



# Supporting patients with hearing loss

## Early intervention and management

In Australia, about 3.6 million people<sup>1</sup> have some level of hearing loss and of these, around one third live with a hearing condition that could have been prevented. Untreated hearing loss and ear disease can have a big impact on the lives of both children and adults.

Early awareness and intervention can help prevent further hearing loss.

You have a vital role in helping detect hearing loss and encouraging patients to explore management options.

We know people can be hesitant to seek help for hearing loss, so by starting the conversation with your patients, it can help to normalise the topic.

## Barriers to seeking treatment

Some people with hearing loss may avoid or delay seeking help due to:

- stigma
- a lack of understanding of the long-term consequences of delaying management
- belief that having a hearing test will result in a recommendation to buy hearing aids
- a lack of familiarity with audiologists and audiometrists compared to other health professionals.

From 50 years of age, there is an increase in rates of hearing loss. You may therefore want to encourage patients of this age to consider getting their hearing checked.

Patients aged 65 and over should be encouraged to get their hearing checked every year as part of their general health check.

## Diagnosing hearing loss

Acquired hearing loss often happens gradually, making it difficult for patients to identify themselves at first.

To gauge whether a patient may be experiencing hearing loss, ask them to consider if they have noticed any of the potential early signs, including:

- difficulty hearing in noisy places
- difficulty hearing people on the phone or if they're not facing them
- regularly asking people to repeat themselves when they speak to them
- hearing sounds as muffled, as though people are mumbling
- needing to have the TV volume louder than other people
- regularly missing the phone or the doorbell ringing
- avoiding situations because they have trouble hearing.
- If you suspect your patient is experiencing hearing loss, encourage them to get a hearing check at a hearing clinic. Anyone can search for a hearing clinic near them via the Healthdirect Service Finder ([healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)).

<sup>1</sup> Roadmap for Hearing Health, Hearing Health Sector Committee, *Supporting all Australians who are deaf or hard of hearing to live well in the community*

## Managing hearing loss

Following a hearing check, a range of management and treatment options may be suitable, including:

- communication strategies (see supplementary factsheet *Tips to Help you Hear Better*)
- assistive listening devices—such as personal amplifiers and headphones
- phone apps—such as instant translator apps that can convert natural speech to text in real time
- hearing aids
- cochlear implants.

## Support and resources

Resources are available to help you support your patients with their hearing health.

- Department of Health and Aged Care website—for information on how to care for ear and hearing health and how to get a hearing check [health.gov.au/hearing](https://health.gov.au/hearing), and information on the Hearing Services Program [health.gov.au/hearing-services](https://health.gov.au/hearing-services).
- Otitis Media Guidelines App—guidelines for management of Otitis Media in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children [otitismediaguidelines.com](https://otitismediaguidelines.com).
- Healthdirect Symptom Checker Tool—by searching 'hearing', this tool will guide patients through symptoms and steps for hearing health [healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker/tool](https://healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker/tool).
- Healthdirect Service Finder—by searching 'hearing clinic', this tool will help people find a hearing clinic located near them [healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](https://healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services).

## Subsidised hearing services and support

Support is available to eligible people who have hearing loss.

This includes free or subsidised hearing services and devices, specific services for children and support to help people translate spoken language to text or Auslan. More information on support available can be found at [health.gov.au/hearing](https://health.gov.au/hearing)

## Common causes of hearing loss

Common causes of hearing loss include:

- Presbycusis, or age-related hearing loss. From the age of 50, there is a marked increase in rates of hearing loss. Presbycusis affects approximately 3 to 4 out of every 10 people over the age of 65.
- Glue ear (otitis media with effusion). This is a common condition among young children that can cause hearing loss. After a cold or ear infection, fluid can build up in the middle ear and become sticky. If it does not clear, grommets can be implanted to help fluid drain.
- Exposure to loud noise. People who listen to loud music or work in loud environments, including musicians, farmers, miners, military personnel and those who work in construction, are at risk.



For more information on ear diseases and disorders, visit [healthdirect.gov.au/ear-diseases-and-disorders](https://healthdirect.gov.au/ear-diseases-and-disorders)

[health.gov.au/hearing](https://health.gov.au/hearing)