



**THE HON MARK COULTON MP**

Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government  
Federal Member for Parkes

Ref No: MC21-900355

11 MAY 2021

Dr Tony Coles  
Chief Executive Officer  
Audiology Australia  
Suite 101, 13 Cremorne Street  
CREMORNE VIC 3121

Dear Dr Coles

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Tony'.

I am writing to inform you of the Australian Government's further investment and ongoing commitment to the hearing health of Australians.

As announced in the Federal Budget 2021, the Government is investing \$5.7 million to redeveloping and modernising the Hearing Services Online (HSO) portal. The HSO portal supports the Hearing Services Program (Program) and helps hearing service providers deliver care to Australians who have hearing loss. This funding will ensure the ongoing viability of the HSO portal and improve service delivery data collection, guaranteeing the Program's client-focused approach. The new HSO portal will replace the existing legacy system and provide improved functionality for hearing service providers, while avoiding potential interruptions to access due to ageing infrastructure.

A number of initiatives announced as part of the Government's \$21.2 million commitment to support the Hearing Health Roadmap in last year's Budget have also progressed. A brief update on these measures is provided below.

The Government committed \$7.3 million for a competitive research grants program to enhance the evidence base for interventions to support vulnerable Australians. The National Health and Medical Research Council has been engaged to manage this process. The first targeted call for research is expected to open by mid-year.

Australian Healthcare Associates (AHA) have been engaged to conduct a gap analysis of residential aged care workforce training needs regarding hearing health, and develop new training modules accordingly. AHA is currently working with relevant stakeholders in the sector to progress this work.

As part of Government's \$5.0 million investment in supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's hearing health, the Department of Health has entered into grant agreements with eight Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in rural and remote areas to create quiet spaces suitable to conduct hearing assessments.

Work is also underway to finalise arrangements for Hearing Australia to implement a program to enhance early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The program aims to empower staff and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between three to eight years, to recognise hearing problems and take action.

Audiology Australia has also been engaged to work with the Hearing Health Sector Alliance to develop teleaudiology guidelines and undertake an audit of the hearing health workforce needs in rural and regional areas. Working groups have been established for both projects and preparatory work is underway.

Initial preparation for a \$5.0 million national hearing health awareness campaign is also underway. This campaign will focus on the prevention of avoidable hearing loss, seek to destigmatise hearing loss, and encourage people experiencing hearing loss to seek treatment. The campaign is expected to be rolled out towards the end of 2021.

The Government will continue to collaborate with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders to further progress other objectives as outlined in the Roadmap for Hearing Health.

This is an exciting time that brings great opportunities. I look forward to continue working with you and the broader sector to further improve Australia's hearing health.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Coulton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Mark Coulton MP**