

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



THE STATE OF HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA: TIME FOR CHANGE

Audiologists for AHPRA by 2026

When we commemorated World Hearing Day last month and reflected on the theme of 'Changing Mindsets', it's evident that the Australian hearing health sector stands at a pivotal juncture. David Brady, Chairperson of *Deafness Forum Australia*, aptly encapsulates the moment's urgency: "*It's about ensuring quality, education, and most importantly, safety.*" Indeed, it's time for a transformation in audiology that prioritises regulation, education, and patient well-being.

In recent years, alarming incidents have shaken public confidence in the provision of quality hearing care in Australia. Reports of catastrophic failures in hospital audiology departments, where children received cochlear implants programmed incorrectly, highlighted systemic deficiencies in our current self-regulatory system. These lapses not only result in immediate harm but also perpetuate lasting disadvantages for individuals and families, impacting their lifelong speech and language development. The need for external regulation of audiology as a specialist allied health profession has never been more pressing.

At present, audiology operates under a self-regulated framework, wherein audiologists must belong to a Peak Professional Body (PPB) to access funding avenues like Medicare and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). While the PPB imposes certain standards and codes of conduct, it lacks the authority to address systemic issues within clinics or prevent non-professional body practitioners from misleading the public. This regulatory gap leaves audiologists vulnerable and compromises patient safety.

Moreover, confusion persists regarding the distinction between audiologists and audiometrists. Audiologists undergo rigorous tertiary education, typically earning a Master's degree, while audiometrists typically complete vocational training with a Certificate IV diploma. Yet, the use of generic titles such as "Audiology Professionals" and the absence of clear qualification disclosure contributes to public misperceptions, further undermining the integrity of both professions. Compounding these challenges is the commercialisation of hearing healthcare, with manufacturer-owned chains prioritising high-volume sales over patient-centred care. This retail-oriented approach is incongruent with the ethical principles of a health profession and often subjects vulnerable individuals to aggressive sales and marketing tactics.

The solution lies in the external regulation of audiology through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). AHPRA registration would establish clear standards, ensuring only qualified professionals provide hearing healthcare services. By advocating for AHPRA registration, we advocate for the safety and well-being of all Australians with hearing impairments.

As concerned citizens, we must voice our support for AHPRA registration. Writing to local members of parliament, utilizing social media campaigns with the hashtag #AudiologistsforAHPRA, and staying informed through platforms like Independent Audiologists Australia are tangible steps towards effecting change. Together, we can shape a future where quality, education, and safety are the cornerstones of hearing healthcare in Australia.

The time for change is now. Let us seize this pivotal moment to advocate for better regulation of audiologists, ensuring that every individual receives the quality care they deserve. Our collective action today will pave the way for a healthier, more inclusive tomorrow.