

International perspective: reducing hearing loss

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Millions of individuals across the world live with disabling hearing loss. A number of causes that lead to hearing loss can be prevented. These include vaccine-preventable infectious diseases such as meningitis and rubella, chronic ear infections, noise-induced hearing loss and ototoxic hearing loss. Many individuals with hearing loss can be treated through medical and surgical means, while others can benefit from the use of hearing devices, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, or learn to communicate through sign language. Early detection and prompt intervention are the most important factors in minimising the impact of hearing loss.¹

A recent World Health Organization (WHO) report reveals that there is an overall lack of population-based epidemiological data on hearing loss and its causes. There is a great deal of variation in the availability of human resources for the provision of hearing care, which is predictably much higher in high- and upper-middle-income countries. This report identified only 32 countries that have reported the development of national or subnational plans to address hearing loss.²

A resolution passed by the World Health Assembly in 1995 noted the issue of hearing loss and the lack of resources to address it. It urged its Member States to develop and implement strategic plans for prevention and management of hearing loss within the framework of primary health care.³ The essential building block to begin planning such a programme is information about the current state of hearing loss and hearing care infrastructure and human resources. The paper by Sanders et al.⁴ in this issue reports on the prevalence of hearing loss and provision of hearing services in some Pacific Island nations

and provides valuable information in this regard. It will help to raise awareness about hearing loss and will serve as an important tool for the development of a hearing care strategy for these Pacific Island nations.

References

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