



Listen Up



Hear our stories



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Did you know ...?



One in six Australians has a hearing loss.



Australians with a hearing loss are often denied full and effective participation and inclusion in society.



Australians with a hearing loss have poorer social, economic and health outcomes than those without a hearing loss.



People with a hearing loss often take up to 15 years to act on their condition, and those with moderate to severe hearing loss are 15 times more likely to need help with daily living.



People with a hearing loss have three more health conditions on average than those without a hearing loss. Examples include heart disease, arthritis, and dementia such as Alzheimer's disease.



Hearing loss costs the Australian community 1.4 per cent of gross national product (GNP) each year in lost productivity. In 2014, that was about \$5.3 billion, based on a GNP of \$381 billion.

Foreword

As the National President of Better Hearing Australia, one of the greatest joys is travelling around to our groups and branches to see and hear about the many Australians with hearing loss who are helped by our services.

Better Hearing Australia is proudly independent and focused on consumers and has been serving the Australian community for more than 80 years.

We provide positive advocacy and a national voice to end discrimination and increase opportunity for Australians with a hearing loss.

Better Hearing Australia is Australia's only independent hearing management service.

We help the 4 million Australians with a hearing loss to gain new skills and knowledge, navigate their way through the maze of hearing services and technology, and find a place where they can share experiences with those who understand.



Sara Duncan

Together, we build a better life for Australians with a hearing loss by finding the right solution without commercial influence.

Our professional staff and volunteers focus on the needs of individuals.

In the following pages you will find some wonderful stories of some of Better Hearing Australia's dedicated volunteers, many of whom began as clients, as well as stories of those who have been helped by our many groups.

As National President I hear many stories and it is clear that hearing loss is a

deeply personal issue.

No two experiences are the same, with the impacts being personally felt by individuals, their families and their communities.

However, what I have found is a common threat of feelings of social isolation, frustration at significant service gaps and poorer health outcomes.

What I find most encouraging though is that through their interactions with Better Hearing Australia our clients, members and volunteers are empowered, reconnected and getting back to their living their lives as fully as possible.

I hope you will enjoy this first edition of *Listen Up*, which aims to bring to the community the stories of those who are living in silence.

Sincerely yours,

Sara Duncan
National President,
Better Hearing Australia



Getting in the door

Encouraging others to
access support

David Thompson says Better Hearing Australia is a source of 'great satisfaction' for both its clients and service providers.

True or false: Many who receive much-needed hearing aids regularly wear them?

The answer's false, according to David Thompson, but it's something he wants to change.

And Better Hearing Australia is the perfect platform for doing so.

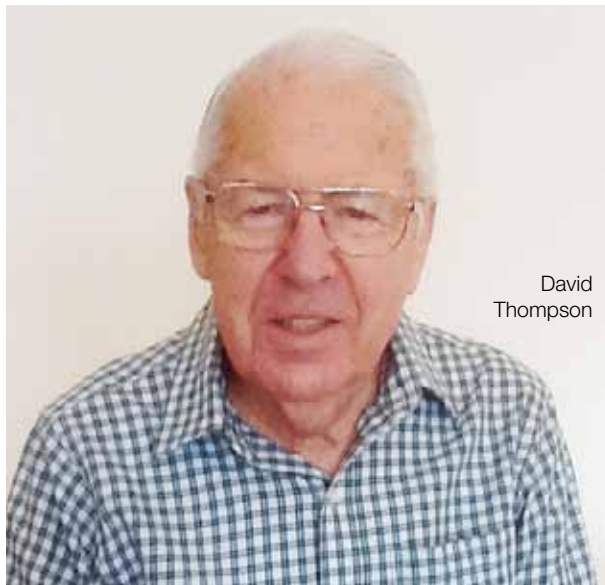
"Most who have tried hearing aids are discouraged by inadequate instruction on how the aid should be used and cared for at the time they are fitted, and inadequate after-sales service," David says.

Not at Better Hearing Australia, one of the nation's largest consumer-based not-for-profit organisations.

Back in the '90s when David became aware of his hearing problems, a friend encouraged him to visit the Victorian branch.

"It has taught me how to manage my situation, what help is available and that I am not alone."

A retiree in the Victorian



David Thompson

town of Portalington, David, has no hearing in his right ear and continuous tinnitus.

He attends Better Hearing Australia sessions in



'It has taught me how to manage my situation ... and that I am not alone'

nearby Drysdale, along with his wife.

"She now has hearing loss herself, so can use all she has learnt for her benefit," David adds.

In fact, he says he "would recommend Better Hearing Australia to anyone," but explains it can be a problem to get an individual "in the door".

But when people do receive Better Hearing Australia's support, David says it's rewarding – not just for the clients.

"I get great satisfaction if we can help someone with a big problem."





Feeling understood

Sharing experiences,
finding assistance

Better Hearing Australia has allowed Sue Daw to be in the 'hearing world' and she's passing on the favour.

Transformative is perhaps the best word for Sue Daw's experience with Better Hearing Australia.

"When I walked into my first Better Hearing Australia class it changed my life immediately," Sue says.

"At last I did not have to pretend that I could hear. I could be myself.

"I was among other people who understood what it was like to have a hearing loss, and they were happy to share their experiences and have some good laughs."

Sue first came to Better Hearing Australia as a client in Canberra where she lives with husband Haydn, who has a



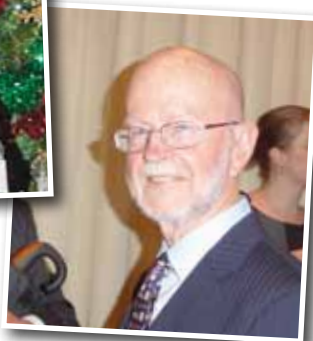
Sue Daw (above) and husband Haydn Daw (left).

'I could be myself. I was among other people who understood what it was like to have a hearing loss'

more recent hearing loss.

"There was so much to learn!" she says.

But Sue took on all the practical knowledge that Better Hearing Australia had to impart.



"Life became so much easier as I learnt about assistive listening devices, where best to sit in a restaurant, to be kind to myself and have plenty of rest – keeping up with conversations when you have to lipread is very tiring" she says.

"With encouragement from the Better Hearing Australia members, I saw an ear nose and throat specialist then had my hearing tested by an audiologist and was fitted with hearing aids in both ears.

"They do not give me perfect hearing and I struggle in some noisy situations but they keep me in the hearing world."

Since 1996, Sue's been ensuring others belong to that world too, as an aural rehabilitation teacher with Better Hearing Australia.

"I have loved every minute of it," she says.

"At every class I always learn something new from the wonderful people who attend."

It's a welcome change from Sue's childhood

when hearing loss saw her struggle in the classroom.

As a seven-year-old, she was diagnosed with otosclerosis in both ears.

It's a hereditary condition that causes progressive deafness due to overgrowth of bone in the inner ear.

Surgery provided no cure.

"Now, I have moderate to moderately severe hearing loss in my left ear and moderately severe to severe loss in my right ear," Sue explains.

But you could hardly tell thanks to Better Hearing Australia generous support, a gift she's passing on to others.

The secrets to managing hearing loss? Perseverance and quality support

In many cases, the first thing people feel when they come to Better Hearing Australia is relief that they are not alone with their hearing loss.

And, they learn that there are things they can do to assist with not being able to hear.

Learning about these things through hearing loss management classes gives people confidence and the skills to manage their hearing loss.

This does not happen overnight for nearly all our members but takes time to be internalised.

Better Hearing Australia members support each other in this process and that is wonderful to see.

– Haydn Daw, Inaugural Chair of Better Hearing Australia Canberra Inc





Relieving tinnitus

Hearing sounds despite
no external source

Victoria Didenko feared tinnitus would rob her of the life she had imagined. Better Hearing Australia changed that.

Imagine a hearing condition leaving you unable to sleep, think or function effectively.

Victoria Didenko feared this would have been her fate if it weren't for Better Hearing Australia.

Three years ago, Victoria acquired tinnitus – it's the perception of sounds, such as ringing, hissing or buzzing, when no external source is present.

For those affected, the condition can significantly reduce quality of life.

"I was beside myself

'I was beside myself with this incessant high-pitched ringing in my head'

with this incessant high-pitched ringing in my head and went directly to my GP," Victoria says, recalling the lead-up to her initial diagnosis.

"I was told to go and see an ENT [ear, nose and throat specialist] and was told I had 'common garden-variety tinnitus'.

"The ENT told me it would get better in time, and that I wouldn't notice it."

That wasn't the case.

"I was desperate to stop the ringing in my head," the mother-of-two says.

After ruling out the possibility of expensive medical treatments, Victoria, 57, of Melbourne, accessed Better Hearing Australia's tinnitus management services.

"I felt listened to, I felt empathy, I felt supported, and I felt calmer and more optimistic that I would eventually start to tune out from the tinnitus and be able to live a full and happy life again," she says.

"Support from Better Hearing Australia did not cost anything but gave me much."

"I hope everyone who needs this support can access it."



Victoria Didenko (above right) holidaying in Trieste, Italy.



Better Hearing Australia (Vic) Inc Hearing Advisor Carol Wilkinson.

Image: Roche Creative

The mind the best tool for treating tinnitus?

Although tinnitus has no cure, most evidence favours a form of counselling known as 'cognitive behavioural therapy' as the best treatment.

When we have an 'ear problem' the brain checks out that part of the body, and will often notice the random electrical impulses occurring along the neural pathways in the auditory system.

Although these impulses are normal, the more we are annoyed or concerned about noticing them, the more the brain keeps rechecking and the worse it gets.

For most people, the solution is 'habituation'. This occurs when the brain no longer feels that the sound is a threat and again chooses to ignore it.

Many habituate naturally, but some with tinnitus need help.

Although counsellors and psychologists may be considered best-placed to deal with much of this work, Better Hearing Australia is in a good position to put together a range of personnel and services to help people with tinnitus.

– Carol Wilkinson, Better Hearing Australia (Vic) Inc Hearing Advisor



A joint effort

Combining a cochlear implant and hearing aid

Better Hearing Australia has enabled Jean Lorraine Williams to use two types of assistive listening devices effectively and forge new friendships along the way.

Receiving assistive listening devices is one thing. Taking full advantage of them can be quite another.

But thanks to the generous support and practical advice of Better Hearing Australia, Jean Lorraine Williams can do just that.

The charity has been critical in helping the retiree to make the most of her cochlear implant and hearing aid.

It's not only taught her how to use the devices effectively, but also opened opportunities to socialise, an activity which her hearing loss made difficult.

"The trained teachers [at Better Hearing Australia] are excellent, and they [use] a variety of teaching methods," says Jean, 86, of Belmont, near Geelong.

"Initially, I attended a four-week course which was most informative, showing how the auditory system works, also tactics for hearing better in large groups and a range of devices to provide a safer environment."

Jean says that when attending church, for example, she makes use of a hearing loop, which is a system that amplifies sound waves for those wearing hearing aids or cochlear implants.

She says she's also developed "lipreading skills, communication strategies, and observation and memory skills".

The importance of these skills, nurtured by Better Hearing Australia, should not be underestimated.

As Jean points out: "Hearing loss can affect many aspects of our lives because it primarily affects communication which is an essential part of daily living."

**'The trained
[Better
Hearing
Australia]
teachers are
excellent'**

It's not surprising, then, that Jean's social life changed when she first experienced hearing loss about age 73.

"Prior to my hearing loss, I was a very active secretary of several organisations," she says.

"[However,] when I experienced hearing loss I withdrew from committees and became more home-centred."

But engaging with Better Hearing Australia about how to best use her cochlear implant and hearing aids has enabled Jean to spread her wings as a social butterfly once more.

"I enjoy being on the Geelong Committee, and have made several friends, she says.

"I look forward to joining the Better Hearing Australia group fortnightly to be with people who understand and know the problems one faces with hearing loss.

"It is a friendly, welcoming group, and benefits those attending and their families."

Hearing aids and cochlear implants – what's the difference?

Among the various assistive listening devices are hearing aids and cochlear implants, but how do the two differ?

Hearing aids

A hearing aid amplifies sound.

Generally, these devices have four main parts, namely a microphone, an amplifier, a loudspeaker (also known as a 'receiver') and a battery.

Hearing aids can be worn in the ear, in the ear canal, completely in the canal or behind the ear.

Cochlear implants

In contrast to hearing aids, a cochlear implant is surgically implanted under the skin behind the ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve.

Generally, a cochlear implant includes



Part of a cochlear implant is worn externally with the remainder under the skin.

an external sound processor and internal components, for example a receiver coil, an electronics package and a long wire attached to electrodes (termed an 'electrode array').

The external sound processor detects and analyses sound then transforms it into signals.

The signals are sent

across the skin to an internal receiver-stimulator, followed by the electrode array and the cochlea.

Next, the signals travel via the auditory nerve to the brain.

A properly functioning auditory nerve is important for a cochlear implant to work effectively.



Mastering new skills

Hearing loss as a
learning opportunity

When Lorraine Ridgway entered Better Hearing Australia, she discovered a world of ongoing support and education.

What if you have a hearing loss, but distracting noise is getting in the way of the sounds you're interested in?

Empowered by expert knowledge from Better Hearing Australia, Lorraine Ridgway has some solutions.

"At Better Hearing Australia we are taught strategies to hear better," Lorraine says, citing the use of a hearing loop, for example.

The technology helps people with a hearing impairment pick up a sound source of interest with little distortion or background noise.

Sound waves from someone's voice, for example, enter a microphone, are turned

'At Better Hearing Australia we are taught strategies to hear better'

into an electric current, amplified, then sent through a wire coil that's been installed around the room. The coil emits a magnetic field that can be picked up by a hearing aid or cochlear implant and turned back into sound.

Through Better Hearing Australia, Lorraine, who wears hearing aids and a cochlear implant, has

learnt the value of hearing loops.

"If there is no hearing loop in theatres, churches, etcetera, you miss out on dialogue," she explains.

Lorraine could have missed out on much more if not for Better Hearing Australia.

"Twenty years ago I started to have a problem with my hearing," says the retiree, of Geelong.

"I had a cousin with a similar hearing problem to mine – unfortunately this is a family problem for us.

"He told me about Better Hearing Australia and how helpful it had been for him.

"So, I went along and joined up. I have learnt so much there."

But education is not the charity's only gift.

"Better Hearing Australia is also a support group," Lorraine says.

"It is nice to find people ... who are going through the same problems as you are and understand."





Recycling hearing aids

When donated listening devices restore lives

Since receiving pre-loved hearing aids from Better Hearing Australia, John Baltopoulos has reclaimed his confidence.

Despite having a real need for hearing aids, the devices remain out of reach for many in the community.

That's unless Better Hearing Australia can come to the rescue.

Among the thousands of people it's helped is John Baltopoulos, who was born with a profound hearing loss.

John came to Better Hearing Australia 12 months ago, keen to turn his life around and stop living in the isolation resulting from his hearing difficulties.

Following an assessment, the charity offered him pre-loved hearing aids through Recycled Sound.

Under the project, Better Hearing Australia



John Baltopoulos

'I now have what most people take for granted. I feel much happier and confident'

receives donated hearing aids, which it sends for refurbishment then distributes to those in need via the Victorian Hearing Aid Bank.

Since being fitted with the devices, John says he is a changed man.

"I now have what most people take for granted," he says.

"I feel much happier and confident."

It's a stark contrast to how John felt before receiving assistance from Better Hearing Australia.

Although he was able to wear government-funded

analogue hearing aids, his eligibility didn't last and it wasn't long before the devices were beyond repair.

Friends gave him old heading aids, which he wore, but they were only just better than nothing.

John purchased some used aids which helped for a while. New digital ones were too expensive.

Life wasn't easy.

Unable to understand much of what was said in social situations, John decided to avoid them.

He describes it as "not being able to push open the door".

Furthermore, John feared misunderstanding colleagues or important information at the timber moulding company where he works and, in turn, losing his job.

However, Better Hearing Australia has allayed those concerns. It's also allowed him to regain his social life.

"So many lost years but I hope it never happens again," he adds.





Living your best life

Thriving despite the demands of hearing loss

Kevin Hobbs says engaging with Better Hearing Australia has enhanced his quality of life.

Kevin Hobbs is defying the odds.

Now retired, the award-winning employee is giving back to the charity that's helped him overcome the challenges of hearing loss.

"Better Hearing Australia have given much to the quality of my present and past life," he says.

Kevin's story begins in country Victoria, when at age 13, he developed mumps that would later affect his hearing.

"My first detection of hearing loss was at the picture theatres where I could not hear well and often missed the punchlines," he says.

Kevin's GP conducted some tests on him at age 16, confirming he "indeed had some hearing loss, but in his opinion not severe enough to warrant a hearing aid".

However, Kevin's scoutmaster who had a hearing aid suggested he visit Melbourne for a second opinion

So, Kevin and his mother made the 290 kilometre

'Better Hearing Australia has given much to the quality of my ... life'

journey by train. A specialist recommended a hearing aid, which he describes as "the size of a cigarette box and, of course, corded".

However, at age 27, Kevin's hearing deteriorated.

He left his country town, again heading to Melbourne, this time to find work as well as help for his hearing loss.

At this point, Kevin discovered Better Hearing Australia and its hearing management classes.

"However, this association was not long as my employer transferred me to a suburb too far away for my attendance

to continue, so I took to studying from textbooks and using a mirror."

Gradually honing his hearing loss management skills, Kevin came to hold "many different occupations", including a position at a hotel in Melbourne where he excelled, receiving an Employee of the Year award.

"I had progressed to senior technician at the hotel," he says, but added that his deteriorating hearing saw him retire.

Kevin then moved to the Gold Coast where he was among the first members of a local Better Hearing Australia branch.

He has since served on the committee and as a past president.

"Our hearing management class is a highlight of our branch and together with members, I have given a number of talks to interested service groups."

"I like to specialise in devices that assist the hearing impaired and keep abreast with modern technology."



Hearing loss in the workforce – the facts

At some point, most Australians seek paid employment.

But hearing impairment can make it all the more difficult to gain and retain.

Consider, for example, the report *A Fairer Hearing*, published by the University of Canberra in 2014.

"People with a hearing loss have poorer educational outcomes, are under-represented in both full and part-time work and tend to leave the workforce earlier."

It's a sobering fact that highlights the importance of practical advice and support service Better Hearing Australia.

Indeed, among the report's recommendations were that "services provided across Australia for people with a hearing loss should be focused on ensuring that people with hearing loss achieve economic participation and social inclusion."

To read the full report, visit www.betterhearingaustralia.org.au.

Branches and groups

Better Hearing Australia has branches and groups around the nation.

All are non-profit incorporated associations run voluntarily by a Committee of Management.

New members, supporters and volunteers are welcome.

Better Hearing Australia branches offer free, independent information and advice on the management of hearing loss and other ear-related conditions.

However, specific services may vary across locations.

For more information, contact the relevant branch or group, or visit www.betterhearingaustralia.org.au.

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Email: bhanewc@gmail.com

Coffs Harbour group

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Taree group

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Underwood QLD 4119

Gold Coast branch

Postal address: PO Box 3667
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Tweed Heads group

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South Australia

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Your gift counts

Better Hearing Australia relies on financial donations to support those with hearing loss and other ear-related conditions.

To donate, contact your local branch or group, or visit www.betterhearingaustralia.org.au.
Your gift may be tax deductible.



Better Hearing Australia

is one of the nation's largest
independent consumer-based not-for-profit
organisations for hearing loss.

For more information, visit
www.betterhearingaustralia.org.au

