

Media release

New born screening for hearing loss set to fail without funding for early intervention, says hearing group

Tuesday 27th July, 2010: Any political commitment to increase the scope of screening for hearing problems in new born babies is set to fail without a corresponding increase in funding for early intervention services, says a national coalition of hearing health providers.

*“First Voice”** has called on the Federal Labor and Coalition parties to commit to ongoing funding for early language and communication intervention given the Labor Government’s announcement in mid-2009 that Universal Newborn Hearing Screening will be fully introduced by the end of 2010. In states where screening has already commenced, services have experienced a huge increase in demand.

First Voice says universal hearing screening will generate increased demand at a time when many services are closing their doors or reducing services due to a lack of funding.

According to the Chairperson for *First Voice*, Ms Anthea Green from The Shepherd Centre, universal screening for hearing impairment is an admirable initiative, but long term chaos awaits those screened if there is no increase in funding for service provision.

“Are we going to end up with another scenario where a well intentioned social policy initiative – in this case newborn hearing screening - leads to a logistical nightmare and personal heartbreak down the track?,” said Ms Green.

First Voice has made a submission to the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Mr Bill Shorten, asking for \$11M annually to cover approximately 1900 families across Australia who will require these services, subject to the numbers of children diagnosed. These funds will make all the difference to the listening, talking and communication outcomes of these children.

“We have yet to get a real commitment from either party on funding,” she said. “Whoever wins the election on August 21st will inherit a major problem unless they commit to ongoing, sustainable funding.

“They will face a backlash from families whose children are diagnosed as having hearing problems via Universal Newborn Hearing Screening, but who cannot access appropriate services because the non-government organisations to whom they turn for help will be struggling under the weight of severe financial difficulties and overwhelming demand,” said Ms Green.

“Screening without increased service provision is a disaster waiting to happen.”

Ends

For more information, interviews or for media enquiries regarding personal case studies, call Martin Palin (0418 419 258; mpalin@palin.com.au or Margo Field (0408 451 693; margo@palin.com.au at Palin Communications (02 9412 2255)

*Issued on behalf of First Voice, which is a national coalition of organisations that provide early language and communication intervention services for infants and children with hearing impairment. It includes The Cora Barclay Centre (SA), Hear and Say (QLD), Taralye (Vic), Telethon Speech and Hearing (WA), The Shepherd Centre (NSW/ACT) and Hearing House (NZ). The funding submission is supported by leading hearing service providers and advocacy groups, including Aussie Deaf Kids (National), Deafness Forum Australia (National), National Disability Services Australia (National), Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (NSW), Sydney Cochlear Implant Centre (NSW and ACT) and The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital and Cochlear Implant Clinic (Vic).