

## Turning a Deaf Ear costs Billions!

Listen Hear! – The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia

Many of us are aware of relatives or friends with hearing loss, and the significant impact that this has on their ability to communicate and to participate in society, but few of us would be aware that **hearing loss represents a real financial cost to Australia of \$11.75 billion per annum or 1.4% of GDP** according to a new research study by Access Economics.

The report, officially delivered to Senator the Hon Santo Santoro, Minister for Ageing, at the opening of the Audiology Australia National Conference in Perth, identifies that **1 in 6 Australians is affected by hearing loss**, and this number is projected to increase to **1 in every 4 Australians by 2050**. Hearing loss is age-related, affecting **3 in every 4 people aged over 70 years**.

The Listen Hear! Report, commissioned by the Cooperative Research Centre for Cochlear Implant and Hearing Aid Innovation **\*\***(CRC HEAR) in partnership with VicDeaf, identifies that **productivity loss related directly to hearing impairment accounts for well over half (57%) of the total financial costs – or some \$6.7 billion a year**.

**\*\* Audiology Australia is a Partner in this CRC!!**

CRC HEAR CEO, Associate Professor Bob Cowan, says the study is the first of its kind to quantify the economic costs and impact on Australia associated with deafness, and will be important for informing policy making and directing health and research resources to the preventive and therapeutic interventions that are most cost effective.

“Deafness suffers from low exposure and its full implications are not immediately obvious. However, this report allows the community to better understand the cost and resource issues associated with hearing loss. The study reports that **hearing loss ranks with asthma, diabetes and musculoskeletal diseases in terms of burden of disability**, and should be considered as a national health priority. ”

“Hearing loss reduces the capacity to communicate, and this in turn impacts on a person’s life chances through the reduced opportunity to equitably participate in education, to gain competitive skills and employment and to participate in relationships. While interventions such as hearing aids and cochlear implants can enhance a person’s ability to communicate, the majority of people with hearing loss (85%) do not use such devices.”

Excessive noise in the work place and social environments is not conducive to good hearing retention. With 36% of hearing loss attributable to excessive noise exposure, all of which is preventable, approaches to better management of noise prevention are needed.

“Now that the true costs are known, it’s time to act to significantly reduce this impact on Australia’s economy.” Associate Professor Cowan said.

“Research into mechanisms and behavioural approaches that encourage hearing loss prevention, improvements in hearing technology, and more efficient ways to undertake clinical hearing assessments and (re)habilitation particularly in rural and remote areas are all required if we are to address the projected increase in hearing loss in our community” Associate Professor Cowan said.



CRC for Cochlear Implant  
and Hearing Aid Innovation



“Government support for promoting greater awareness of preventable hearing loss and generating more efficient and effective ways to support those with a hearing impairment to continue or return to work, would be sound value for money for Australia's short and long term economic wellbeing.” said Associate Professor Cowan.

*CRC HEAR, established through the Commonwealth Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program, strives to improve communication for the millions of hearing-impaired adults and children in Australia and the rest of the world through research activities and education programs aims at creating:*

- *innovations enabling new hearing technology devices and products;*
- *innovative clinical procedures that enhance benefits to users of hearing devices and save healthcare costs;*
- *innovative courses for postgraduates and professional training workshops;*
- *innovative technology transfer activities to ensure uptake of Centre research and education outcomes.*

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