

HEARING LOSS AND ROLE OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Hearing screening, ear examination and basic ear and hearing care interventions can be provided by trained non-specialist health care providers in clinical or community settings.



THE PROBLEM



Globally more than **1.5 billion** people experience some

degree of hearing loss.

Of these, an estimated **430 million** have **disabling hearing loss**, a number that could rise to **over 700 million** by 2050.



If unaddressed, hearing loss negatively impacts

communication, development of language and speech in children; cognition; education; employment; mental health; and interpersonal relationships.



The prevalence of disabling hearing loss increases exponentially with

age, rising from 15.4% among people aged in their 60s, to 58.2% among those aged more than 90 years. Unaddressed hearing loss may be responsible for over 8% of cases of dementia among older adults.



In children, almost **60%** of hearing loss is due to

causes that can be prevented through measures such as immunization, improved maternal and neonatal care, screening for, and early management of otitis media.



Globally, less than 20% of those in need of ear and hearing

care access the services they need. **Unaddressed hearing loss poses an annual cost of nearly US\$ 1 trillion.** This includes costs related to health care, education, productivity losses, and societal costs.



There is a **global shortage of hearing care specialists** such

as audiologists and ENT specialists. This shortage is greater in low- and middle-income countries, where the need for these services is highest.

Genetic factors

Hypoxia or birth asphyxia

Low birth weight

Hyperbilirubinemia

Perinatal infections

Meningitis

Ototoxic chemicals and medications

COMMON CAUSES OF HEARING LOSS. MOST ARE PREVENTABLE.

Smoking

Nutritional deficiencies

Ear or head trauma

Otitis media

Exposure to loud sounds

Ageing



World Health Organization

THE SOLUTION

To integrate ear and hearing care into universal health care and ensure availability of services through primary health care approaches. Essential public health interventions for ear and hearing care are summarized in the acronym "H.E.A.R.I.N.G."

- H** **Hearing screening and intervention.** Systematic hearing screening at strategic points of life i.e., in newborns and infants; children, especially in school settings; older people; and those exposed to noise, ototoxic chemicals or ototoxic medicines.
Early identification of hearing loss followed by prompt rehabilitation is key for a successful outcome.
- E** **Ear disease prevention and management** at community level through following simple Dos and Dont's for healthy hearing; early identification, management and referral of ear diseases by trained primary health care providers, and access to specialized medical and surgical care, when needed.
- A** **Access to technologies** such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and middle ear implants that can benefit the majority of those with hearing loss.
- R** **Rehabilitation services** that can be easily accessed, such as speech and language therapy, use of sign language and lip reading.
- I** **Improved communication** through sign language interpretation; and captioning services to facilitate participation of people with hearing loss in all activities.
- N** **Noise reduction** through implementation of occupational hearing conservation programmes in the workplace; and adoption of the global standard for safe listening devices and the global standard for safe listening venues as national standards.
- G** **Greater community engagement**, including those who are deaf and hard of hearing, to change behaviours and attitudes towards hearing loss and its causes.

ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

-  Be informed about hearing loss and **disseminate this information** among colleagues. 
-  **Inform the community** about tips for healthy ears and how to suspect hearing loss. 
-  Support the integration of ear and hearing care as a part of the **health programme** you work on. 
-  Promote hearing self-checks **using the WHO hearWHO app**. 
Download the app
-  Know about the **availability of ear and hearing care services in your area** and where to refer those people that need them. 
-  Observe the **World Hearing Day every 3 of March** and organize awareness events for hearing health. 
-  Know how to be **hearing loss friendly** <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/how-to-be-hearing-loss-friendly> 



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