



14 October 2016

Commissioner Mick Gooda and Commissioner Margaret White
Office of the Royal Commission
PO Box 4215
Kingston ACT 2604

Dear Commissioners

As President of the Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery (the society of ear, nose and throat surgeons of Australia), and somebody who's been involved with Aboriginal ear disease for thirty years, I would like to draw your attention to the high rate of deafness in Indigenous people in youth detention centres in Australia.

The Deadly Ears program in Queensland went to youth detention centres in Mareeba and Brisbane. Boystown went to the youth detention centre in Adelaide. The Telethon Group in West Australia went to their youth detention centre, as did Dr Damien Howard with backup from audiologists and doctors from the Menzies School of Medicine in Darwin. They found that between 80 and 90% of the Indigenous inmates in these youth detention facilities were deaf.

There is a clear association between deafness and poor language development. There is a consequent association which is well described between deafness, poor language and listening skills with underperformance at school, secondary truancy and unacceptably high rates of illiteracy in people who have attended school in remote Aboriginal communities. Dr Damien Howard, the psychologist in Darwin, has shown the association between poor educational outcomes and deafness with feelings of hopelessness, underachievement, substance abuse, suicide violence and incarceration. It was very satisfying to see that you are around this topic, having invited Damien Howard to give evidence at the Commission.

I hope your Commission will look further at the root cause of the terrible images which you are investigating. There needs to be an evidence-based health and educational response to 90% of young Aboriginal children having hearing aid-level deafness in their early brain development periods. There are models of care in health and education that have been shown to be effective – the best known and effective is the Queensland Government's Deadly Ears program.



2/2

We need a national response to this issue and an appropriate evidence-based method to benchmark programs, interventions and jurisdictions to establish best practice and best use of resources.

I would be happy to meet with you anywhere to discuss this issue in further detail as would Associate Professor Kelvin Kong, an Indigenous ENT surgeon based in Newcastle who is highly influential in this field and has headed the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Indigenous Health Committee.

Yours sincerely

Privacy

Christopher Perry OAM, FRACS
President

Cc:

Mr Phil Truskett AM, President, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

Lorna Watson, Chief Executive Officer, ASOHNS

Paul Cargill, Manager, Fellowship Services, RACS

Amy Kimber, ACT Regional Manager, Commonwealth Advocacy, RACS

John Biviano, Director, Fellowship & Standards, RACS