



## THE WELLINGTON DECLARATION

17 MAY 2015



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**Relationships with industry** are an integral element of audiological practice, but as an emerging profession with few guidelines to follow, many of those relationships have not been transparent leaving the public unsure of the difference between the hearing device industry and the profession of audiology. The range of services that audiologists deliver has been obscured by the marketing of products via audiology clinics. The public is not well informed as to the differences between audiologists, audiometrists, hearing aid distributors or online or retail stores (such as pharmacists or direct to consumer businesses) that sell hearing devices direct to the public. Audiology currently falls outside of regulation by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Similarly, in New Zealand, audiology is currently an unregistered profession.

In response, Independent Audiologists Australia Inc and Independent Audiologists New Zealand engaged a panel of internationally recognised bioethicists comprising Prof Paul Komesaroff, Assoc Prof Ian Kerridge and Prof Grant Gillett to facilitate a three day seminar in Wellington, New Zealand from 15 – 17 May 2015. The facilitators drew attention to relationships that audiologists hold with industry that have emerged but which, to date have not been clearly defined, disclosed, constrained or regulated. These relationships are known to be of concern to patients, audiologists and other stakeholders, having been the topic of recent public scrutiny in the media. In order for the profession of audiology to achieve a position of trust within society, transparent and regulated relationships are needed between audiologists and all stakeholders (including other audiologists and industry).

Patient-centredness needs to be demonstrated in all aspects of audiological service delivery – including the prescribing and fitting of hearing devices.

**The Wellington Declaration** (next page) was accepted by all delegates on Sunday 17 May 2015 – including independent audiologists, audiologists employed in non-independent sectors, patients, consumer group representatives and regulators.

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### The Wellington Declaration has been endorsed by

**Mojo Mathers**

*MP and Greens Political Party spokesperson for disability issues in the  
New Zealand parliament.*

**Richard Brading**

*President, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People Australia, Inc.*

**Michele Barry**

*CEO, Better Hearing Australia.*

## **The Wellington Declaration 2015**

We, the participants at the seminar co- convened by Independent Audiologists Australia and Independent Audiologists New Zealand, in Wellington, New Zealand, are mindful of the responsibility that rests on us at this moment in the history of our profession, to declare our commitment to:

- 1. Ensuring a patient-centred approach within audiological services including the prescribing / dispensing elements of our practice.**
- 2. Building and strengthening relationships between stakeholders (including patients, colleagues, industry, funding bodies, regulators, training institutions, associations and health care practitioners) across the field of audiology in both Australia and New Zealand.**
- 3. Promoting a single code of professional conduct for audiologists, that incorporates clinical, ethical and legal aspects of practicing audiology in Australia and New Zealand.**
- 4. Reducing risk of harm (including risk of financial harm) to the public through seeking mandatory national registration in both New Zealand and Australia under the relevant regulatory structures.**
- 5. Guaranteeing transparency of interests (financial and otherwise) that could be perceived to influence the clinical judgement and professional recommendations made by audiologists, including transparency in billing for products and services.**
- 6. Encouraging professional bodies to uphold the code of conduct in the interests of all members regardless of their employment status including the offering of legal advice and mentoring within the profession.**

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### **Implementation of the Wellington Declaration**

Independent Audiologists Australia Inc and Independent Audiologists New Zealand will set in motion the process of promoting this declaration and providing audiologists with practical skills to implement the declaration, including the following:

- **Drawing up and establishing a strategic plan including the ratification of this declaration.**
- **Formalising joint cooperation between at least their two organizations to implement this declaration.**
- **Seeking endorsement by stakeholders for this declaration.**
- **Preparing policy and position statements aimed at widespread implementation of this declaration.**
- **Applying and promoting this declaration when advocating for the profession of audiology.**
- **Providing guidance to professional bodies on the adjudication of complaints in light of this declaration including facilitating a culture of mentoring and sustaining the profession through regulation that promotes the practice of audiology in a collegial rather than a competitive fashion.**
- **Demonstrating patient-centredness in all aspects of audiology including the prescribing and dispensing of devices in policy documents and guidelines.**
- **Advising audiologists how to define and explain their relationships with industry and other stakeholders including guidelines about transparency, declaring interests, negotiating employment conditions, explaining billing practices, and disclosing commissions, sales targets and clinic ownership.**
- **Lobbying for mandatory national registration, thus demonstrating a commitment to the recognition of audiology as a profession distinct from industry.**