

**20 August 2014**

## **Privatisation or Privation? The future of hearing services in Australia**

Deafness Forum has presented its report to government on the findings of an investigation into the potential impacts of privatising Australian Hearing.

The government has appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers and Herbert Smith Freehills as advisers for a scoping study into future ownership options for Australian Hearing.

The report documents the results of Deafness Forum's consumer consultation, which found there were differing views on the notion of a sale, but common concern with the potential impact on the delivery of critical services.

The Australian Government Hearing Services Program delivered by Australian Hearing to special needs groups contributes to the whole of government objectives of educational attainment, workforce participation and social inclusion. The Program provides an essential service as it helps people with hearing loss to reach their potential and contribute to society.

Our report details the key elements of the Program that consumers feel may be threatened by the privatisation of the government hearing services provider and the opportunities for service enhancement that could be considered under alternative service delivery arrangements.

Australian Hearing is highly regarded internationally as the provider of quality hearing services, particularly to Deaf and hearing impaired children, and the National Acoustic Laboratories is regarded as a world leader in hearing research.

Any proposed changes to existing arrangements should ensure that Australia maintains its reputation as a world leader in hearing services delivery and research.

Read our advice to government at [www.deafnessforum.org.au/index.php/advocacy/112-uncategorised/245-submissions](http://www.deafnessforum.org.au/index.php/advocacy/112-uncategorised/245-submissions)

Deafness Forum spoke with leading hearing social policy specialist, Professor Anthony Hogan in relation to the proposed sale of Australian Hearing, Prof Hogan said that "the Australian

Government needed to conduct a broader inquiry, not just about the potential sale of Australian Hearing, but to consider the capacity of the current model of hearing services in Australia to meet the needs of the Australian people. In the international arena there had been significant enhancements to the nature and range of available hearing services and that Australia needed to look into new ways of doing the business of hearing".

He said that "it's been the best part of 60 years since some serious thinking has gone into the design of hearing services in Australia and as such, and following on from the Senate

Inquiry into hearing and health, it was time that policy makers, informed by consumers, had a better think about how we more efficiently and effectively meet the health and wellbeing needs of people with hearing loss in Australia”.

Prof Hogan urged fellow Deafness Forum members to write to Senator Nash to express their concerns about hearing and health and to call on her to make representations to the Minister for Health to make hearing the next National Health Priority.

***Write to:***

**Senator the Hon Fiona Nash**

**Assistant Minister for Health**

**PO Box 6100 - Senate, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600**