Venue & Equipment	16,731	11,324	5,407 ↑
Insurance - Associations insurance	2,074	1,795	279 ↑
Insurance - Commercial	1,145	1,103	42 ↑
Insurance - Directors/Officers	-	422	(422) ↓
Insurance - Workers Comp	1,690	1,822	(131) ↓

	2024	2023	VARIANCE
Interpreters	4,941	2,378	2,563 ↑
Leave Accruals	15,601	12,554	3,047 ↑
Membership Fees	443	2,383	(1,940) ↓
Consumables	5,547	2,445	3,102 ↑
Printing/Copy Charges	-	1,203	(1,203) ↓
Publications & Info Resources	2,657	1,119	1,539 ↑
Recruitment Expenses	6,623	-	6,623 ↑
Superannuation Exps	24,178	11,994	12,184 ↑
Communications, IT, Data	6,921	3,495	3,425 ↑
Travel-Accommodation & Meals	18,047	15,294	2,753 ↑
Travel-Airfares	12,698	9,040	3,658 ↑
Travel-Park/Hire/Tolls/Taxi	7,276	2,232	5,044 ↑
Wages-Staff (Gross)	219,415	114,231	105,184 ↑
Total Operating Expenses	445,113	333,838	111,275
Net Profit	197,649	15,230	182,419

Balance Sheet

DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA

As at 30 June 2024

	30 JUNE 2024	30 JUNE 2023	VARIANCE
Assets			
Bank			
StG #04063-4745 Main A/c	206,224	361,514	(155,290) ↓
Term Deposit	100,000	100,000	- —
Term Deposit 3	116,000	-	116,000 ↑
Term Deposit 2	102,000	-	102,000 ↑
Term Deposit 692	112,000	-	112,000 ↑
Total Bank	636,224	461,514	174,710
Current Assets			
Accruals	10,984	296	10,688 ↑
Prepayments	2,973	5,222	(2,249) ↓
Trade Debtors (Receivable)	6,167	73,962	(67,795) ↓
Total Current Assets	20,124	79,480	(59,356)
Fixed Assets			
Less: Office Equip Accum Depn	(2,537)	(6,989)	4,452 ↑
Office Equipment at Cost	5,677	6,989	(1,312) ↓
Website Acc Dep	(8,795)	(4,247)	(4,548) ↓
Website at Cost	13,644	13,644	- —
Total Fixed Assets	7,989	9,397	(1,407)
Total Assets	664,338	550,391	113,947
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Accrued Expenses	8,048	4,470	3,578 ↑
GST	5,360	3,842	1,519 ↑
Income in Advance	81,057	164,872	(83,815) ↓
PAYG Withholding Payable	23,748	-	23,748 ↑
Provision - Annual Leave	38,624	25,921	12,703 ↑
Provision - Long Service Leave	30,681	28,112	2,569 ↑
Trade Creditors (Payables)	2,376	49,218	(46,842) ↓
Superannuation Payable	3,140	-	3,140 ↑
Deafness Forum Ltd - Visa Card	812	1,442	(630) ↓
Total Current Liabilities	193,846	277,877	(84,031)

	30 JUNE 2024	30 JUNE 2023	VARIANCE
Non-current Liabilities			
LSL Non Current	329	-	329 ↑
Total Non-current Liabilities	329	-	329
Total Liabilities	194,175	277,877	(83,702)
Net Assets	470,163	272,514	197,649
Equity			
Current Year Earnings	197,649	15,230	182,419 ↑
Retained Earnings	272,514	257,284	15,230 ↑
Total Equity	470,163	272,514	197,649

Statement of Cash Flows

DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA For the year ended 30 June 2024

2024

Operating Activities

Receipts from customers	729,656
Payments to suppliers and employees	(482,342)
Cash receipts from other operating activities	(13,867)
Net Cash Flows from Operating Activities	233,447

Investing Activities

Payment for property, plant and equipment	(3,359)
Other cash items from investing activities	(8,439)
Net Cash Flows from Investing Activities	(11,798)

Financing Activities

Other cash items from financing activities	(46,309)
Net Cash Flows from Financing Activities	(46,309)

Net Cash Flows

175,340

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of period	460,072
Net change in cash for period	175,340
Cash and cash equivalents at end of period	635,413