



Hearing Association

New Zealand

Te Kāhui Rongo o Aotearoa

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The Chief Executive
Christchurch City Council
Freepost 178
Christchurch.

Submission on Community Plan.

At least 10% of the population has a hearing loss. This will increase both in number and impact on younger people as "toxic" noise increases. The Hearing Association in Christchurch and throughout New Zealand has been in existence for over 60 years.

During 2003 a "Twelve Point Action Plan" was adopted and is progressively being implemented. A summary of the plan is attached. Progress to date is available on the National Web Site www.hearing.org.nz. As a voluntary and charitable organization the Hearing Association provides unbiased assistance to the hearing impaired and their families. However like most organizations it is reliant on grants and donations in order to provide this service at little or no cost to the Hearing impaired. In many cases these people through their hearing loss are in the lower financial group. We believe that there is a great need for local bodies to assist disability organizations such as ours. It has been said that 20% of the population suffer from a serious disability. Hearing Loss, Deafness, Blindness, Mobility are but some of the areas.

From a reading of the "Community Plan" it is not apparent that disabilities feature to a great extent. Volume 2 page 15 outlines in a general way intended support and advocacy. We consider that specific mention should be made in the plan to provide support to both people with disabilities and those organizations helping. This may require a separate disability office. One person in five is affected and that is a large portion of the City's population. The 12 Point Action Plan being undertaken by the Hearing Associations throughout New Zealand could well be the nucleus for the city's support and feature more prominently in the future plan.

As President of [redacted] Association Christchurch I would be prepared to present this submission in person.

Yours sincerely
Hearing Association Christchurch Inc

R S Abbott (President)



Working for the hearing-impaired.

E mahi ana mā te hunga waimaero rongo



ACTION PLAN

To Improve Services and Facilities for the Hearing-Impaired

In March 2003, the Hearing Association adopted a 12-point action plan to improve services and facilities for the hearing-impaired, and to raise the profile of the association which is the premier organisation representing people with this disability.

Hearing loss is invisible, and the requirements of people with the disability are often ignored by service providers ranging from government departments, to transport companies, accommodation providers, and television companies, right through to the local supermarket.

According to the last census, 223,500 recorded they suffered a hearing disability, including deafness. However, a report by K Anne Greville PhD published in October 2001, records 400,000 New Zealanders suffer hearing loss ranging from mild to complete deafness, with 390,000 suffering hearing loss. Of that figure, 250,000 have a hearing loss that qualifies as a disability. At 10% of the population, hearing loss is probably the single-biggest disability group in New Zealand.

While there are many issues affecting those with hearing loss, the association has focused on the following 12-points for attention. We regard these issues as our right, rather than as some favour to be granted by the organisation concerned, and will work to achieve all points.

1 - Television Subtitles

Subtitled television programmes are available on only the three main public channels – TV One, TV2 and TV3 – funded by public money through NZ On Air. We want this extended to all television channels, notably sky TV, and Prime. If necessary, we will seek legislation to ensure this happens. This is especially important for the elderly with limited discretionary income, for whom television is a major source of entertainment.

2 - Audio Loops

Despite legislation requiring that buildings such as theatres and meeting halls have assistive listening systems (primarily audio loops), the bulk of theatres and public buildings do not have them, or where they ARE installed, they often do not work. The law must be enforced. Assistive listening systems allow those appropriate hearing aids to receive enhanced sound through their aids. Audio loops are even available for specific areas like a reception desk or bank teller position.

3 - Dedicated Facilities for hearing impaired

Companies and organisations that do business in public must provide facilities where those with hearing loss can retain their privacy and dignity. The nature of hearing loss means those doing business with them will often have to speak more loudly, but in places like banks and hospital clinics, this can mean others can hear what is being said. A private room, or an area that provides some privacy is required. This is as much a right for the hearing-impaired, as ramps are for the physically disabled.

4 - Advertising Contact Numbers

Advertising in newspapers, on billboards etc, provides a phone number for you to contact, but by and large do not provide either a fax number or e-mail address. This prevents those who can't hear on the telephone, from taking advantage of the information being advertised. Contact addresses such as fax numbers or email addresses should be included in all advertising as a matter of course.

5 - Hearing Aid Funding

Government subsidies for hearing aids have recently doubled – to \$198 each – while the cost of standard aids usually starts at about \$600, and can rise to several thousand dollars. While those in work or education can qualify for other subsidies, the elderly in particular – those with the most limited incomes – are not generally ineligible for any help. The ability of these people to make the most of their hearing, and to get the most out of life is being compromised.

6 - Audiologist Funding

Audiologist, can be described as the “hearing” specialists, but those working in hospital clinics are often overworked, and the fees of those in private practice can be expensive and a barrier to those seeking their services. We want audiologist fees subsidised in a standard fashion nation-wide.

7 - Medical Insurance

Medical insurance policies generally cover only the cost of audiograms and little else, yet hearing loss is one of the largest disabilities in New Zealand. Medical insurance companies must be encouraged to provide policies offering a wider range of service for those who are prepared to pay for them.

8 - ACC Bulk Funding

Bulk funding for hearing loss caused by accident bears no resemblance to hearing's place as the second-most important human sense after eyesight. While the total loss of eyesight warrants a payment of about \$110,000, total loss of hearing merits a payment of about only a third of that. Payments for partial loss of both senses are equally out of proportion. Compensation must be more adequate and realistic.

9 - Noise Levels

Noise levels public places – especially clubs and bars – has been described as “toxic”, and yet nothing has been done to curb this danger to the public, especially the younger generation who run the risk of future hearing problems as a result. Those who work in such venues are even more at risk. Noise levels should be treated as the same threat to health as smoking is.

10 - Public Awareness

Because hearing loss is invisible, and because of the stigma it often carries, the average New Zealander often does not realise that by and large there is no cure for hearing loss or damage. They therefore do not protect their hearing as they should. By the same token of public ignorance, people who generally know how to help someone in a wheelchair or visual disability, do not know how to help those with hearing loss. This is a public health issue, and a public campaign must be instituted.

11 - Travel

Travelling on public transport, especially long-distance travel, is often stressful and sometimes dangerous for those with hearing disabilities. They generally have no way of accessing or understanding public address announcements, and can be denied information with safety implications as well as such basic information as flight changes, departure changes, and so-on. The death of an American tourist at Kaikoura railway station in March 2003 highlights this danger. All public address information must be presented in visual form, preferably by display screens. As a minimum, all transport companies must be required to identify passengers with disabilities, and then cater for their needs. The most suitable way of doing this is through the booking process.

12 - Accommodation

People with hearing disabilities staying at hotels, motels and other such accommodation, often have no way of knowing fare alarms have been activated, and they face the same privacy issues at check-in and check-out as they do in banks, hospitals, etc. Televisions in hotels and motels usually are not equipped with teletext, denying guests the option of enjoying this basic service. The accommodation industry must acknowledge the needs of the hearing-impaired and cater for them.

The Hearing Association is committed to achieving each of these goals, and will work with all relevant organisations, companies, and government departments to do so.

Chris Peters
Public Affairs Manager

31 January 2004