



## Thousands of Aboriginal children at risk of hearing loss

Hearing loss and ear disease is considered a public health emergency in the NT by the World Health Organisation because on average it affects 12 per cent of people in Aboriginal communities. A shortage of specialists in the Northern Territory means 6 thousand children have outstanding referrals to have their ears checked or problems treated. Nine out of 15 youth in the NT's youth detention centre have a recognised hearing problem.



## Tiredness and fatigue are a common issue for deaf people, regardless of how mild or serious their hearing loss might be

According to one study, children suffering from recurrent fatigue tend to miss more school; are at increased risk for poor academic performance, making them less prepared to advance; and are more likely to fail a grade than their non-fatigued peers."



## Keep your child's hearing aid in top condition

Hearing aids, like all electronic devices sometimes break down. Your baby or young child depends on you to check every day that their hearing aids are safe and functioning properly. The sooner you discover problems, the quicker they can be fixed.

## Audiology at the Cutting Edge

The Audiology Australia 2020 Conference in Perth will bring audiologists and other professionals together to forge a proactive and positive approach to the future.

# Severe ear health specialist shortage leaves thousands of Aboriginal children at risk of hearing loss

By [Sowaibah Hanifie](#) for ABC News

Thousands of Aboriginal children have outstanding referrals for specialist hearing appointments in the Northern Territory because services have been cancelled.

Key points:

- 1,200 fewer hearing services have been delivered to Aboriginal children in the NT since 2016
- More than 6,000 children have outstanding referrals to have their ears checked or problems treated
- Nine out of 15 youth in the NT's youth detention centre have a recognised hearing problem

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) NT hearing health report analysed the success of the Hearing Health program delivered to more than 10,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from 2012 to 2018.

Hearing loss and ear disease is considered a public health emergency in the NT by the World Health Organisation because on average it affects 12 per cent of people in Aboriginal communities.

The AIHW report found, while the percentage of youth with hearing loss decreased by 8 per cent over six years, at least 530 outreach audiology services had been made unavailable since 2016. There were also 443 fewer ear, nose and throat teleology services and 253 fewer clinical nurse services from 2016 to 2018.

The report stated the drop was because of a shortage of specialists available through the Federal Government-funded Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC).

The shortage meant 2,600 children and young people had outstanding referrals to see an audiology service to diagnose potential ear problems at the end of 2018.

Three thousand, four hundred and eighty four youth were also overdue for ear, nose and throat appointments, where hearing loss can be assessed and treated.

A Federal Department of Health spokesman said \$500,000 in extra funding would be committed to RAHC in 2021, and an additional \$4 million dollars over three years would go to the NT Government's Healthy Ear Program.

Menzies School of Health Research professor Amanda Leach has been working in hearing health in the NT and said Aboriginal communities were becoming frustrated with service delivery.

"They're not being listened to. They've had this issue for decades and it hasn't really improved," she said.

"Even if you look back at the data from the 1970s, 18 per cent of children under four with ear drum perforations. It's still almost that.

"One elder told me a story of a boy who's now around 14 years of age and still got really big problems with discharging ears and not hearing properly.

"He was first identified as a little kid, before school, and they're still waiting for something to happen for that child."

NT Health Department's Amarjit Anand said a major shortage of fly-in specialists contributed to the long wait lists, as well as an increase in children needing the programs.

She also said there were no courses in the Territory for audiologist qualifications.

"Most of the audiologists who come from RAHC have full-time jobs wherever they live interstate and they actually take leave, annual leave or leave without pay to come work for us," she said.

"We've got discussions happening through Flinders University with Charles Darwin University and also La Trobe university ... to start a program here."

The NT Health department has not set a target for reducing the waiting list.

### **Potential of Aboriginal children stifled because of hearing loss**

Anna Marie Kitchen understands the crippling impact ear problems have on someone's life. Until she was 60 years old, she couldn't hear much of the world around her because she had holes in her eardrums that developed from multiple untreated ear infections soon after she was born.

She had surgery at 15 but wasn't referred for hearing aids that she needed.

Ms Kitchen said her opportunity to receive a good education and achieve her goals were gone.

"It was awful (in school) because people didn't like you. You had an infection. And then of course when you're at school you got the bullies (saying) 'ah, yuck you stink.' because you got an infection," she said.

"I used to run away, I was very miserable at school because of these things.

"It played a big part in losing a lot of things in life and education ... I wanted to be a secretary or something like that, but who's going to answer the phone when you can't hear the other person."



**Photo:** Anna Marie Kitchen hated school because she couldn't hear the teachers and was bullied for her infected ears. (ABC News: Sowaibah Hanifie)

Data from Territory Families indicates in September 2019 nine out of 15 youth detainees at Don Dale Youth Detention centre were identified as needing hearing assessment.

Professor Leach said hearing loss continued to cause low school attendance and delayed social and language development among Aboriginal youth.

"They're misunderstood, those children, because they're not responding to commands or communications ... they can't keep up with their peers so they tend to muck up and have behavioural problems," she said.

"When they (governments) see this hasn't improved, I think that's an enormous thing Australia as a whole has to deal with and take it on as a national priority."

To improve education outcomes, the Territory's Council of Government Schools is lobbying the NT Government to spend \$23.3 million dollars on upgrades to schools across remote and rural regions.

The Catholic Education system has already completed \$500,000 worth of upgrades in all of its Northern Territory schools.

Acting Education Minister Eva Lawler said in a statement she recognised early intervention was vital to treating hearing issues.

She said schools would be able to undertake the upgrades with \$300,000 of funding that they would receive under the four-year term of the Gunner Government.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-16/hearing-loss-affecting-thousands-aboriginal-children/11596888>



This 4 day International Congress on the Education of the Deaf 2020 (ICED 2020) will take place in Brisbane in July 2020.

This not-to-be-missed Congress provides a collaborative learning environment and networking opportunities.

<https://iced2020.com/>

## This high tech jacket fitted with special sensors allows deaf people to 'feel' music on their skin

By [Hasan Chowdhury](#) for The Telegraph



A high-tech jacket is giving deaf people the chance to “feel music” through an immersive experience that aims to open the doors of gigs and concerts to the hard of hearing for the first time.

CuteCircuit, a London-based fashion technology firm which has received funding from the UK government, has created a jacket embedded with sensors that gives wearers sensations, allowing them to feel the sounds of various instruments on different parts of their body.

“The violins can be felt on the arms and the drums on the back,” the company says.

The so-called “Sound Shirt” is fitted with 16 sensors that are woven throughout its fabric. The sensors receive music played in real-time and the sound is transmitted as sensation into the shirt.

Francesca Rosella, the company’s co-founder and chief creative officer, said the technology gives deaf people a chance to experience music through feeling.

A person wearing the shirt can feel a “series of haptic sensations”, which create a feeling of touch on their body which aligns with the music being played.

“Inside the shirt - that by the way is completely textiles, there are no wires inside, so we’re only using smart fabrics - we have a combination of microelectronics ... very thin and flexible, and conductive fabrics,” she said.

“All these little electronic motors are connected with these conductive fabrics so that the garment is soft and stretchable.”

[https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/10/09/high-tech-jacket-fitted-special-sensors-allows-deaf-people-feel/?fbclid=IwAR1UM6pfbviHksxdf38hs\\_h16BiR1mxiKgAJe\\_2U6BXfJYoHUvDcjN8yz1Q](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/10/09/high-tech-jacket-fitted-special-sensors-allows-deaf-people-feel/?fbclid=IwAR1UM6pfbviHksxdf38hs_h16BiR1mxiKgAJe_2U6BXfJYoHUvDcjN8yz1Q)

## How to do a daily check of your child's hearing aid

If you've ever experienced headphones or speakers with a dodgy wire, you'll know how irritating a sound equipment malfunction can be. Now imagine the frustration when that problem affects everything you hear.

Hearing aids are electronic devices and sometimes they will break down. Your baby or young child depends on you to check every day that their hearing aids are safe and functioning properly. The sooner you discover problems, the quicker they can be fixed. If there's a fault with your child's hearing aid, contact us to borrow one while it's repaired.



In this article by Hearing Australia, here's how you can keep your child's hearing aid in top condition:

### **Get the right tools**

When your child is first fitted with hearing aids, your audiologist will give you a hearing aid test kit and show you how to use the items in it. If you need a refresher on how to use it or have any questions, feel free to ask.

### **Quick check**

Chances are, mornings are one of the busiest times of your day. The minimum you want to do is this quick check.

1. Turn the aid on, cup it in your hand, and listen for a whistling sound. If you hear one, you know it's producing sound. If it's not working, check the battery. Also look at the ear mould for wax build up and moisture in its tubing.
2. Do a safety check by ensuring that the battery door is locked and the tubing is securely on the ear hook and glued to the mould.

## Child speech detection test

If your child is old enough to participate, the Child Speech Detection Test or Ling Test, is another good one to knock off in the morning. It checks your child's hearing and the hearing aids at the same time. You can repeat it during the day if you have any concerns or if they are about to do something that focuses on hearing, such as a language lesson or speech therapy.

1. In a quiet room stand about a metre behind your child and say speech sounds in your normal volume (ah, ee, or, oo, mm, s, sh) one at a time in a random order, pausing for your child to respond.
2. Once your child acknowledges or repeats the sound, move onto the next one.
3. Move further away, about two to four metres behind your child, and repeat the exercise so you can see how distance affects their hearing.

How much your child hears with the hearing aids depends on the type and degree of hearing loss. Check with your audiologist to understand what sounds your child should be able to hear at different distances.

If your child is having difficulty, there may be a problem with their hearing aid or a change in their hearing. Do a physical check and the parent listening check and then contact your hearing centre if you have concerns, especially if you suspect a change in hearing.

You can do this in the mornings, but if you're pressed for time, it's not a bad idea to do it in the evenings in preparation for the next day. Here's what to look for.

## Ear mould (from BTE aids only)

- If there's a wax build-up, clear it using a wax tool.
- If the ear mould is dirty, wipe it with a tissue or damp cloth. If that doesn't do the trick, detach mould from the hearing aid and wash it with warm, soapy water. Shake the mould to remove water from tubing and if you have an air puffer, blow air through the tubing and then leave the mould to dry overnight.
- If there's moisture in the tubing, pull mould tubing off the earhook and use a puffer to blow air through the tubing. The bend where the tubing goes into the ear mould is particularly prone to moisture build-up.
- If the tubing is kinked or twisted, get new tubing as it affects the passage of sound to the ear.
- If there are holes or splits in the tubing, take the ear mould to your audiologist for repair or to arrange a new tube as it will cause whistling and affect the sound.

## Hearing aid

- If there are cracks in the case, take it to Hearing Australia for repair as the electronic components might get damaged.
- Check each aid is attached to the correct ear mould. BTE aids usually have a red marker for the right ear and blue for the left. They're often located in the battery compartment

## Battery

- If the battery is leaking or corroded, throw away leaking battery and clean away corrosion, which looks like white powder, on battery contacts and compartment with a cotton bud dipped in methylated spirits. If it's too damaged, take the aid to Hearing Australia for repair.
- Check the battery in a battery tester and change if it is low.

## Other tips

- Use a dry aid kit: storing the aids in a dehumidifier dries them out, reducing the number of repairs. This is especially important in a humid environment or if your child perspires a lot.
- Encourage independence: watch your child's reaction if the hearing aids aren't working and ask them to tell you if something is wrong. Gradually get them involved in looking after their aids
- Keep them dry: unless you have special water-resistant aids, remove before bathing or swimming.
- Remove for sleeping: this is for your child's comfort. If they fall asleep with them on, it's fine to leave them in place for their nap so you don't disturb them.

It's important to check your child's hearing aids daily. You will need to do this until your child is old enough to tell you when something is wrong. <https://bit.ly/2pb0eL3>



The Audiology Australia 2020 Conference in Perth, 'Audiology at the Cutting Edge: Shaping Your Future' will bring audiologists and other professionals together to forge a proactive and positive approach to the future, by sharing and expanding current knowledge, skills and expertise to meet the clinical and operational demands facing audiology. <https://auda2020conference.asn.au/>





**Deafness Forum was part of a delegation** of the Hearing Health Sector Alliance that met with the Government's minister responsible for Hearing, Mark Coulton MP (fourth from left in the photo).

David Brady, chair of Deafness Forum (second from left) briefed Minister Coulton on key consumer issues.

The Hearing Health Sector Alliance advocates at a high level for a whole of government approach to focusing research and funding programs aimed at improving hearing health policy in Australia.

Other members of the Hearing Health Sector Alliance represented at the meeting were Audiology Australia, Australian College of Audiology, Better Hearing Australia, Hearing Aid Manufacturers and Distributors Association of Australia, Hearing Business Alliance, Hearing Care Industry Association, Ear Science Institute Australia and National Acoustic Laboratories.

<http://hearinghealthsectoralliance.org.au/>

## Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association

**Our Vision**  
To lead and promote sign language interpreting across Australia

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) is a not-for-profit body and is the national peak organisation representing the interests of Auslan/English Interpreters and Deaf Interpreters in Australia. <https://aslia.com.au/>

# CONCENTRATION FATIGUE

WHAT IS IT & HOW IT AFFECTS DEAF PEOPLE?



By Ahmed Khalifa for Hear Me Out

Did you know that tiredness and fatigue are a common issue for deaf people, regardless of how mild or serious their hearing loss is?

The issue surrounding concentration fatigue is not something that is immediately obvious to anyone and it's certainly not a topic that you'd normally associate with deaf people.

But it's a common situation and occurs when deaf people can find concentration hard work, to the point where you are so mentally tired, that they can't concentrate anymore.

As someone who knows exactly what that feels like, I can tell you that it sucks.

But it's important to get an understanding of what is it, what are the side-effects and how can you deal with it...whether you are deaf or not (as you can still make it easier for deaf people to deal with it).

Concentration fatigue is a term used when your brain's inhibitory attention mechanisms are working extra hard and it is caused when a person finds concentration hard work.

The average deaf person will have to use various attention mechanism in order to interpret and eventually understand what is said because they have to pay more attention than a person with typical hearing levels because they have to use up more of their brains' resources when listening and lip-reading.

There are many stories of deaf people going through bouts of concentration, and one person who has explained it well is Ian Noon in this blog post, and the following quote is a good example of what it feels like if you want to get an understanding of what it feels like:

"Processing and constructing meaning out of half-heard words and sentences. Making guesses and figuring out context. And then thinking of something intelligent to say in response to an invariably random question. It's like doing jigsaws, Sudoku and Scrabble all at the same time."

If you are learning a new language, you may understand how this feels. When you are listening to someone speak in the language that you are learning, you are then translating it to your spoken language in your head, and then you work on translating your reply to the language you are learning.

This all happens instantly, but it can make you tired, especially if you are still learning the language.

## **The side-effects of concentration fatigue for deaf people**

According to one particular study (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4096811/>)

“...children suffering from recurrent fatigue tend to miss more school (for reasons unrelated to physical ailments); are at increased risk for poor academic performance, making them less prepared to advance; and are more likely to fail a grade than their non-fatigued peers.”

It's worrying enough for parents that their deaf children face barriers during their day-to-day lives. But it is also another thing to worry about if those who are school could fall behind academically, simply because concentrating on hearing, lip-reading and interpreting is hard work.

There are various other side effects too:

1. You feel like having a nap – I'm not one to take naps, but there are times where all that concentration meant that you want to take a quick power nap to get your energy back up.
2. Headaches can come and go – your brain is working hard, so it's natural that headaches can come, especially if you haven't taken a break. This is a challenge because when you are in the zone at work you forget to take a break. And when you get a headache, it's a reminder for you to take a break.
3. People think that you don't sleep enough – because it's not obvious to everyone apart from you, people are quick to judge you that you are not sleeping enough and tells you to do something about that (something which happened to me before).
4. You zone out in your own world – this is the moment when you feel like you hit a brick wall. Your brain is switched off and you stare at a blank space, sometimes without even realising it.
5. People think that you are being rude/lazy/selfish – it's hard to focus when you are tired. So it's natural that you unintentionally don't listen to the other person because you have zoned out or you are suddenly tired from concentrating. And as a result, you give off the impression that you are being rude/lazy/selfish.
6. Important information can be missed – this is evident when someone is talking. And you don't have to be fatigued, as you can be zoning in and out just because you were tired for a moment. And as a result, you missed out on something...and you don't know what.
7. FOMO can happen – it's not uncommon to avoid going to social events because the fatigue has kicked in. You are so desperate to go out, socialise and just have fun. But the fatigue can be a big one and you might either not go to social events or you leave early because you can't cope.
8. You may experience 'deaf anxiety' – a topic that not many people talk about is 'deaf anxiety'. This is when a d/Deaf or hard of hearing person have gone through a moment in their lives which has triggered anxiety as a result of their inability to hear. It's not a nice experience.

## **There are several things you can do to help deal with concentration fatigue**

- take regular breaks throughout the day
- go for walks and breathe in some fresh air
- drink lots of water and keep yourself hydrated throughout the day

- try to be in environments where the background noise is low
- be alone in a quiet space if you need to (and take off your hearing aids if you are wearing one)
- use subtitles or closed captions where possible when watching TV programmes, videos, movies, YouTube clips, etc.
- communicate in areas with good lighting to enable lip-reading
- provide options of a hearing loop system (or audio induction loop), a special type of sound system for use by people with hearing aids
- be aware of those who need space to recover
- try to be open about it to other people about how you are feeling
- when choosing a place to sit, seat yourself close enough to the speaker/lecturer/teacher/instructor

Even though it's not something that can be cured, it can be dealt with better and made easier. If you are hearing and you want to understand better about concentration fatigue, next time you feel like you are tired after a hard day at work, or after a long conversation, or even at social events, think about how deaf people can be even more tired than you if placed in the same situation.

And if you are d/Deaf, remember that you need to make it easier for yourself if you find it hard to focus. Be kind to yourself.

<https://hearmeoutcc.com/concentration-fatigue-affects-deaf-people/>

## Know someone who might like to get their own One in Six?

Drop us a line: [hello@deafnessforum.org.au](mailto:hello@deafnessforum.org.au)

We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay respect to them and their cultures, and to elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the challenge of overcoming high levels of ear health issues among First Nation people and its role in Closing the Gap. We acknowledge the risk to indigenous sign languages and the importance of Auslan.

People with disability have and continue to be subjected to isolation, exploitation, violence and abuse in institutions. We thank the Australian Parliament for its bipartisan support of a Royal Commission into the evil committed on people with disability.

Items in Deafness Forum communications may incorporate or summarise views, standards or recommendations of third parties, which is assembled in good faith but does not necessarily reflect the considered views of Deafness Forum or indicate commitment to a particular course of action. We make no representation or warranty about the accuracy, reliability, currency or completeness of any third party information. We want to be newsworthy and interesting and our aim is to be balanced and to represent views from throughout our community sector but this might not be reflected in particular editions or in a short time period. Content may be edited for style and length.