



Coordinated nationally by Deafness Forum

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MEDIA RELEASE

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**1 in 6 Australians is currently affected by hearing loss – it's more common than you think.
"Get the Message"**

Hearing Awareness Week 19 – 25 August 2007

Hearing Awareness Week 2007 focuses on different ways we can communicate. It's time to lift the blanket of invisibility and raise the awareness of hearing impairment and deafness in the Australian community at large. 2007 is the time to get the message out.

Currently over 3.55 million Australians live with some form of hearing impairment on a daily basis. According to the 2006 Access Economics report this is likely to increase to one in four Australians by the year 2050. This increase can be attributed to the ageing population of Australia as well as an increasing number of Australians suffering from noise induced hearing loss, something which is entirely preventable. In Australia, hearing loss is more common than all national health priorities except musculoskeletal conditions. This means hearing loss is more common than cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, asthma, cancer and mental illness.¹

Having a hearing loss or deafness affects a person's capacity to communicate and function effectively in society. However the barriers to participation in society for a person with a hearing loss largely come from the community's lack of understanding of how to communicate.

Activities over this week include free hearing tests at a range of hearing clinics around Australia and free information expos organized by community groups.

Visit the Hearing Awareness Week website www.hearingawarenessweek.org.au for more events.

Main events being held during Hearing Awareness Week

The Deafness Forum annual Captioning Awards held in Sydney on August 23. The awards recognize achievements, initiative and excellence in captions. Comedian Colin Lane will MC the evening. Guest award presenter Mr Graeme Innes, Disability Discrimination Commissioner of HREOC. Captions help people who are Deaf or have hearing loss to understand and follow the soundtrack. Captioning ensures that everyone has the ability to access broadcast messages.

At Parliament House (Canberra), Australian Hearing will be running two days of hearing tests for politicians and their staff.

Hearing Awareness Week is a national event held in the last full week of August each year. It provides an opportunity to raise community awareness of hearing impairment and hearing loss prevention.

Deafness Forum is a national peak body for people who are Deaf, have a hearing impairment or chronic disorder of the ear. Deafness Forum is the national coordinating body for Hearing Awareness Week.

To arrange interviews with Deafness Forum CEO, Nicole Lawder Voice telephone: 02 62627808 (BH), 0404 037 177(MOB) Text (TTY) telephone: 02 6262 7809 (BH).

Quick Facts

(for more details go to <http://www.hearingawarenessweek.org.au/educationres.htm>)

1. One in six Australians has some form of hearing impairment – that's 3.55 million people
Deafness is one of the most common disabilities worldwide.
2. Hearing impairment is frequently misunderstood.

¹ Access Economics: Listen Hear! The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia, February 2006

Despite one in six Australians currently being affected by hearing loss, Deafness and hearing impairment continue to be, misunderstood or ignored. For these 3.55 million people in Australia getting messages across to family, friends and the community may take many forms.

3. Deafness is invisible.
Deafness and hearing loss have long been associated with confusion, isolation and depression. With the development of technologies such as "state of the art" hearing aids, hearing loops and closed captioning, people with a hearing loss now have far greater access to personal communication and to events happening in the world around them.
4. Tell others when you can't hear them well.
Even though hearing loss affects one in six Australians, many people have not met a person with a hearing impairment. If you have a hearing loss let the other person know and tell them what they can do to assist the communication process.
5. Having trouble hearing? Have a hearing test today.
During Hearing Awareness Week, many audiology clinics offer free hearing tests.
6. Shouting won't help me hear you better.
Do not shout at a person with a hearing impairment. This does not help them to hear you better. Shouting distorts your lip patterns and makes lip reading more difficult. Speak clearly but do not over enunciate your speech as this also distorts normal lip patterns.
7. There's nothing wrong with having a hearing impairment.
Hearing loss is sometimes seen as something to keep hidden. Some people do not acknowledge they have a hearing loss for years after they first notice deterioration in their hearing.
8. Hearing aids are a great help.
"Put simply hearing aids maintain me my place in the world; they keep me connected to the reassuring buzz of life; they enable me to communicate."
9. Try learning a new language – Auslan.
Australian sign language (Auslan) is the language used by Deaf people, their family, friends and colleagues of the Deaf community. Auslan uses signs and fingerspelling and has its own grammar. Like other true sign languages around the world, Auslan is distinct from spoken or written English. And like other languages it is taught at TAFE and some universities in Australia.
10. Treat your hearing with care.
Noise induced hearing loss occurs from exposure to loud sounds. Sounds, that are sufficiently loud to damage sensitive inner ear structures, can cause hearing loss irreversible by any presently available medical or surgical treatment. Hearing loss associated with noise exposure can occur at any age and is often characterised by the difficulty in understanding speech and the presence of a ringing noise (Tinnitus) in your ears when no such sound exists. This form of hearing loss is almost entirely preventable.

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