



Establishing the Costs of Hearing Loss in Australia

Summary of research

Per Capita
September 2022

We acknowledge the traditional owners of country and pay respect to past, present and emerging Elders.

We also acknowledge and respect the members of the Deaf community in Australia, who preserve their rich heritage, culture, and our language; Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

We also acknowledge our custodians of Auslan, promoting awareness, equality, and access through our sign language. Through Auslan, we inspire future leaders in our Deaf community to continue our legacy and heritage.

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Hearing loss affects about one in five, or 20 per cent, of Australians. Given demographic effects associated with the changing population as well as elevated exposures to loud noise, the rate of hearing loss is anticipated to increase to 25 per cent of Australian population over the next 30 years.

The impact of hearing loss is significant to both pre-lingually deaf (that is, those born with hearing loss, or who acquire hearing loss prior to learning to speak) and post-lingually deaf persons. Many sources of hearing loss are preventable, and there are plausible interventions for pre-lingually deaf children that provide significant social and economic benefits.

Auslan has been identified as a source of protective benefit. Investment in programs to address hearing loss and programs that moderate the impacts of hearing loss are critical given the significant impacts of hearing loss on the lives of many Australians.

Deaf Connect and Deaf Australia commissioned Per Capita to determine the broad impacts of hearing loss and their associated costs. The costs of hearing loss have been explored significantly within Australia and New Zealand, yet the costs remain misunderstood and few beyond those directly affected by hearing loss understand the costs well.

Understanding the costs of hearing loss is critical to policy formulation and to inform programs that seek to address the costs and effects of hearing loss.

The financial impacts of hearing loss are substantial, with the most significant costs associated with lost productivity caused by hearing loss, and the disabling effects of hearing loss. The costs of hearing loss are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

| Cost Item | Cost – Deaf Community |
|--|------------------------|
| Cost of separation | \$300,807 |
| Outpatient exp. | \$182,595 |
| Cochlear implantation | \$91,764,417 |
| Implant maintenance | \$30,824,000 |
| Hearing Support Program | \$4,227,398 |
| Hearing aid replacement | \$917,993 |
| Maintenance of hearing aids | \$64,431 |
| Hearing aid fitting refitting and consultation | \$172,357 |
| GP Consultations | \$441,876 |
| Allied Health | \$674,404 |
| Additional health services | \$1,703,326 |
| Reduced employment | \$75,931,265 |
| Absenteeism | \$9,905,071 |
| Presenteeism | \$19,316,431 |
| Primary and secondary support | \$429,417,000 |
| Auslan Interpreter education | \$998,833 |
| Auslan interpreter services | \$36,328,100 |
| National Relay Service | \$22,000,000 |
| Disability support for individuals with hearing loss | \$1,942,370 |
| Carer and support costs | \$3,468,344 |
| Costs to wellbeing and quality of life | \$1,052,000,000 |
| Total | \$1,782,581,018 |

*In some cases these figures have been rounded.

The total cost of hearing loss is currently \$1.78 billion annually. This is arguably one of the largest health associated costs within the Australian economy. Equally concerning is the emerging evidence of a potential association shared between hearing loss and dementia. If established, this may result in the presented cost estimate grossly understating the true cost of hearing loss.

