Hearing loss: Early intervention the key

Early intervention remains the key to reducing the rate of hearing loss in Australians, Assistant Minister for Health Fiona Nash said today.

Speaking at the Hearing Care Industry Association breakfast at Parliament House ahead of Hearing Awareness Week (23-29 August), Minister Nash said hearing once damaged often cannot be repaired, echoing the theme of the week: Hearing is precious and fragile.

“Hearing is something most Australians take for granted, but imagine a life without it,” Minister Nash said.

“One-in-six Australians currently experience some sort of hearing loss and this figure is expected to grow to one-in-four Australians by the year 2050 as the population ages.

“Hearing loss reduces our ability to communicate with our friends and family and to participate in social situations. It can also affect education and job prospects.

“Young people and those in loud working environments are particularly susceptible to hearing loss from exposure to loud noises.”

Minister Nash said the Australian Government is investing in research through the Hearing Loss Prevention Programme and the National Acoustic Laboratories to help identify the causes of preventable hearing loss.

“During 2015-16 we are helping to fund 30 projects to enhance services in remote locations, improve device functionality and improve identification and management of hearing loss in children,” Minister Nash said.

“While research is helping to understand the reasons for hearing loss and how to prevent it, the Government, through the Hearing Services Programme, is continuing to support people whose hearing is already impaired.

“The Voucher Programme allows Australians to access fully and partially subsidised hearing services from a national network of contracted service providers.
“On average, 290 new clients apply for the Voucher Programme each day through the Hearing Services Online portal. The portal provides clients with faster access to services with the potential to receive services on the same day.

“In 2014-15, the Australian Government invested $384 million so that more than 660,000 Australians could receive more than 1.2 million services under the Voucher Programme.

“The Community Service Obligations programme provides specialised services to children and other eligible groups such as adults with complex hearing needs and some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

“In 2014-15, more than 30,000 young Australians under the age of 21 received more than 66,000 services and more than 3,000 young adults (21-25 years) received approximately 6,600 specialist services under the CSO.”

For further information on Hearing Awareness Week and the Hearing Services Programme please visit www.hearingawarenessweek.org.au or www.hearingservices.gov.au

Media contact: Les White 0409 805 122 les.white@health.gov.au