

# The costs of a communication disability

*Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.*

One in seven Australians has a communication disability arising from problems with speech, language, or hearing. The disabilities can be mild or severe, temporary or permanent; present from birth or acquired later in life.

Being able to communicate - talk with and listen to others easily, share opinions and ideas - is a basic human right. Most people take this right for granted because they do not understand what it is like not being able to converse or interact with others.

For those people with a disability, and their families and friends, the costs involved in being given a say in life can be great both emotionally and financially.

## Emotional costs

Emotional costs are often great for people with a communication disability and their families and friends. Imagine the disappointment of a father who cannot understand his son's story about what happened during the day, or the grief of a 40 year old nurse who has a stroke and loses all power of speech. Consider the anxiety of the teenager who stutters most when trying to say his name or the frustration of a young girl who has ideas to fill a page but can only write three lines of a story.

## Behavioural costs

Behavioural costs often flow directly from the emotional impact of a communication disability. Aggression, shyness and depression may result when people are unable to communicate with those around them. These feelings may lead to minor or serious anti social behaviour which affect the whole community.

## Associated costs

People with difficulties in speech and language often have difficulties in learning, reading and writing. The result is costly to the individual and to society. Poor literacy and under achievement at school often contribute towards later unemployment. Students with communication disabilities often have to repeat years at school. The costs to society include unemployment benefits and disability allowances.

## Access to services

Time and travel costs to see a speech pathologist can mount up for anyone with a communication disability. With long waiting lists and understaffing in government services, many people are opting to see a private speech pathologist. Each private speech pathologist negotiates their fees, some of which may be covered by private health insurance. Treatment often needs to continue over many months and even years.



## **Equipment costs**

Some people with severe disabilities will need communication aids that cost thousands of dollars.

For example, the communication related costs associated with the removal of a voice box include the annual cost for a prosthesis which ranges from \$385 to \$780 depending on the type used. An electro-larynx can cost from \$900 to \$1300 with an additional annual cost for batteries (\$200) and speech pathology treatment.

The ability to have a say in life is a very important human right.

## **For further information:**

Contact Speech Pathology Australia - the official body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability.

## **References**

Please contact Speech Pathology Australia's National Office for the references used to create this Fact Sheet.

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