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MEDIA RELEASE

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Hearing impairment under-reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

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Under-reporting of hearing impairment is a substantial issue for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, according to new analysis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Western Sydney University.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged seven years and over across Australia participated in the voluntary hearing test as part of the 2018–19 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey.

The independent hearing test found more than four in 10 (43 per cent) people had a hearing impairment in at least one ear on the day of testing – noting hearing impairment on the day of the test may have been due to a temporary cause like ear congestion associated with a cold.

Analysis by the ABS, in partnership with Dr Scott Avery from Western Sydney University, found almost eight in 10 (79 per cent) people with a hearing impairment according to the test did not report having a long-term hearing impairment.

ABS Indigenous and Social Information Program Manager, Stephen Collett said: "The analysis shows 82 per cent of people with a mild impairment and 53 per cent of people with a moderate, severe or profound impairment on the day of testing may have an unreported long-term hearing impairment. This suggests substantial under-reporting of hearing impairment within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and points to a need for further research."

Dr Avery added: "Unreported hearing impairment has an impact upon other aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives. Our analysis shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with a moderate to profound hearing impairment experience greater inequality in educational, employment and health outcomes compared to those with no hearing impairment.

"For example, 41 per cent of people with no hearing impairment had completed Year 12 or equivalent. This was more than double the percentage for people with a moderate, severe or profound hearing impairment (18 per cent). The proportion of people aged 18 to 64 years with no hearing impairment who were employed (57 per cent) was also higher than for people with a moderate, severe or profound impairment (37 per cent)."

Further information is available in the article Under-reporting of Hearing Impairment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population.

Media notes:

- Long-term hearing impairment refers to persons who reported they had a hearing impairment that has lasted, or is expected to last, more than six months.
- The survey collected data on a range of health conditions, risk factors and use of health services as well as data on language, cultural identification, education, labour force status, income and discrimination – for full details see Survey topics (appendix).

- When reporting ABS data, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (or ABS) must be attributed as the source. For media requests and interviews, contact the ABS Media team at media@abs.gov.au or Dr Scott Avery, Western Sydney University, on 0429 936 347 or media@westernsydney.edu.au.

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