



THE HON JUSTINE ELLIOT MP
Minister for Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

24 August 2008

\$3.6 million for hearing loss prevention research

The Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, today announced the Australian Government will fund \$3.6 million to five separate groups for research into ways to prevent avoidable hearing loss.

One in six Australians are affected by hearing loss. With an ageing population, hearing loss is projected to increase to one in every four Australians by 2050¹ and can have a profoundly negative effect on ones quality of life.

This announcement coincides with the start of Hearing Awareness Week.

Mrs Elliot said the funding is made available through the Australian Government's Hearing Loss Prevention Program and will provide for vital research and related prevention strategies.

"The research will fill important gaps and progress knowledge to inform prevention programs," Mrs Elliot said.

"The research projects will examine the management of middle-ear disease and hearing loss in Aboriginal children up to five-years-old, target school-age children and young people with prevention education and identify enablers and barriers to the use of hearing protection in the workplace." Mrs Elliot said.

According to the Access Economics report, "hearing loss costs the Australian community about \$11.75 billion a year". The major components of this cost are lost productivity (\$6.7 billion), the cost of informal carers (\$3.2 billion) and direct health system costs (\$674 million) per annum.

"The *Hearing Loss Prevention Program* tackles the burden of preventable hearing loss in the Australian community and targets young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people in the workplace."

This year's Hearing Awareness Week theme is 'One in Six – its more common than you think', was officially launched in Melbourne today.

The aim of Hearing Awareness Week is to raise awareness of hearing loss, assist and support affected people, educate the general public about reducing the incidence of hearing loss and about measures that can be taken to improve quality of life.

"This Week provides an opportunity for people to get information about services available and free hearing screenings, at many hearing centres across the nation." Mrs Elliot said.

¹ Access Economics' 2006 report '*The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing*'

Funding under the *Hearing Loss Prevention Program* has been awarded to:

Dr Warwick Williams from the National Acoustic Laboratories for a project to establish the prevalence of hearing loss and its relationship to leisure sound exposure in adolescents; and a study to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of noise exposure for young people together with an assessment of the relative 'hazard' contribution that different activities and environments pose for young people across a lifetime.

Dr Paul Chang of Edith Cowan University for a project to determine the effectiveness of a health-based fear appeal augmented by simulations of hearing loss and tinnitus in comparison to warnings that emphasise health concerns alone.

Associate Professor Linnett Sanchez of Flinders University for a longitudinal study with high statistical power to significantly extend previous research into the effects of the use of swimming pools by Indigenous children in remote communities by incorporating measures of hearing (audiometry) and middle ear function (tympanometry) as the critical outcome measures which are more directly linked to educational outcomes in these children.

Associate Professor Peter Morris of the Menzies School of Health Research for a project to evaluate a comprehensive case management support program for the prevention of hearing loss associated with otitis media with perforation in Indigenous children 0-5 years of age.

Dr Peta Miller and Dr Perri Timmins of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for a project to determine the key barriers and enablers to the effective control of hazardous occupational noise exposure amongst key stakeholders within selected high risk populations.

Hearing Facts:

Access Economics' 2006 report '*The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia*' reported that in 2005 there were an estimated 3.55 million Australians with hearing loss.

The Australian Government through Hearing Services Program will spend about \$312 million in 2008-09.

The prevalence of hearing loss is greater in Indigenous communities than in the non-Indigenous population. The prevalence of otitis media in Indigenous communities can range from 10 per cent to 54 per cent. The World Health Organization defines rates of chronic suppurative otitis media greater than 4 per cent as an unacceptable public health problem.

Research published in the International Journal of Audiology by the National Acoustic Laboratories, the research division of the Government hearing services provider *Australian Hearing*, found that 25 per cent of people surveyed wearing personal stereos are using them at levels, and for durations at which hearing damage starts to occur.

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