

We're all Ears for Hearing Awareness Week



Aboriginal
Health Council
of Western Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

3 March 2021

During **Hearing Awareness Week**, it is important to remember that Aboriginal Australian children have one of the highest rates of chronic otitis media (middle ear infection) in the world. They are three times more likely than non-Aboriginal children to experience permanent hearing loss associated with ear disease.

Children living in regional and remote communities are particularly at risk of long-term hearing problems due to environmental determinants such as poor housing and infrastructure, overcrowding, and exposure to pollutants such as tobacco smoke.

In Australia, some Aboriginal communities report that up to 40 percent of their children suffer from chronic otitis media.

Early diagnosis and management of otitis media, as well as measures aimed at improving environmental health conditions, are key elements in avoiding hearing loss, and the consequent effect on a child's language, education and psychosocial development.

The Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) model of holistic, comprehensive primary care is best suited to provide this early intervention and to address environmental determinants of poor ear health. ACCHSs are embedded within communities and can provide regular education, screening and treatment for children in a culturally secure, family-oriented environment.

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by Aboriginal people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians. Addressing otitis media will be essential to achieving a number of the goals in the National Agreement, such as increasing the proportion of Aboriginal children assessed as developmentally on track and ensuring Aboriginal students achieve their full learning potential.

Achieving these goals will be vital to reduce the risk of future disadvantage for Aboriginal children, and will require greater consultation with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector.

Hearing Awareness Week is an opportunity to emphasise the ongoing need for stronger action to reduce the prevalence of hearing loss and improve the overall health and social outcomes for Aboriginal people.

March 3rd was **World Hearing Day**. On this day, AHCWA raised awareness about the challenges experienced by Aboriginal people living with hearing loss, as well as highlight how WA health agencies and other health stakeholders can support the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ear and hearing health outcomes.

MEDIA CONTACT: Deisha Price – Phone: (08) 9227 1631, email: Deisha.Price@ahcwa.org