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PARENTS OF DEAF CHILDREN
Supporting families for over 60 years

19th January 2024

Dear NSW Disability Royal Commission Response Team,

Subject: Urgent Review and Reconsideration of Recommendations for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in CALD Communities

I trust this letter finds you well. I write to you as the President of Parents of Deaf Children (PODC), an organisation that has been steadfastly supporting families for over six decades. It is with a profound sense of disappointment that I address you today regarding the final report of the Disability Royal Commission.

While we acknowledge the immense efforts put forth by the Commission, we cannot help but express our dismay at the report's inadequate attention to the critical issues raised by parents of deaf children and the broader Deaf community. The recommendation to close specialised Deaf schools/units has accentuated the prevailing lack of understanding surrounding the indispensable need for culturally and linguistically focused educational environments for Deaf children.

Allow me to emphasize the considerable benefits of bilingual programs in fostering effective communication and learning for Deaf children. The Commission's oversight on this matter is disheartening, considering the positive impact such programs can have on the overall development of deaf and HOH children within the CALD community.

Furthermore, our disappointment deepens at the lack of acknowledgment and proposed solutions for language deprivation. This pervasive issue continues to inflict devastating consequences upon a significant majority of deaf children and their families. As a parent support organisation, we consistently witness the adverse effects of this problem due to the lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding language deprivation.

Parents may not be confronted by the term "language deprivation," but they are undeniably confronted by the absence of concrete actions. There is a noticeable void in focused research, effective remedies, and support systems for children and their families grappling with language deprivation. Unfortunately, they seem to have been forgotten in the Commission's process and recommendations.

The impacts of language deprivation on health, life expectancy, mental health, and social and community well-being cannot be overstated. The lack of intervention and support for language-deprived deaf children not only impedes their educational development but also poses severe risks to their overall well-being.

Language deprivation puts deaf children at risk for cognitive delays, mental health difficulties, lower quality of life, a higher level of trauma, and limited health literacy.
Gulati, S. (2014). Language Deprivation Syndrome. ASL Lecture Series

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In addition to these concerns, we feel disheartened by the absence of recommendations for Bi-modal Bilingual support from birth. Families advocating for bi-modal bilingual pathways from birth face significant challenges due to a lack of funding through the NDIS and a dearth of clear pathways for bi-modal bilingual children. Research consistently highlights the preventive benefits of the bi-modal pathway, particularly in averting linguistic injuries situation like those in the South Australia and Queensland cochlear implant debacle.

We understand that some may perceive these choices as available to families, but the reality is that there is limited support and no clear pathway for deaf children without systemic changes. Moreover, we would like to bring attention to the lack of understanding and support for Deaf parents of deaf children and families with limited proficiency in English. Access to parenting and government services is currently inaccessible to this demographic, placing them at risk and in a disadvantaged position.

Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world. However, some people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face greater challenges when dealing with the health and welfare system. Language barriers, lower health literacy, and difficulties navigating an unfamiliar system put them at greater risk of poorer quality health care, service delivery and poorer health outcomes compared with other Australians.
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians 2022: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

We strongly urge the Disability Royal Commission to revisit the CALD recommendations and engage in meaningful dialogue with leading organisations to ensure that the needs of deaf children and their families are appropriately addressed in the final report. Only through collaborative efforts can we hope to dismantle the discriminatory barriers, neglect, and adverse outcomes projected for the future generation.

Your attention to this matter is crucial, and we look forward to a positive response that reflects the urgency and importance of rectifying these oversights.

Thank you for your understanding and commitment to creating a more inclusive and supportive future for Deaf children and their families.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Robertson
President
Parents of Deaf Children

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ATTACHED – Key Terms definitions and list of relevant readings.

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KEY TERMS

Critical Period of Language Acquisition: The early childhood years when children can acquire language naturally through exposure, after which it is much more difficult.

Deaf/deaf: When we write "Deaf," it refers to the Deaf community or a person's cultural identity. When it's not capitalised, it is an adjective describing hearing loss, from total deafness to lower-than-normal hearing ability.

Language Deprivation: Occurs when someone has insufficient exposure to language during the critical time of language learning.

Language Input: Language input is how much someone is exposed to language they can understand.

Language Modality: Language modality is the means though which language is expressed, such as spoken, written, or signed.

Auditory-Oral: Auditory-Oral is a way of teaching deaf and hard of hearing children that focuses on spoken language as the main or only form of communication.

Cochlear Implant (CI): A cochlear implant is a device implanted in the ear to help people with significant hearing loss. Instead of relying on regular hearing, it uses electric signals to stimulate the hearing nerve. With practice, someone with a cochlear implant may learn to understand these signals as sound and speech.

Bimodal Bilingual: Bimodal bilingual for deaf children means they use two modes of communication, usually sign language and written/spoken language, to understand and express themselves.

READING LIST

Australia & International – reports:

Media release from the Premier of South Australia
Government overhauls WCH cochlear implant program, supports families impacted since 2006 | Premier of South Australia

Culturally and linguistically diverse Australians Report 2022
Culturally and linguistically diverse Australians Overview - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)

Establishing the costs of hearing loss in Australia
https://deafaustralia.org.au/statements-papers/our-culture-our-value-the-costs-of-hearing-loss-in-australia/

Exploring the benefits of Auslan in Early Intervention approaches for deaf children
https://deafaustralia.org.au/statements-papers/exploring-the-benefits-of-auslan-in-early-intervention-approaches-for-deaf-children/

World Federation of the Deaf - Declaration on the Rights of Deaf Children
https://wfdeaf.org/rightsdeafchildren/

The right to language
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24446945/

The rights of deaf children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373170399

The fundamental framework for deaf/hard-of-hearing children: a model from the child's perspective
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373489301

Language deprivation:

Avoiding linguistic neglect of deaf children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311215976

Responsibility in the current epidemic of language deprivation (1990-Present)
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02989-1

What You Don't Know Can Hurt You: The Risk of Language Deprivation by Impairing Sign Language Development in Deaf Children
What you don't know can hurt you: The risk of language deprivation by impairing sign language development in deaf children - PMC (nih.gov)

Language Deprivation Syndrome: A Possible Neurodevelopmental Disorder with Sociocultural Origins
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5469702/

Understanding Language Deprivation and Its Role in Deaf Mental Health
https://www.jstor.org/stable/26983957#:~:text=The%20book's%20content%20provides%20in,LDS%20affect%20the%20deaf%20population.

Effects of Early Language Deprivation on Brain Connectivity: Language Pathways in Deaf Native and Late First-Language Learners of American Sign Language
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6761297/

Responsibility in the Current Epidemic of Language Deprivation (1990-Present)
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32761503/

Should All Deaf Children Learn Sign Language?
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26077481/

Language Deprivation Syndrome: A Possible Neurodevelopmental Disorder with Sociocultural Origins
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5469702/

Sign Bilingualism or Language Deprivation
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344350940

Auditory deprivation does not impair Executive Function, but language deprivation might: Evidence from a parent-report measure in deaf native signing children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308079184

Early Intervention/Language Development:

Early Intervention Protocols: Proposing a Default Bimodal Bilingual Approach for Deaf Children
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7477485/

How Bilingualism contributes to healthy development in deaf children: a public health perspective
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02976-6

Language acquisition for deaf children: Reducing the harms of zero tolerance to the use of alternative approaches.
https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1477-7517-9-16

Education and health of children with hearing loss: the necessity of signed languages
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6796673/

Successful communication does not drive language development: Evidence from adult home sign.
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27771538/

Deaf Children of Hearing Parents Have Age-Level Vocabulary Growth When Exposed to American Sign Language by 6 Months of Age
https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(21)00036-6/fulltext

Language development in deaf bilinguals: deaf middle school students co-activate written English and American Sign Language during lexical processing
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2021.104642

The Design and Validation of a Parent-Report Questionnaire for Assessing the Characteristics and Quality of Early Intervention Over Time
https://academic.oup.com/jdsde/article/14/4/422/491307

Acquisition of Sign Languages
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8570554/

Describe, don't prescribe. The practice and politics of translanguaging in the context of deaf signers
https://pure.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/24265674/Describe_don_t_prescribe_The_practice_and_politics_of_translanguaging_in_the_context_of_deaf_signers.pdf

Education and health of children with hearing loss: the necessity of signed languages
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31656336/

The effects of sign language on spoken language acquisition in children with hearing loss: a systematic review protocol
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24314335/

Critical period for first language: the crucial role of language input during the first year of life
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26111432/

Early Sign Language Exposure and Cochlear Implantation Benefits
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28759398/

Deaf Children Need Rich Language Input from the Start: Support in Advising Parents
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9688581/

Language Choices for Deaf Infants: Advice for Parents Regarding Sign Languages
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26603583/

Language and Communication of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/language-communication-deaf-hard-of-hearing-children/

What we can learn from hearing parents of deaf children
https://journals.cambridge.org/abstracts_S1030011214000190

Systems that support hearing families with deaf children: A scoping review
https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288771

Using Family-Centered practices to increase language access for multilingual deaf or hard of hearing children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357495486

Examining the influencing factors on deaf children in treatment procedure and family environment
http://dx.doi.org/10.32598/irj.20.3.1637.1

Rethinking the language development of deaf and hard of hearing children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367083230

The benefit of the "And" for considerations of language modality for deaf and hard-of-hearing children
https://pubs.asha.org/104.227.68.18

Language not auditory experience is related to parent-reported executive functioning in preschool-aged deaf and hard-of-hearing children
http://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13677

The benefits of sign language for deaf children with and without cochlear implant(s)
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263082827

Early language intervention in deaf children of hearing parents
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354768787

Long-Term Implications:

Discourses of prejudice in the professions: the case of sign languages
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28280057/

Ensuring language acquisition for deaf children: What linguists can do
https://gallaudet.edu/deafhealth/ensuring-language-acquisition-for-deaf-children-what-linguists-can-do/

The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q): assessing language profiles in bilinguals and multilinguals.
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17675598/

Early Language Acquisition and Adult Language Ability: What Sign Language Reveals About the Critical Period for Language

https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/28159/chapter-abstract/212970837?redirectedFrom=fulltext

Age constraints on first versus second language acquisition: evidence for linguistic plasticity and epigenesis
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14642540/

Neurolinguistic processing when the brain matures without language.
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29406150/

Age of acquisition effects on the functional organization of language in the adult brain
https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21705060/

Dinner Table Syndrome: A Phenomenological Study of Deaf Individuals' Experiences with Inaccessible Communication
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342623540_Dinner_Table_Syndrome_A_Phenomenological_Study_of_Deaf_Individuals'_Experiences_with_Inaccessible_Communication

Rethinking the critical period for language: New insights into an old question from American Sign Language
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6818964/

Ten things you should know about Sign Languages
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370785727_Ten_Things_You_Should_Know_About_Sign_Languages

What Medical education can do to ensure robust language development in deaf children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267025999

Deaf children's non-verbal working memory is impacted by their language experience
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276510816

Theory of mind in deaf adults: The role of verbal ability and interpersonal experiences from early years
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318492030

Does early exposure to spoken and sign language affect reading fluency in deaf and hard-of-hearing adult signers?
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374054048

The influence of language deprivation in early childhood on L2 processing: an ERP comparison of deaf native signers and deaf signers with a delayed language acquisition
http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2202/13/44

Adverse childhood communication experiences associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases in adults who are deaf
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2020.04.016

American Sign Language syntax and analogical reasoning skills are influenced by early acquisition and age of entry to signing schools for the Deaf
https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01982

Auditory access, language access, and implicit sequence learning in deaf children
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317276464

Deafness and early language deprivation influence arithmetic performances
https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2022.1000598

Mental health experiences of deaf in New Zealand – interviews with twelve Deaf with mental illness
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354399865