

Submission
No 83

**INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES EDUCATIONAL
SETTINGS**

Organisation: Parents of Deaf Children

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13th February 2024

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Disability in Education with a Focus on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Committee,

I am writing to submit our concerns regarding deaf and hard of hearing students to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Disability in Education.

Our organisation, Parents of Deaf Children (PODC), has been advocating for over six decades for the rights and welfare of deaf children and their families. Recently, while reviewing our organisation's archives, we were dismayed to find that the issues families faced in the 1980s regarding education are strikingly like those we continue to witness today. Despite decades of advocacy, organisational feedback, and the profound impact of language deprivation on the lives of those affected, these concerns remain unaddressed.

In the past, deaf children were often punished for using Auslan, a practice that was later recognized as harmful over time. Sadly, variations of this neglect persist today, as many deaf children still lack access to information in the most accessible format—signed language. Additionally, the misguided belief that hearing aids or cochlear implants alone suffice for deaf or hard of hearing children is profoundly flawed.

It is imperative that discussions on Deaf education be led by individuals with lived experience and academic expertise in the field. At PODC, we possess a timeline spanning from the early 1980s to the present day, vividly illustrating the distressing situations families have endured and the profound impact on countless lives left unheard.

Primary Concerns:

1. **Misconceptions:** Society's misconceptions regarding the capabilities of deaf and hard of hearing children continue to hinder their development and opportunities. Dispelling these misconceptions and providing appropriate support is crucial for their success. Moreover, the misconception that hearing aids or cochlear implants alone suffice for deaf or hard of hearing children disregards the multifaceted needs of these children, including the importance of sign language as a primary mode of communication.

2. **Absence of Deaf Education Specialists:** The exclusion of Deaf education specialists from national school reform initiatives is troubling and undermines the future of deaf and hard of hearing students' education. Deaf education specialists play a vital role in understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges of deaf and hard of hearing students, including language development, communication methods, and curriculum adaptations. Their expertise is essential for ensuring the provision of inclusive and effective education for these students.
3. **Impending Closure of Deaf Schools and Units:** The closure of Deaf schools and units contradicts principles of inclusivity and equity and jeopardizes the educational outcomes of deaf and hard of hearing students. Deaf schools and units provide specialized support and foster a sense of belonging for deaf and hard of hearing students, often leading to better academic performance and higher levels of satisfaction with their educational experiences. The closure of these spaces not only deprives students of essential support but also undermines their right to access education in environments that cater to their specific needs and preferences.
4. **Shortage of Qualified Teachers:** A significant shortage of qualified teachers of the Deaf deprives students of essential educational support tailored to their unique needs. Qualified teachers of the Deaf play a critical role in providing specialized instruction, support, and advocacy for deaf and hard of hearing students, including facilitating language development, communication, and academic achievement. Addressing the shortage of qualified teachers is essential for ensuring that all deaf and hard of hearing students have access to high-quality education and support services.
5. **Language Deprivation:** Language deprivation among deaf and hard of hearing children has lifelong consequences and must be addressed through comprehensive early intervention programs. Language deprivation can significantly impact academic achievement, social integration, and mental well-being, hindering the overall development and success of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Early exposure to language, including sign language and spoken language, is critical for language development and cognitive growth in deaf and hard of hearing children. Efforts to address language deprivation should prioritize early intervention, language access, and linguistic diversity to support the communication and educational needs of deaf and hard of hearing students.
6. **Assistive Technology Solutions:** Schools often lack adequate resources for implementing assistive technology solutions tailored to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students. Assistive technology, including hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, and captioning services, plays a crucial role in enhancing communication, access to information, and academic success for deaf and hard of hearing students.

However, many schools face challenges in procuring, maintaining, and integrating assistive technology into the learning environment. Addressing these challenges requires adequate funding, professional development, and technical support to ensure that all deaf and hard of hearing students have access to the assistive technology they need to succeed in school and beyond.

- 7. Concerns for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities:** Culturally and linguistically diverse families encounter barriers in navigating the education system for their deaf or hard of hearing children. Language barriers, cultural stigmas, and lack of access to information and support services can hinder these families' ability to advocate for their children's educational needs effectively. Addressing these concerns requires culturally responsive and linguistically accessible support services, education, and outreach efforts to ensure that all families can engage with their child's school and participate in decision-making processes.

In conclusion, we urge the Parliamentary Committee to prioritize the inclusion of Deaf education specialists in national school reform initiatives. Addressing these concerns is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all deaf and hard of hearing students.

Thank you for considering our input on this critical issue.
Sincerely,

Suzanne Robertson
President
Parents of Deaf Children

ATTACHED – Key Terms definitions and list of relevant readings.

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 through 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](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>