

**SENATOR THE HON DOUG CAMERON
SHADOW MINISTER FOR HUMAN SERVICES
SENATOR FOR NEW SOUTH WALES**

LABOR RULES OUT PRIVATISATION OF AUSTRALIAN HEARING

Labor will keep Australian Hearing and the National Acoustic Laboratories in public hands and oppose Malcolm Turnbull's plans to privatise the vital service.

"Mr Turnbull and his Liberals have provided no justification for privatising Australian Hearing. It operates at no cost to government and provides an essential service to more than 160,000 Australians," Senator Cameron said.

"It is a world-class institution that is the envy of the world. Selling it off is ideological madness.

"The Abbott-Turnbull Government's discredited and unfair Commission of Audit proposed the privatisation in 2014. It was a bad idea then and it is a bad idea now."

The 2016-17 Turnbull Budget allocated a further \$2.2m to "consider the future ownership of Australian Hearing", paid for by a "special dividend from Australian Hearing in 2016-17".

This is on top of the \$540,000 spent on external consultants in the Government's scoping study into privatisation.

"Instead of ripping a further \$2.2m out of hearing services, Labor will support Australian Hearing to do its job," Senator Cameron said.

"The Chifley Labor Government founded Australian Hearing in 1947, and we will ensure that it has a strong future.

"A Shorten Labor Government will review the parameters of Australian Hearing's services so it can meet the challenges of operating under the contestable funding model of the NDIS.

"We do not agree with the Liberals that the only response to those challenges is to privatise Australian Hearing."

Australian Hearing provides hearing health services to more than 160,000 Australians at 137 permanent hearing centres and 380 temporary sites.

It provides services to age pensioners, ex-defence personnel, young people under 26, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with complex hearing needs. About 16,000 ex-defence personnel used the services last year.

Australian Hearing also operated 233 remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach sites, as well as providing seven mobile hearing buses.

Australian Hearing's research arm, the National Acoustic Laboratories, is a world-leading research institution.

Labor's unequivocal position was strongly supported by concerned Australians such as Parents of Deaf Children and the Deafness Forum during Senate Committee hearings into the potential privatisation of the service.

Labor's stand against the privatisation of Australian Hearing matches its commitment to keeping Medicare in public hands.

Labor will legislate within the first 100 days of being elected to protect Medicare while the Liberals are spending \$5 million on a taskforce to sell off the Medicare payments system.

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