

The mission of Independent Audiologists Australia is to promote and support clinical practices owned by audiologists.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDEPENDENT AUDIOLOGISTS AUSTRALIA: HEALTH MINISTERS MUST PUSH FOR REGISTRATION OF PROFESSION FOLLOWING SHORTFALLS IN TWO HOSPITAL AUDIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS

Paediatric Certification not fit-for-purpose, AHPRA registration of audiologists urgently needed

November 17th, 2023 –

Independent Audiologists Australia (IAA) has welcomed the report released by the Townsville Hospital and Health Services (THHS) following the investigation of the Townsville University Hospital's (TUA) Audiology department. IAA believes that THHS should take action on all 25 of the recommendations in the report. The investigation was initiated by THHS's internal audit process after a cluster of "unexpected outcomes" was discovered in the follow-up testing of newborns from the hearing screening program. THHS voluntarily expanded the review to include cochlear implant mapping outcomes after becoming aware of reported adverse outcomes at South Australia's Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN). THHS should be commended for initiating a timely, transparent, and comprehensive investigation.

IAA was saddened to see these issues surface in hospitals across multiple states. We raise concerns that audits are not routinely performed in all states, and recommend that this be considered with urgency. The reviews of both TUH and WCHN highlight the challenges encountered by audiology departments in hospitals—over-scheduling, understaffing, and audiologists often working in isolation. The THHS recommendations included collaborative models of care, and engagement with external providers. Where possible, IAA strongly believes that patients should be informed of community-based, private, and not-for-profit, cochlear implant and audiology services. Patient choice of service allows an opportunity for second opinions and collegial case management, increasing the standard of care for patients, and reducing economic and social burden for families. Hub and spoke models of care are utilised successfully across government services, and should be implemented in order to preserve and spread State Hospital funding, whilst increasing convenience and care for families.. Cochlear implant mapping for children and adults is already successfully delivered in private audiological practices and community based not-for-profit centres, and is easily accessible with Medicare funding.

The Hon Shannon Fentiman, Queensland Health Minister, has taken a bold step in advocating for the registration of audiologists by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). AHPRA registration will empower and protect the public by ensuring that all audiologists meet the same high standards of training, qualification, and professional conduct. IAA has lobbied government for registration, and fully supports registration of audiologists through AHPRA. IAA urges all state health ministers to recognize the importance of external regulation of audiology as a profession to safeguard against risks to the public. This risk extends beyond children and cochlear implant patients. Audiologists in both the public and private sectors provide care to individuals with high care and support needs, including children, the elderly, and those with one or more disabilities. Membership of a professional body is voluntary for audiologists in Australia, and there is no requirement to show membership in order to provide hearing services to the

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public. As such, there is no pathway for permanent disciplinary action should there be a complaint against a non-member.

The 'hearing aid industry', which encompasses audiologists, audiometrists, other 'hearing health practitioners', manufacturers and government providers, was put on notice by the ACCC ("Issues around the sale of hearing aids") in a landmark investigation in 2017. Unfortunately, hearing care has become a retail focused industry, where many clinicians' skill levels have narrowed significantly based on employment through vertically-integrated, overseas-owned corporate entities. Training and professional development has become primarily device-centred or sales-focused, rather than patient-care centred. IAA's members are audiologists wishing to privately practice hearing health care across a full and unrestricted range of specialised hearing and balance services, without pressured sales, commissions and external Key Performance Indicators. Greater protections to the public and more stringent regulation of hearing health professionals is necessary, for a return of the audiology profession to "health care".

IAA will continue to advocate for mandatory registration of all practitioners in the Australian hearing health sector.

INDEPENDENT AUDIOLOGISTS AUSTRALIA.

Independent Audiologists Australia Inc (IAA) promotes and supports clinical practices owned by audiologists. Members are Masters-qualified audiologists who independently own and operate more than 350 audiology practices across Australia, and adhere to IAA's strict code of ethics.

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