



audiology australia ltd

Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs- References Committee

Inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce

4 March 2016

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Executive Summary

Audiology Australia thanks the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs-References Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce.

Audiology Australia is the peak body representing 2400 audiologists in Australia. Audiologists are University trained health professionals (entry level is a Masters Degree) who specialise in the identification, diagnosis and rehabilitation of hearing loss, tinnitus, balance disorders, auditory processing disorders, age-related hearing loss, and acoustic shock.

The need for older Australians to have their hearing needs met is recognised in Australian legislation. However, the reality of aged care services does not live up to the legislative aspirations. With an ageing population there will not only be a continuing and increasing need for the services of audiologists, but also for an aged care sector workforce that is educated in the management of hearing loss and the important role audiologists play.

In this submission, Audiology Australia identifies what is needed to enable the aged care workforce to address the hearing needs of care recipients:

- Recipients of aged care services must have ready access to audiologists who have training in performing audiological assessments and providing rehabilitation services for clients with complex needs (including those with additional disabilities or health conditions, such as dementia).
- Care recipients should receive a hearing screening test upon entering residential facilities.
- The government should clarify exactly what must be provided by residential services (and what may be provided by home care services) as regards personal assistance with communication. This should be done in consultation with the hearing services sector, including representatives from Audiology Australia.

Introduction

Audiology Australia thanks the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs-References Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce.

Audiology Australia is the peak body representing 2400 audiologists in Australia. Audiology Australia requires members to operate under a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct, and supports audiologists to offer the optimum care to their clients by awarding the Certificate of Clinical Practice.

Audiologists are University trained health professionals (entry level is a Masters Degree) who specialise in the identification, diagnosis and rehabilitation of hearing loss, tinnitus, balance disorders, auditory processing disorders, age-related hearing loss and acoustic shock. Audiologists provide services in a broad range of settings, including: aged care facilities, hearing aid clinics, medical practices, hospitals, community health clinics, government funded agencies, cochlear implant clinics, private practice, and ear nose and throat (ENT) specialist and otology clinics.

In 2006, it was estimated that one in six Australians suffer from hearing loss with this figure expected to rise to one in four Australians by 2050. Amongst older Australians the prevalence of hearing loss increases to as much as one in two¹.

The need for older Australians to have their hearing needs met is recognised in Australian legislation. Providers of residential care services must make "arrangements for aural [...] health practitioners to visit care recipients, whether the arrangements are made by care recipients, relatives or other persons representing the interests of care recipients, or are made direct with a health practitioner" (Quality of Care Principles, 2014). Approved providers of residential services *must* provide, and home care services *may* provide, personal assistance with communication, including assistance to address difficulties arising from impaired hearing or speech, assistance with the fitting of sensory communication aids, and checking hearing aid batteries (Quality of Care Principles, 2014). Furthermore, the Accreditation Standards for residential aged care facilities require that "Care recipients' sensory losses are identified and managed effectively" (Quality of Care Principles, 2014).

However, the reality of aged care services does not live up to the legislative aspirations. With an ageing population there will not only be a continuing and increasing need for the services of audiologists, but also for an aged care sector workforce that is educated in the management of hearing loss and the important role audiologists play.

In this submission, Audiology Australia identifies what is needed to enable the aged care workforce to address the hearing needs of care recipients by responding to issues related to terms c) and i) in the terms of reference for the inquiry into the future of Australia's aged care sector workforce.

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

Audiology Australia's response to terms c) and i)

Term c) The interaction of aged care workforce needs with employment by the broader community services sector, including workforce needs in disability, health and other areas

With an ageing population, there will be an increasing need for audiologists who have the training and experience needed to deliver services to older Australians. Aged-care recipients often have complex health conditions and needs. Therefore, the traditional model of hearing service provision consisting of standard audiological assessment and fitting of hearing aids often does not adequately address the communication needs of aged-care recipients. Alternative audiological services, aids and equipment such as assistive listening devices and environmental changes (e.g. visual displays, captioned TV, amplified telephones, acoustic shielding, and changes to seating arrangements) better meet the needs of many aged care recipients.

It is therefore necessary that recipients of aged care services have ready access to audiologists who have training in performing audiological assessments and providing rehabilitation services for clients with complex needs (including those with additional disabilities or health conditions, such as dementia). This would require:

- that the aged care workforce is sufficiently educated and trained so as to be able to assist care recipients in locating and applying for audiological services;
- that adequate funding for audiological services, aids and equipment is available for care recipients; and
- that residential facility management makes arrangements to facilitate audiologists' access to their facilities.

Furthermore, in order to meet the Accreditation Standards for residential aged care requirement that care recipients' sensory losses are identified and managed effectively, all care recipients should receive a hearing screening test upon entering the facility.

Term i) the role of government in providing a coordinated strategic approach for the sector

The government should clarify exactly what must be provided by residential services (and what may be provided by home care services) as regards personal assistance with communication. This should be done in consultation with the hearing services sector, including representatives from Audiology Australia.

The types of services that should be accessible to aged care recipients and arrangements that should be made by aged care providers include:

- Hearing screening upon commencement of entrance into residential facilities
- Assistance in accessing trained audiologists who can apply a broad range of assessment techniques according to the care recipient's abilities
- Consultation between audiologists and the aged care workforce regarding the communication needs and abilities of care recipients
- Individual hearing and communication plans for care recipients, with clear instructions as to how the aged care workforce can manage care recipients' audiological needs
- Assistive listening devices where clinically indicated
- The use of hearing aids only in those circumstances where the client is experiencing hearing and communication difficulties, the need cannot be addressed appropriately through other means and the client is likely to cope with a hearing aid
- Consultation between audiologists and the aged care workforce regarding possible environmental changes to enhance communication such as visual displays, captioned TV, amplified telephones, acoustic shielding, and changes to seating arrangements
- Education for the aged care workforce in how they can better meet the hearing and communication needs of clients
- Cooperation between audiologists and the aged care workforce in order to evaluate communication outcomes for clients, for example by providing audiologists with the opportunity to conduct interviews with staff, other residents, and management