



History of the Hearing Services Program

- 1944** The [National Health and Medical Research Council](#) (NHMRC) established the Acoustic Research Laboratory (ARL) to investigate the effects of noise on military personnel.
- 1947** ARL's role was expanded to include the assessment and rehabilitation of children affected by the rubella epidemics of 1939-1941.
- 1948** The then Department of Health was given responsibility for the ARL renaming it the Commonwealth Acoustic Laboratories (CAL). The then program began providing services to returning World War II veterans and school children.
- 1968** The program was expanded to include social security pensioners.
- 1973** CAL was renamed the [National Acoustic Laboratories](#) (NAL).
- 1991** The *Australian Hearing Services Act 1991* came into effect. Australian Hearing Services (AHS) was established as a Commonwealth Government Statutory Authority. NAL was retained as a research division of AHS.
- 1996** The Government announced changes to improve choice for consumers, increased competition between service providers (AHS and private) and between manufacturers of hearing devices resulting in greater cost effectiveness of the Hearing Services Program.
- 1997** The *Hearing Services Administration Act 1997* came into effect and the Office of Hearing Services (the Office) was formally established within the then Department of Health and Family Services to administer the voucher system and accredit providers of hearing services.
- The Community Service Obligations (CSO) component of the program is administered by the Office, and contracted to Australian Hearing Services to deliver to eligible groups.
- 2007** The Office was provided with funding for research into prevention activities to address the burden of avoidable hearing loss in Australia. The [Hearing Loss Prevention Program](#) grants are administered by the NHMRC.
- 2009** A Senate Inquiry into hearing services was announced in September 2009. The Committee tabled its report [Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia](#) in Parliament on 13 May 2010. The Government presented its response to the recommendations contained in the Senate report, on 30 May 2011.
- 2010** Introduction of a [Minimum Hearing Loss Threshold](#) (MHLT), defining the minimum hearing loss required before a client of the program is fitted with a hearing device.
- 2012** Key reforms to the program commenced on 1 January 2012. All new and return vouchers issued after 1 January 2012 are valid for three years instead of two and the CSO component of the program was expanded to include access to hearing services for eligible young adults aged 21-25 years inclusive.
- 2013** As part of the introduction of the [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#) (NDIS) on 1 July 2013, the Government agreed to transition existing Commonwealth programmes providing support to people with a disability to the NDIS. The Australian Government Hearing Services Program was included as one of these programmes, and will transition (in part) through an ongoing process to the NDIS by 2019-2020.
- 2014** The Office introduced an online portal to support the voucher component of the Australian Government Hearing Services Program. The portal provides faster access to the program for eligible clients, and enables hearing service providers to manage their client and site information more efficiently, without requiring the Office to do this on their behalf.