



Media Release

PROPOSAL TO TRANSFER OWNERSHIP OF AUSTRALIAN HEARING TO A PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

18 February 2016

A consortium consisting of the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children, Macquarie University and Cochlear Ltd has bid for future ownership of the government-owned Australian Hearing.

Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann, the Minister for Finance announced that the Government will formally examine the proposal by the consortium. This will include the possible terms and conditions for any ownership transfer.¹

Australian Hearing is a major provider of hearing services in Australia with particular expertise in the delivery of services to children with hearing loss and adults with more complex hearing rehabilitation needs. It also provides a culturally sensitive outreach program to deliver hearing services to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The Government has been investigating future ownership options for Australian Hearing since 2014. Deafness Forum of Australia and many of its member organisations including Parents of Deaf Children and Aussie Deaf Kids, have been providing submissions to Government to identify the risks and highlight the concerns of stakeholders should the Government decide to proceed with the sale of Australian Hearing.

Deafness Forum of Australia needs to understand the implications and ramifications of the proposal from the consortium before it can take a position on whether to support the transfer of ownership of Australian Hearing to a non government entity. Any risks to service quality, access, device provision, and independent advice and support to people with hearing loss and their families and carers need to be identified, and any potential strategies to mitigate these risks need to be assessed before Deafness Forum can express a view on the proposed ownership arrangements.

According to Ann Porter AM, founder and CEO of the online parent support group Aussie Deaf Kids, "our current system, with hearing services provided by Australian Hearing, ensures a seamless pathway for parents from diagnostic audiology to hearing rehabilitation services. Parents have expressed confidence in the current system that ensures the hearing needs of their baby will be addressed. It remains unclear to me whether this proposal by the Consortium is one that will address the concerns expressed by parents regarding the sale of Australian Hearing and the move to a contestable environment under the NDIS."

¹ Ensuring a Strong and Viable Future for Australian Hearing in a Contestable NDIS Market | Minister for Finance <<http://www.financeminister.gov.au/media-release/2016/02/12/ensuring-strong-and-viable-future-australian-hearing-contestable-ndis>>

Anna Messariti, president of Parents of Deaf Children in NSW said that preserving a diversity of independent, well-run hearing services is of paramount importance.

“Deaf children and their families deserve to have expert care and choices about where they go to seek that support. Right now, we need answers to many questions about the consortium proposal and how it will impact on the range of options that are currently available” Anna Messariti said.

Deafness Forum of Australia will gather further information on the proposal and will then consult with members and other interested stakeholders. As the next Federal Budget is due in May there is very little time to highlight any concerns to Government.

Deafness Forum chairman David Brady said, “we will continue to advocate on behalf of our members to ensure that their needs and those of families are protected and that client outcomes are not compromised should the Government decide to change the ownership arrangements of Australian Hearing.”

CONTACT

Aussie Deaf Kids aims to empower parents raising a child with hearing loss through online support, information and advocacy.

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Parents of Deaf Children supports families with babies, children and teenagers with hearing loss in NSW.

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Deafness Forum of Australia is the peak national body representing all interests and viewpoints of the Deaf and hearing impaired communities, including those people who have a chronic disorder of the ear.

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