

Media Release

Thursday 16 September 2010

Speech Pathology Australia welcomes new Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers

Speech Pathology Australia today welcomed the appointment of Senator Jan McLucas as the new Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers.

SPA National President, Chris Stone stated that she looks forward to working with Senator McLucas to address the needs of the hundreds of thousands of Australians living with communication and swallowing disorders.

“The *Better Start for Children with Disability* initiative announced by the Labor Government during the election campaign is a positive step for children’s disability services and we look forward to working closely with the government at all levels to implement the program and ensure its ongoing success,” Ms Stone said.

“We also strongly encourage the extension of the scheme to include children with significant communication difficulties who may not be eligible through one of the six disabilities funded under the initiative. Communication impairment is often an ‘invisible’ disability, however we implore the government to not allow it to remain silent.

“Early intervention is the best way to give children with complex communication needs the best start in life. Extending government funding to children with less ‘visible’ disabilities allows access to essential speech pathology services from a young age, something that will make an enormous difference to the child’s quality of and participation in life.

“Speech and language disorders have significant long-term impact and can result in literacy difficulties, poor educational outcomes, reduced employment prospects and the increased likelihood of social, emotional and mental health issues, with early intervention shown to be the best way to lessen this impact.

“We also look forward to continuing consultation regarding the Inquiry into Disability Care and Support to ensure the needs of people with a severe communication and swallowing impairments are met across their entire life span.”

Ms Stone reiterated the Association’s call for a National Productivity Commission Inquiry into the social and economic impact of communication and swallowing disorders and urged cross-ministry support.

“The extent of communication and swallowing impairment within Australia is unknown and similar inquiries in other countries indicate they could cost our economy anywhere between \$13 and \$15 billion each year.

“Until the prevalence and impact of these disorders within the community is fully ascertained, it is impossible for government and health professionals to adequately plan and provide services, especially early childhood intervention and for our ageing population.”

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For more information or comment, please contact:

Joanna Wood

03 9642 4899 / 0430 633 234

marketing@speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

The Speech Pathology Association of Australia Limited
ABN 17 008 393 440

