



Hearing loss in Australia

IT'S MORE COMMON THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

ONE IN SIX PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA HAS A HEARING LOSS, AND WITH THE AGEING OF THE AUSTRALIAN POPULATION, HEARING LOSS IS PROJECTED TO INCREASE TO ONE IN EVERY FOUR AUSTRALIANS BY 2050.¹

Causes of hearing loss

A hearing loss can result if there's a problem at any point in the hearing pathway – in the outer, middle or inner ears, or in the complex auditory nerve pathway to the brain.

HEARING LOSS CAN BE:

- * congenital (present at or soon after birth) or acquired (develops later)
- * pre-lingual (before a child has fully developed speech) or post-lingual (after the development of speech)
- * conductive (caused by blockage or damage in the outer and/or middle ear) or sensorineural (caused by damage to, or malfunction of, the cochlea, or to the hearing nerve, or a combination of both).

The most significant single cause of hearing loss in Australia is exposure to loud noise. 37% of hearing loss is due to excessive noise exposure.¹

Hearing loss can also be acquired through illness, accident, exposure to certain drugs and chemicals, or as part of the normal ageing process.



One in six people in Australia has a hearing loss

Hearing loss among children

In Australia, between 9 and 12 children per 10,000 live births will be born with a moderate or greater hearing loss in both ears and around a further 23 children per 10,000 will acquire a hearing impairment that requires hearing aids by the age of 17 through accident, illness or other causes.

Each year Australian Hearing fits between 1,200 and 1,500 children with hearing aids for the first time.

Otitis media, also known as middle ear infection, is a common childhood complaint which is often associated with temporary or fluctuating hearing loss. This in turn can affect a child's learning, language development and behaviour.

Although it is usually easily treatable, the incidence of otitis media is significantly higher among Indigenous children, for whom it represents a serious health and educational issue.

Hearing loss among seniors

Over half the population aged between 60 and 70 have a hearing loss.² This increases to more than 70% of those over the age of 70² and 80% of those over the age of 80.³

Men have a higher incidence of hearing loss than women,³ particularly older men, mainly due to noise exposure in the workplace and during war service.

Hearing loss among veterans

War veterans are likely to suffer from hearing problems due to hearing damage from noise exposure during their war service.

Hearing is the second most common medical condition reported by Australian war veterans and war widows, with

55% reporting hearing loss as a current medical condition.⁴

Hearing loss among rural Australians

Over half of Australia's farmers are likely to suffer from premature hearing loss through occupational noise exposure from agricultural machinery, tools and pigs in sheds at feeding time.⁵

Almost all farmers over the age of 55 who have been exposed to loud noise suffer some degree of hearing loss. However, only 18 percent of farmers wear hearing protection while working with heavy machinery.⁵

The cost to the economy

Hearing loss costs Australia almost \$12 billion a year, with almost 160,000 people not working because they can't hear well enough.¹

In addition, compensation claims for noise induced hearing loss due to excessive noise at work comprise a very significant proportion of all claims for occupational diseases.

Most, if not all of these cases could have been avoided if the right noise management practices had been followed.

What can be done?

People with a hearing loss can feel isolated and frustrated but the good news is that there is help at hand.

An expertly fitted digital hearing aid can significantly reduce the physical and emotional consequences of hearing loss.

People who wear hearing aids are less affected by depression, have improved health, and experience a better sense of independence and control over their lives.⁶

Australian Hearing is Australia's leading provider of high quality hearing care. An Australian Government agency with 60 years' experience, Australian Hearing is dedicated to helping people manage their hearing impairment to deliver a better quality of life.

- 1 Access Economics: *Listen Hear! The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia*, February 2006
- 2 Wilson D, Walsh PG, Sanchez L and Read P: *Hearing Impairment in an Australian Population*, Centre for Population Studies in Epidemiology, South Australian Department of Human Services, 1998. Statistics based on a 4 frequency average hearing loss greater than 25dB HL in the worse ear.
- 3 Mitchell P et al: *The Prevalence, Risk Factors and Impacts of Hearing Impairment in an Older Australian Community: the Blue Mountains Hearing Study*, 2002
- 4 Australian Government, Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Your lives, Your needs 2003, Findings from the 2003 Survey of Entitled Veterans, War Widows and their Carers commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs*
- 5 Williams W, Forby-Atkinson L and Gartshore G: *'Hearing Loss and the Farming Community'*, *J Occup Health Safety* – Aust NZ 2002 18 (2), 35 – 44
- 6 National Council of Aging: *The Impact of Untreated Hearing Loss in Older Americans*, December 1998

