



Hearing Awareness Week – August 24-30, 2003

**Federal Government agency, Australian Hearing,
speaks out on Australia's silent epidemic**



June 2003: Without flinching, Australians embrace all sorts of technology to 'improve' and 'change' our lives –from mobile 'video' phones, digital cameras, home entertainment systems to remote control home heating system. But why is it Australians can't welcome hearing aid technology?

Australia offers subsidised digital hearing aid technology of the most advanced kind¹, yet our population don't seem to be using it. Australia's Federal Government Agency, Australian Hearing estimates that as many as 2.7 million Australians could currently be isolated by hearing loss, a condition that can be improved with the use of a hearing aid.

Hearing aids have the capability to change lives more so than most technology but they are still avoided by four in five people who could actually benefit from wearing one.

Australian Hearing believes that old fashion stigmas and outdated pre-conceptions are behind this silent epidemic. Sharan Westcott, Principal Audiologist at Australian Hearing explains that among the reasons for the resistance to hearing aids is the fear of being identified with the stigma of deafness and a general fear of ageing.

"Some people want to conceal their hearing impairment due to fear of ridicule or other perceived repercussions such as restricted opportunities in the workplace. Some people are simply embarrassed by the fact they have a hearing loss. Because it's invisible, people just don't realise how common it is," said Ms Westcott.

As part of Hearing Awareness Week (24-30 August), a national education campaign devoted to educating Australians about hearing and hearing loss issues, Australian Hearing wants people to recognise that 'Hearing Aids Help You'.

"Australians need to think differently about hearing devices. We want seniors who are unnecessarily suffering hearing problems to contact us for a free screening and consider the latest technology," Ms Westcott said.

Hearing aids not only improve a person's ability to hear and communicate, they can enrich a person's overall quality of life (interpersonal relationships, health, social life) and can reduce feelings of anger, frustration and even depression.² Today's hearing aids are sophisticated, have better sound quality and offer users a range of options to suit varied lifestyles.

As a Commonwealth funded authority, Australian Hearing's services are government subsidised and are provided exclusively to pensioner concession card holders, most war veterans and children under 21. Free hearing screenings are available to seniors from Monday to Friday during **Hearing Awareness Week**. Those interested are advised to call their nearest Australian Hearing centre on **13 17 97** for an appointment.

About Australian Hearing

Australian Hearing understands the social and emotional impact that a hearing loss can have, and has been helping people hear since 1947 when the Federal Government established the organisation to help returned soldiers who suffered hearing damage during World War II and to help the large number of children born deaf following the rubella epidemic of the late 1940's. With 73 centres and more than 200 visiting sites around Australia, Australian Hearing is the largest and most comprehensive provider of hearing services and hearing aids in Australia, and one of the few largest in the world.

¹ Australian Hearing clients can choose devices from fully or partially government subsidised digital technology to best suit their needs and preferences.

² National Council of Aging: The Impact of Untreated Hearing Loss in Older Americans. December 1998.

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact Lee-Anne Sargeant, Australian Hearing, 0419 010 417 lee-anne.sargeant@hearing.com.au
