



22 May 2023

Secretary
Social Development Committee
Parliament of South Australia
GPO Box 572
Adelaide SA 5001

By email: sdcc@parliament.sa.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Re: Petition No. 96 of 2021 – Funding for children and students with additional learning needs in public schools and preschools

Audiology Australia (AudA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Social Development Committee inquiry into Petition No. 96 of 2021 on funding for children and students with additional learning needs in public schools and preschools.

AudA is the peak professional body for the profession of audiology, representing over 3,500 practising audiologists in Australia and 95 per cent of all practising audiologists in the country. This includes over 250 audiologists in South Australia. Audiologists are tertiary qualified allied health professionals with expertise in the assessment, prevention and non-medical management of hearing loss and associated disorders of communication and balance. Our members provide hearing services and supports in a wide range of settings, including the school and education setting.

We urge the Government to address the ongoing issue regarding school access to funding and support for children and students with additional learning needs. It is our view that public schools and preschools should be adequately resourced to provide in-class learning support, including educational support staff, for students with additional learning needs in order to support and optimise students' learning outcomes. Data from the SA Department of Education's Inclusive Education Support Program (IESP) reports that the overall prevalence of disability among students in South Australia was 10.8 per cent in 2019.ⁱ

Students with additional learning needs may include children who are deaf and/or hard of hearing and those with additional and/or other hearing conditions, such as auditory processing disorder. We highlight that hearing health contributes to the overall health and wellbeing of an individual. The sense of hearing is at the centre of most social interactions and enables an individual to communicate and connect with their peers and participate in a range of social environments, including in the school and learning environment.ⁱⁱ

We further highlight that hearing loss in children poses unique challenges on the emotional, social and psychological wellbeing of a child due to the association between childhood hearing loss and impaired speech and language development.ⁱⁱⁱ It has been observed in the academic literature that children with hearing loss tend to exhibit more behavioural and social problems, have lower

psychosocial health-related quality of life, and poorer language outcomes than other children.^{iv} It is well understood that appropriate interventions are crucial in ensuring the adverse impacts of hearing loss on a child's social and educational development are minimised.

In the context of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), we highlight that as at 31 December 2022, a total of 573,342 participants accessed services and supports under the NDIS.^v Around 8.6 per cent of the total number of NDIS participants were located in South Australia (n=49,596).^{vi} Of those participants, 1,890 participants has a hearing impairment as their primary disability, representing 7 per cent of all NDIS participants with hearing impairment as their primary disability.^{vii} In addition, 977 children in South Australia accessed early connections under the NDIS.^{viii} Early connections are funded by the NDIS and support children younger than 7 years of age and their families, regardless of whether the child is eligible for the NDIS. Early connections provide families with timely access to mainstream and community services, practical information relevant to the child's development, early supports and connections to apply to the NDIS.

However, AudA is aware of cases where families with children who have developmental conditions, including additional learning needs, have been unable to access appropriate supports through the NDIS due to being ineligible under the Scheme's strict eligibility criteria. Charities, such as the Children's Charity in South Australia, are increasingly becoming a stopgap measure and providing funding assistance to families and children for supports, including hearing assistive technology supports, outside of state and national government funded programs. However, these charities are under increasing pressure to fundraise and cover the cost for support provision due to factors which include the contraction of the Australian economy. We note that access to services and supports in the private sector is very expensive and out of reach for many South Australian families.

We also highlight that there is not an equal opportunity for families to access stopgap measures for learning and therapy supports. Children and students with additional learning needs who live in disadvantaged communities, including rural and regional areas, have an even smaller opportunity to access the supports required to support them in the school and learning environment.

It is our view that the ongoing issue faced by many South Australian families in regard to school access to funding and support for children and students with additional learning needs requires urgent attention from the South Australian Government. We note that some South Australian children are waiting for more than 2 years to receive an assessment by a specialist. This long waiting period causes significant delays to intervention and support provision for the child and has the potential to adversely impact on a child's learning and development.


In conclusion, we note that audiologists who work in the school and education setting are able to provide expert assistance and support to students and children who have a hearing condition and additional learning requirements. This includes the provision of the following:

- Providing evidence for needed services and hearing assistive technology.
- Facilitating listening, learning and communication access via specialised assessments.
- Recommending, fitting and managing hearing assistive technology.

- Providing and recommending support services, resources, classroom setup, hearing impairment management and counselling.
- Advocating on behalf of students.^{ix}

AudA welcomes the opportunity to discuss any feedback outlined in the submission response further. I can be reached via AudA's Advocacy and Policy Manager, Elissa Campbell, at elissa.campbell@audiology.asn.au or (03) 9940 3900.

Yours sincerely



Dr Barbra Timmer
President

ⁱ Sincovich, A., Moller, H., Gregory, T., & Brinkman, S. (2020). Review of trends in disabilities among children and adolescents. Fraser Mustard Centre. South Australian Department for Education and the Telethon Kids Institute. Adelaide, South Australia. Available at: education.sa.gov.au/docs/system-performance/fraser-mustard-centre/trends-in-disabilities-among-children-and-adolescents-final-report.pdf

ⁱⁱ Noble, W. (2009). Preventing the psychosocial risks of hearing loss. *Australian Family Physician*. 38:591-593.

ⁱⁱⁱ Olusanya, B. O., Davis, A. C. & Hoffman, H. J. (2019). Hearing loss: rising prevalence and impact [published correction appears in Bull World Health Organ. 2020 Feb 1;98(2):148]. *Bull World Health Organ.*, 97(10):646-646A.

^{iv} Hogan, A., Shipley, M., Strazdins, L, Purcell, A. and Baker, E. (2011). Communication and behavioural disorders among children with hearing loss increases risk of mental health disorders. *Aust NZ J Public Health.*, 35:377-83.

^v National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). (2022, December 31). NDIS Quarterly report to disability ministers. Available at: ndis.gov.au/about-us/publications/quarterly-reports

^{vi} NDIA. (2022, December 31). South Australia, Quarterly Performance Dashboard. Available at: data.ndis.gov.au/reports-and-analyses/participant-dashboards/hearing-impairment

^{vii} Refer vi.

^{viii} Refer vi.

^{ix} Educational Audiology Association. Educational Audiologist Role Defined. Available at: edaud.org/educational-audiologist-role-defined/