

THE JOURNAL of SHHH AUSTRALIA INC.
Self help for Hard of Hearing People

Hearing Matters

November 2014

SHHH Australia Inc
1334 Pacific Highway
Turrumurra NSW 2074



***Make It
Number 10***

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COVER PHOTO: David Brady, chair of Deafness Forum and past chair Alex Jones, with former Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graeme Innes (centre).

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:

15th January 2014



**Remember,
hearing help
is available
wherever you
see this symbol**

SHHH Mission

SHHH Australia Inc. is a voluntary organisation giving services and support to hearing impaired people throughout Australia who communicate orally.

SHHH hits the airwaves!

Chris Danckwerts

Last July I was invited to speak on behalf of SHHH in a Radio Northern

Beaches program hosted by David Harris. This program, entitled "A Senior Moment or Two" runs every Friday morning and is a mixture of topical interviews and music. There are no phone-ins from listeners. The station's coverage is, as its name suggest, over Sydney's northern beaches area, stretching from Manly to Palm Beach.

My hour on air was shared with a gentleman from University of the Third Age (U3A) and various musical interludes. David asked me in advance for a list of questions, which I supplied, hoping to build up to a clear statement of SHHH's objectives and philosophy. On air he then threw the questions at me out of sequence and omitted several. This was my first radio interview and, not being very good at thinking on my feet at the best of times, I found myself floundering somewhat. It shows the dangers of being too rehearsed in these situations! But I think that I did manage to get some of the essential points across to my listeners.

Three people gave me their assessments afterwards. One found it very useful and informative. One thought it was OK, but maybe missed a few scoring opportunities. And the third thought I should have done a lot better! So I guess that overall I rated "average". At least they thought I was better than the man from U3A! All in all, an interesting experience. I learnt a lot, but am not likely to get another chance!

Radio Northern Beaches is a community station run by volunteers. It broadcasts from Terrey Hills on 88.7 and 90.5 FM



SHHH is on Facebook!

Do you like Facebook? If you do, then try our new SHHH Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/160071054087557/> And tell your friends!

SHHH Australia

- Operates a hearing information centre
- Produces Hearing Matters as a quarterly newsletter for members and subscribers
- Runs an active Facebook page
- Supports and encourages local SHHH groups
- Maintains an extensive information service, with a series of fact sheets on aspects of hearing loss and its management
- Provides speakers as part of its extensive Outreach Program
- Administers a Hearing Aid Bank, in conjunction with the Audiology Department of Macquarie University in Sydney and other participating providers
- Acts as an advocate to government, industry and other organisations to make them more aware of issues concerning hearing loss

Tell us about your tinnitus

Tinnitus is any sound that is heard, where there is nothing in the outside world making the sound. It can be described as many things, including ringing, humming, buzzing, clicking and many more. It can occur in either one ear, both ears, or centrally. The sound may be constant, fluctuating or intermittent. In other words, everyone's tinnitus experience is different. SHHH is looking for tinnitus stories to accompany an upcoming issue that will focus on this important topic. If you live with tinnitus, we would love to hear of your experiences, both good and bad. Contact the SHHH office (details on page 14).

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Australian Hearing was established in 1947. It is the leading provider of the Australian Government Hearing Services Program, which provides hearing aids through the 'voucher system' to people receiving government pensions. It also delivers the Community Service Obligations program, providing services to hearing-impaired people under 26, eligible adults with complex needs, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. It also provides the leading national research body, the National Acoustic Laboratories.



The proposed sale of Australian Hearing puts all these vital services in jeopardy. As a large, efficient and effective publicly-owned provider of hearing services, Australian Hearing offers consumers the highest quality services and products at the lowest cost to government. It is large enough to negotiate excellent product prices with the large international manufacturers and able to attract and keep many of the best hearing professionals in the country. The quality of Australian Hearing services provides the gold standard to which the private sector aspires.

This is not to say that it is always better than the private sector. There are many excellent private providers who also provide gold-standard services. They continue to compete successfully with Australian Hearing. Will they try so hard if it is no longer around?

Australian Hearing offers services throughout the entire country, so that consumers in rural and remote regions can be confident of receiving the same standard of hearing care as those in the big cities. Clients can move anywhere in Australia, and still have their hearing aids checked or repaired by an Australian Hearing branch.

The provision of Community Service Obligations is an integral element of the suite of Australian Hearing. These are special services for the most vulnerable consumers – young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those with complex needs. The provision of these services is highly effective, due to the size and spread of Australian Hearing's services – literally to every remote corner of the nation. Staff regularly travel to remote rural and regional communities and are able to meet the hearing needs of most of the locals. Splitting-up the organisation would result in the loss of the efficiencies and economies of scale, not to mention the loss of the skilled dedicated workforce which provides these services.

SHHH is concerned that the sale of Australian Hearing's voucher services will inevitably result in decay in the quality of services and products. Hiving-off the voucher services from the Community Service Obligations will result in the loss of efficiencies and de-skilling of the professional workforce. The voucher system design is deficient, in failing to provide adequate transparency for consumers to understand the level of product and service to which they are entitled. Few consumers complain to the Office of Hearing Services. Australia is not a complaining country and older people are reluctant to complain about a free service.

I recently spoke to a consumer who was unhappy with the 'free' hearing aids with which he was fitted by a well-known chain. When he complained about constant whistling of his aids, he was first told that he would have to put up with them for a few more years, when he would be entitled to a voucher. It was only when his wife complained more loudly, that the business relented and exchanged the hearing aids for a different pair that didn't whistle.

The proposed sale of Australian Hearing will inevitably involve a break-up of its existing functions and the sale of the profitable areas of activity, with downgrading of the unprofitable ones. The loss of size will result in disappearance of the economies of scale, loss of the widespread network that covers rural and regional Australia and the end of the strong, integrated, consumer-focused workforce.

The introduction of a voucher system into Community Service Obligations will cause widespread confusion, as vulnerable consumers discover the limits of service and struggle with high-pressure selling of 'top-up' products and services. Hearing health will be forced into the consumerism box, away from the focus on quality outcomes, to a profit-driven model.

Of course you can expect that the government will make all sorts of nice promises and give grand assurances that quality and service won't fall under a fully-privatised system. Unfortunately, those sorts of promises usually don't last long. Once Australian Hearing is sold off, it will be gone forever.

Richard Brading
President SHHH Australia Inc.