

MEDIA RELEASE

Social and economic benefits of early intervention for deaf children far outweigh investment cost, says new report

Canberra: Embargoed to Monday 22nd August 2011: Every dollar invested in early intervention services for deaf children produces almost two dollars worth of social, educational, vocational and economic benefit, according to a new cost-benefit analysis launched in Canberra today.

The report¹, by consulting group *Econtext*, shows that transforming the lives of deaf children by delivering the gift of speech is only part of the equation when it comes to early intervention. It demonstrates clear, tangible, economic benefits as well.

The analysis, commissioned and launched by First Voice* (a coalition of hearing service providers), showed that costs of early intervention programs (wages foregone by carers, costs of therapy and investment in hearing devices etc) were dwarfed by the benefits such as higher incomes, reduction in disability, avoidance of extra school costs and the likelihood of those who underwent therapy being in longer term paid work.

The costs incurred during the early intervention period produce lifelong benefits. Using a fifty year horizon, the cost of early intervention services was estimated at \$203,307 in current dollar terms while the lifelong benefit was conservatively estimated at \$382,894 in current dollar terms, delivering an overall benefit-to-cost ratio of 1.9:1.

First Voice Chairperson Dr Dimity Dornan said the report provided the economic rationale for government investment in early intervention services for Australia's deaf children.

"We've known for some time that almost all of the hearing impaired children who participate in early programs that focus on listening and speaking go on to do well at mainstream schools. This report confirms the longer term economic and social benefits of that progress. These children end up in better jobs with higher salaries than they would have otherwise. It clearly shows they are avoiding the additional costs of special schools and the need for ongoing disability support," said Dr Dornan.

The report assumed a government contribution of 40% of the operational costs (ie. around \$6,000 per child per year) then goes on to conclude "*..The government is thus able to leverage private contributions to achieve an important social outcome with economic benefits that significantly exceed the government co-contribution.*"

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“There are already strong arguments for the funding of these services on grounds of compassion and social equity. Now there is a strong, evidence-based economic argument as well,” said Dr Dornan. “In short, every dollar of taxpayer money that government invests in auditory verbal therapy for deaf children is repaid with more successful school outcomes, better long term employment and reduced welfare dependency,” concluded Dr Dornan.

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For more information, copies of the report, interviews or for media enquiries regarding personal case studies, contact Martin Palin (0418 419 258; mpalin@palin.com.au) or Lauren Sharkey (0439 404 200; lauren@palin.com.au) at Palin Communications (02 9412 2255)

** First Voice is the national voice for five leading Australian charities whose primary focus is the provision of listening and spoken language therapy services in Australia. Evolved from the Alliance of Deaf Children, First Voice represents the largest group of early intervention organisations for hearing impaired children in the region – supporting thousands of children across Australia.*

1. Early intervention programs to assist children with hearing loss develop spoken language. A social cost-benefit analysis. A report prepared for First Voice. Econtext. August 2011