



Director Profiles

Appointments in 2024

Christopher Blackham-Davison

Darwin, NT.

Christopher was nominated by Australian Lions Hearing Dogs in 2024. He will be a new member of the board of Deafness Forum Australia.

As a person with hearing loss since birth and a bilateral cochlear implant recipient, Christopher is passionate about advocating for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. He primarily communicates orally but is also proficient in Auslan. Additionally, he is supported by an Australian Lions Hearing Dog and currently has his fourth hearing dog, Frodo.

Christopher graduated from Griffith University in 1998 with a Bachelor of Teaching in Special Education and has since worked as a special education teacher in various locations across the NT, including remote areas. Currently, he teaches Auslan to students from Transition to Year Six in a primary school in Darwin.

From 2020 to 2023, he served as the chair for the NT Disability Advisory Committee. In 2017, he was honoured to receive the NT Disability Service Award for Excellence in Promoting Community Awareness. Since 2021, he has been a member of the judging panel for the NT Disability Service Awards. Additionally, he represented the NT at the National Disability Strategies Forum in Canberra in 2022. He also contributed to developing the NT Disability Strategy 2022-2032 and its accompanying three-year action plan (2022-2025), outlining how the NT government will support people with disability.

As a strong advocate for the rights of individuals with disability, he actively encourages others to challenge organisations and ensure equal treatment for people with disability. He is committed to improving the lives of individuals with hearing loss and supports the objectives of Deafness Forum Australia.

In addition to his professional roles, Christopher has been actively involved with Lions International for the past 20 years, including serving as president of his local club for the last seven years. He has also represented his club as a delegate at the Lions District Convention for the past 10 years.

Christopher notes that the Deaf community has seen fantastic changes, such as increased access to Auslan and real-time captioning, and he is eager to contribute to further advancements.

In his spare time, he enjoys travelling across Australia and internationally, four-wheel driving, cooking, volunteering, and engaging with diverse communities.

Rhonda Locke

Coffs Harbour, NSW.

Rhonda was first nominated by Better Hearing Australia in 2022. This will be her third and final term as a member of the board of Deafness Forum Australia.

For more than 20 years, Rhonda worked in senior marketing roles in the public and private sectors. She holds a Bachelor of Business and a Graduate Certificate of Business. Her career spans various industries, including media, transportation, health, not-for-profit, employment and training, technology, and events. She was the Head of Melbourne for a highly successful marketing agency, McCorkell. Today, she owns and manages a successful business located in regional NSW.

Throughout her career, Rhonda has dedicated time to volunteer causes such as Race Against Dementia, The Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and mentoring students through the Griffith University mentoring program. She was also invited to assist with the rebranding of Whirled Foundation, contributing based on her marketing background and personal health circumstances. In 2022-23, she led a project to rebrand Deafness Forum Australia, depicted by a Dragonfly Logo.



Twenty years ago, she was diagnosed with Meniere's disease, which has significantly affected her life since. She suffers from severe and constant tinnitus and has lost hearing in one ear. She also experiences 'dizziness' and has learned to recognise the symptoms before an episode, although it can still occur unexpectedly. Despite these challenges, she has successfully grown her career and managed a household and family. Understanding the impact of this condition on an individual's career, family, and everyday life, she aspires to assist those with similar situations and ensure their needs are considered when creating policies and opportunities. She is actively contributing to the health and welfare of the many people suffering from vestibular conditions.

Barry MacKinnon AM

Perth, WA.

Barry was first nominated by Deafness Council WA in 2022. This will be his second term as a member of the board of Deafness Forum Australia.

Barry McKinnon was raised in Bridgetown, a small town in the southwest of the state. He attended Bridgetown High School before going to Perth as a boarder at Wesley College. He went

on to the University of WA, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Economics and a Diploma in Accounting. He then practised as an accountant.

Barry spent six years as leader of the WA Liberal Party and leader of the Opposition between 1986 and 1992.

Barry is the parent of a son, Michael, who has hearing loss. He has extensive experience in community service, politics, and the corporate and disability sectors. Barry was involved with many organisations in the disability sector, including the Disability Services Commission, Commonwealth Hearing Services Consultative Committee, Telethon Speech and Hearing, Amanda Young Foundation, Mental Health Advisory Council, Hearing Research and Support Foundation, and Deafness Council WA.

He was a board member of Telethon Speech and Hearing from 1983 to 1986, during which time he was also chair until he became leader of the state Liberal Party. He was a key figure in the establishment of an organisation called PUSH, the Parents United to Support Hearing Impaired Children. In 1997, Barry was made a member of the Order of Australia for services to people with hearing impairments. He also received a centenary medal in 2001.

Barry has also been:

- Disability Services Commission chair
- Commonwealth Hearing Services Advisory Committee member
- Commonwealth Hearing Services Consultative Committee chair
- Hearing Research and Support Foundation member

Hannah McPierzie

Perth, WA.

Hannah was nominated by DeafBlind West Australians in 2024. This will be her first time as a member of the board of Deafness Forum Australia.

Hannah is a community leader with a firm belief in equity and fairness. Using her lived experience perspective to speak up for those without a voice, she passionately believes in identifying and removing barriers to enable everyone to participate fully in life and society. She worked as a teacher of students with disabilities within the WA public education system for 15 years, finishing in 2024 to work as an educator in the broader community. During this time, she had the added responsibilities of curriculum coordinator and graduate teacher mentor and achieved Senior Teacher status. She currently works part-time at SensesWA as a deafblind educator with clients, community groups and larger organisations, helping them understand what they can do to support people living with dual sensory loss. She also works for herself as a disability consultant and advocate, working across the country to bring communication barriers to the forefront of business planning and strategies.

Hannah has a rare disease, Neurofibromatosis Type 2 (NF2), and life-saving brain surgeries resulted in her profound deafness in 2021. NF2 also impacts her vision, and her balance system is now obsolete as both her vestibular-cochlea nerves have been severed. She has bilateral auditory brainstem implants, which she uses to access sound. She now identifies as deafblind. She uses a range of strategies to communicate with the world: voice-to-text programs,

lipreading, Auslan, and speech. It has been a significant shift from growing up hearing and simply using her ears to understand the world around her.

Hannah is the Chairperson of Deafblind West Australians, the only peer support organisation for those living with deafblindness in Western Australia and their families. The organisation holds fortnightly drop-in sessions with guest speakers and organisations. Its membership continues to grow. Deafblind West Australians is a member of the Deafness Forum.

Hannah is a steering committee member working with Palliative Care WA on making advanced care planning more accessible for people with sensory loss. In her consultancy role, she has recently begun running lectures at the University of Melbourne's School of Audiology, teaching the students how to communicate effectively with their patients and the barriers they do not see. After such a positive reception, this has also been opened to the broader School of Medicine. She is involved with Deafblind Studies at the University of Birmingham City. She has run online sessions with their social work students on the mental health aspects of living with deafblindness.

Hannah speaks to the barriers, the prejudices, and the strategies that will be used in the future. She wants to see the silos of disability broken down, believing that treating hearing loss, vision loss, and loss of mobility (and more) as separate areas (assuming people would only fall into one category) is problematic. She notes that a growing number of people fall into two of these areas, and oftentimes more. She advocates for more comprehensive approaches in various settings, such as audiology clinics preparing for people with low vision, ophthalmology clinics aware of hearing loss, and priority train seating with large-print maps and scrolling LED nearby.

Hannah always engages with literature and policies, checking for inclusion and access. She knows many of the challenges deafblind people face are due to the lack of lived experience at the top levels.