

Hearing Loss and Fatigue.

Governments Falling
Short on Closing The
Gap.

Hearing Loss Increases
Severity Risks for
People with Medical
Conditions.



Governments Falling Short on Closing The Gap.

The first review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020) finds Australian governments have made little progress towards the Agreement, which is limiting improvements in life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The report, released today by the Australian Government Productivity Commission, finds that governments are not yet sharing power with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a way that enables decisions to be made in genuine partnership. It also finds that little effort has been made to reform government agencies or to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector. Instead, governments have largely taken a business-as-usual approach, pursuing thousands of initiatives that are disconnected from each other and the ambitions of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

[Read and download the Report here.](#)

Have your say. You are invited to [make a submission or a brief comment](#). Submissions are due by 6 October 2023.

A Deafness Forum Australia perspective.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has 17 national socio-economic targets across areas that have an impact on life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Two of the targets, 10 and 11, relate to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Due to the clear links between hearing loss and high rates of incarceration, it is imperative that hearing loss across the life span is considered in any action designed to meet these targets.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience high levels of ear disease and hearing loss from a very early age. It impacts speech and language development, cognitive development and auditory processing ability which inhibit listening skills and leads to poor attention. This can then result in disruptive behaviour in the classroom, poor school attendance and early school leaving. The lack of education then impacts on employment opportunities and income levels and can result in increased contact with the criminal justice system causing a “school to prison pipeline”.

Numerous reviews, inquiries and research findings have made recommendations to

governments to break the cycle of disadvantage, however, the impact of hearing health is often overlooked due to the myriad of other chronic health issues requiring attention. Action is often neglected due to lack of clarity between Commonwealth and State responsibilities to implement such recommendations.

In order to address the impact of hearing health on Closing the Gap target 10 and 11, and to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system, it is recommended that:

a) existing programs that target ear disease and hearing loss in children, work to improve school attendance and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples gain employment be strengthened. These programs will also support the Closing the Gap targets of Children Thriving in their Early Years (Target 4) and Students Achieve their Full Learning Potential (Target 5).

b) targeted funding be made available for a culturally appropriate hearing program to be established nationally to address the needs people within the criminal justice system including the juvenile system. The program would need to include:

- Education programs for all staff working within both the juvenile and criminal justice systems, to increase awareness of the impact of chronic ear disease experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adults and to provide information on appropriate strategies and programs to meet the needs of people with ear disease and hearing loss.
- Education and counselling programs for individuals who may not realise they have a hearing loss or that treatment options are available, or, due to cultural reasons may feel shame about having a hearing loss or wearing an assistive listening device.
- Community education on the link between hearing loss and involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

- Provision of hearing assessment prior to a person's court appearance.
- If hearing loss is identified appropriate interventions must be provided before the court appearance or supports provided to ensure a fair hearing.
- Provision of hearing assessment prior to a person being admitted to prison with regular assessments provided during the person's stay in prison.
- Clinical pathways to medical advice and treatment as well as rehabilitation options including assistive listening device fitting where indicated.
- Provision of devices such as sound field amplification system and other mechanisms for improving the acoustic environment for those with hearing loss.
- Access to hearing support services once the person leaves prison.
- National data source on hearing loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contact with the criminal justice system within the National Prisoner Health Data Collection.

It is essential the recommended services are culturally appropriate and involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members in all aspects of the program to ensure initiatives are tailored to meet the cultural needs of individuals.

The implementation of these initiatives would lead to a reduction in the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems and will also prevent further deaths in custody resulting from the consequences of unidentified and untreated ear disease.

Read more in Deafness Forum's submission to the Australian Government, [Closing The Gap: Addressing the Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Criminal Justice System](#).

To Improve Diagnosis and Treatment of Vestibular Disorders.

By Brenda Patoine for [Harvard Catalyst](#).

When you think of the five senses, you are probably not thinking “vestibular.” Divya Chari does, and she wants you to know that the inner ear does more than hear. It is also critical to how we perceive our body in space.

The Massachusetts (U.S.) Eye and Ear specialist is already shining new light on the forgotten child of sensory disorders, vestibular dysfunction.

What is vestibular dysfunction? It is a disturbance in the body's balance system. It can interfere with activities of daily living. Diagnosis is a challenge, and without more exacting diagnostics, treatment is a trial-and-error slog that steals time from patients.

Divya Chari's approach straps patients into a moving, tilting, rolling chair for a battery of tests designed to pinpoint the precise source of the problem.

Divya said her goal is to improve the diagnostics of vestibular disorders and treating it right the first time. Symptoms of vestibular disorders overlap considerably, so a major focus is to understand why a person is having symptoms and to differentiate vestibular disorders from one another.

“Vestibular disorders often get ignored in research on sensory dysfunction, even though they affect many people,” she said.



“But hearing is not the only thing that the inner ear does. Many of those patients also suffer from symptoms of dizziness, imbalance, and vertigo that lead to significant morbidity and reduced quality of life. Paying attention to those symptoms is important.

“There's still so much we don't know about the inner ear. Acute or chronic vestibular disorders can be more readily identified by the damage they cause, but many vestibular disorders are episodic in nature, meaning that people might have symptoms some days but not on others. The episodic nature of symptoms can make it challenging to come to a definitive diagnosis.”

Meniere's disease and vestibular migraine are two disorders that pose a particular challenge because they have similar symptoms and a high rate of co-occurrence. Although treatments exist for both disorders, the treatments are very different.

How might this work on Vestibular Disorders change clinical practice?

“That’s the million-dollar question, and I think this is where our test battery has the potential to have a large impact” Divya said.

“Currently, we rely on clinical history for diagnosis. We ask questions about symptoms, then apply a defined set of clinical consensus criteria to the answers. That process is highly variable. It’s very patient-dependent and provider-dependent. We need better diagnostic tools to help us understand, diagnose, and tailor our treatments.

“If we can better differentiate definite Meniere’s from definite migraine, we might also be able to identify patients in the middle. Our hope is that this can be more broadly applied to a larger group of patients with vestibular dysfunction and inner-ear disease.



[Divya Chari](#) M.D.

“Right now, we have a number of treatments for vestibular migraine, and other treatments for Meniere’s disease, but we often don’t know which one to use. We’ll try one and if that doesn’t work, we try another, and so on. It’s trial-and-error.

“Getting to a more definitive diagnosis quicker allows us to tailor treatment more effectively. That has the potential to decrease suffering and improve the patient’s quality of life much more quickly.”

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National Relay Service: Survey Results.

During May, the National Relay Service (NRS) asked users to provide feedback on how the NRS can improve their experiences and continue to meet community needs. The survey allows the NRS to monitor user sentiment and consider opportunities for improvement to the service.

The key findings of the survey include:

- NRS users continue to have a positive experience with the service on par with the survey conducted in February 2022.
- Opportunities exist for the NRS to engage with larger organisations regularly contacted by NRS users to improve call taking processes.
- There are opportunities for improvements to features.
- There are also opportunities for further improvements to Relay Officer processes and training.

You can read the [survey results here](#) or you can see the results of the survey in a [video in Auslan](#). This video has no sound or captions.





Hearing Loss Increases Fatigue in 40+.

A recent study shows people with hearing loss are nearly twice as likely to experience daily fatigue compared to those with ordinary hearing.

By [Karl Strom](#) for [Hearing Aid Tracker](#)

The [study](#) was conducted by a team of researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine U.S.

This research is thought to be the first national study to establish a connection between the effort expended by individuals with hearing loss to process sounds and its long-term impact on their overall health.

Audiologist and study co-author [Nicholas S. Reed, AuD, PhD](#), said the findings provide insights into the adverse health effects experienced by those with hearing loss. These effects may even extend beyond fatigue and encompass decreased physical activity, poorer mental health, and cognitive function.

“Fatigue caused by hearing loss could help explain other findings such as the association between hearing loss and decreased physical activity,” says lead-author Kening Jiang, MHS.

The research highlights the importance of addressing hearing loss as an integral part of overall health management. The sample had too

few people who use hearing aids, limiting conclusions about how amplification might reduce fatigue. However, by recognising and treating hearing loss, healthcare professionals can help alleviate the burden of chronic fatigue and improve the overall wellbeing of individuals with hearing loss. As fatigue impacts people on a daily basis, the researchers hope to hone in on mediating factors between it and other physiological ramifications, potentially including cognitive decline or dementia.

“This work adds more evidence that age-related hearing loss can impact our health in many ways,” says Reed. “It’s important for audiologists to continue to use this evidence to push for policy changes to ensure accessible and affordable hearing care and appropriate accommodations across public and work settings.”

The study authors say more research is warranted to explore fatigue’s multidimensional aspects and how hearing loss may contribute to different types of physical and mental fatigue. They say understanding how hearing loss impacts other health outcomes is crucial for comprehensive care and intervention strategies, particularly for future policy decision-making.

Original paper: [doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2023.1328](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoto.2023.1328)

Hearing aid features explained.



The National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL) introduces its new consumer guide to hearing aid technology features.

NALguide: Hearing Aid Features Explained is a new resource to help hearing aid users and the general public understand the large, and often overwhelming, landscape of hearing aid technology available in the hearing device market today.

The guide is presented from the perspective of consumer listening needs.

NALguide is accessible as a downloadable PDF as well as an interactive webpage on the NAL website which provides more detailed information:

https://www.nal.gov.au/nal_products/nalguide-hearing-aid-features-explained/

The aim for this guide is to be a relevant and evolving resource to inform the typical hearing aid consumer, and to facilitate discussions with their hearing healthcare professional.

The principle behind the guide.

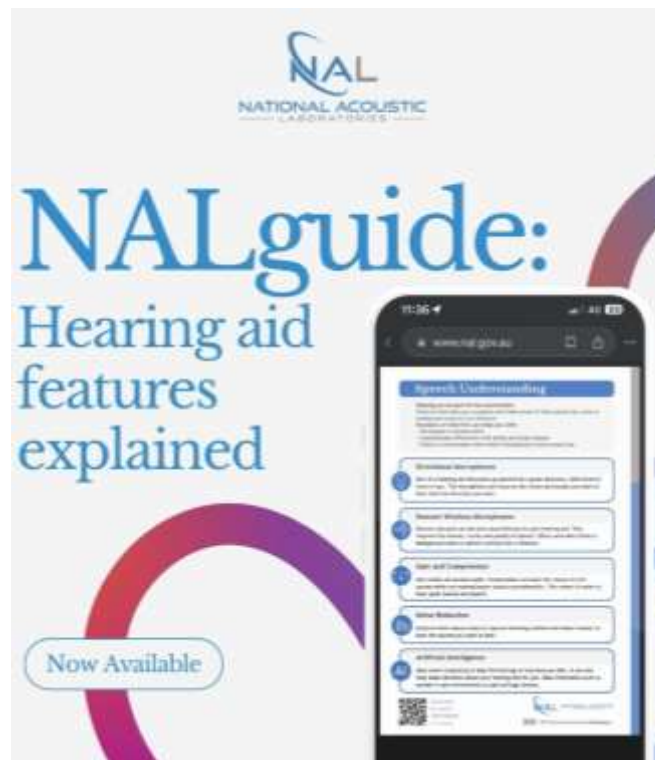
With information available from such a wide array of sources it can often be difficult to navigate and understand these technologies and

features, particularly when a person finds themselves evaluating opinions, reviews, and marketing materials.

This guide was carefully consolidated and compiled from a wide range of publicly available sources and refined to communicate no preference or bias toward a certain feature, manufacturer, or technology level.

NALguide was created to empower hearing aid users and other stakeholders to better understand and discuss hearing aid technology, and to ultimately achieve the best outcomes for their individual needs.

This work was undertaken with support from and in consultation with the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care, The Hearing Aid Manufacturers and Distributors Association of Australia, and the Deafness Forum Australia.



Try out [NALguide: Hearing Aid Features Explained](https://www.nal.gov.au/nal_products/nalguide-hearing-aid-features-explained/).

Chemo-related Hearing Loss May Have Emotional, Social Impacts in Testicular Cancer Survivors.



By [Darlene Dobkowski](#) writing for [Cure Today](#)

One in three testicular cancer survivors who experienced hearing loss after chemotherapy reported significant functional impairment, recent study findings demonstrated.

“After cisplatin-based chemotherapy (a chemotherapy drug used to treat testicular, ovarian, bladder, head and neck, lung and cervical cancer) hearing loss develops rapidly because of inner-ear damage including the inner and outer sensory hair cells, spiral-ganglion neurons, stria vascularis and injury to central auditory pathways,” the researchers wrote in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

“The hearing loss is permanent, becoming a chronic health condition.”

Researchers analysed data from testicular cancer survivors who were treated with first-line cisplatin-based chemotherapy.

Although cisplatin is widely used for the treatment of cancers like testicular cancer, it is highly ototoxic, meaning it can cause damage to the ear.

“Cisplatin is one of the most ototoxic drugs in clinical use, causing permanent hearing loss in both ears in up to 80% of cancer survivors, with many experiencing ringing of the ears,” the researchers wrote.

Of the survivors in this study, 56% reported hearing loss and 60% reported experiencing tinnitus. Ten percent of survivors with hearing loss used hearing aids, and 35% reported significant functional impairment associated with hearing loss.

The research found that severe functional impairment was linked with fatigue, cognitive dysfunction and worse overall health.

In addition, testicular cancer survivors with more severe hearing loss or severe tinnitus were more likely to report that they experienced depression, cognitive dysfunction, fatigue and lower overall health.

“Cisplatin should not be avoided, but attention must be turned to survivorship, including an awareness of the functional impact of ototoxicity,” the researchers wrote.

Routine follow-up of adult-onset cisplatin-treated ototoxicity in cancer survivors should begin with pre-chemotherapy baseline measurements, resume shortly after treatment and include annual query for hearing loss/tinnitus status and severity, especially as patients age, so that they can access proper available treatments and strategies.



Get Help with Your Hearing.

The Australian Government has created a national awareness campaign to encourage people with untreated or developing hearing loss (aged 50–70 years) to proactively manage their hearing health.

Hearing loss is common among Australians, with 1 in 6 people experiencing some form of difficulty hearing. Left untreated, it affects mental and physical health and has a big impact on everyday life. That's why it's important to think about hearing in the same way we think about other aspects of our health.

Many Australians with hearing loss do not seek treatment but help is available. Having a hearing test can help to detect the early signs of hearing loss, so you can keep your hearing healthy for longer. Hearing aids are not the only treatment for hearing loss. Following a hearing check, a range of management options may be discussed.

If you are concerned about your hearing, or the hearing of someone you love, book a hearing check today. Talk to your health professional or visit [health.gov.au/hearing](https://www.health.gov.au/hearing) for more information.

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Simon's World Of Colourful Sounds.

Simon is a carefree boy with partial hearing. He wakes up one day and discovers that his world has become silent. He goes from wearing a hearing aid to getting a cochlear – a small electronic device – surgically implanted.

Although the sounds are not perfect, he learns to cope and finds joy again.

Simon's World Of Colourful Sounds is inspired by first-time author and teacher Adeline Lynn Quek's former stint at Singapore's Canossian School, a special education school for children with hearing loss.

Adeline is now a teacher at a primary school.

"I love how they carried their challenges with smiles and the way they uplifted one another, even their teachers." She says of the students at Canossian School.

The fictional character of Simon embodies their positivity and gives readers a glimpse into the lives of those who are differently abled.



Picture book Simon's World Of Colourful Sounds is written by Adeline Lynn Quek and illustrated by Lee Kowling. Photos by Louise Choy Haohua and Pacesetters.

Buy a copy of the hardcover book at publisher Pacesetters' [website](#) and Books Kinokuniya.

From Singapore's [The Straits Times](#).

Boost for Ear Health.

In celebrating the recent NAIDOC week, Alcoa announced its global charity, the Alcoa Foundation, will provide Earbus Foundation of WA with three years of funding to continue to deliver its program across the communities near where Alcoa operates in the Kwinana, Peel and Upper South West regions of Western Australia.

This commitment builds on funding Alcoa has already provided in support of our one-stop ear health service in this part of WA since 2018. To date, Alcoa funding has enabled Earbus to provide ear assessments for 1,350 children across 33 schools, daycares and early learning centres. This has included 3,046 ear screens, 1,647 hearing tests and 844 health checks.



Alcoa Australia President, Matt Reed with Alcoa Earbus Program Coordinator, Chontae Hayden.

Earbus CEO and Co-founder, Dr Lara Shur, said the program was crucial for improving the lives of some of the most at-risk children in WA.

“This renewed partnership with Alcoa will allow us to continue this vital program with our team that includes an ear health screener, audiologist

and nurse practitioner, enabling us to provide a quality screening, treatment and surveillance program,” Dr Shur said.



Alcoa Australia President. Matt Reed, said the company was keen to help build on that success as there is nothing more important than a child’s health or education.

“Middle ear disease seriously impacts early childhood development and we are proud to be helping to turn this around so these children can learn and achieve their full potential,” Mr Reed said.



The [Earbus Foundation](#) of WA recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. Celebrating were Earbus CEO Lara Shur and executive director Paul Higginbotham.

Hearing Loss Increases Severity Risks for People with Medical Conditions.

A new study in 'The Lancet' shows that hearing loss is associated with a significantly greater risk for increases in hospitalisation, long-term care placement, emergency visits, adverse drug events, and falls.

Hearing loss has been linked to increased mortality and the risk of dementia in various studies. However, less is known about its association with other crucial health conditions like cardiovascular disease, hospitalisation, and long-term care facility placement. Additionally, the burden of comorbidities (the presence of one or more additional medical conditions or diseases in an individual who already has a primary condition) among people with hearing loss remains underexplored.

This new study aimed to investigate the association between hearing loss and a wide range of medical outcomes. The study aimed to assess the burden of comorbidities among individuals with hearing loss and identify factors that might modify the link between hearing loss and negative health outcomes.

Key findings from the research

- **Burden of Comorbidity:** Hearing loss was found to be independently associated with a significantly higher burden of comorbidity, even after adjusting for age and sex.

- Hearing loss was linked to an excess risk of various adverse clinical outcomes such as hospitalisation, placement in long-term care facilities, emergency department visits, adverse drug events, and falls.
- **Effect Modification:** The magnitude of the excess risk related to Hearing Loss appeared to be higher in individuals who were younger or had fewer comorbidities.

Possible Reasons for Excess Risk

Communication barriers between healthcare providers and people with Hearing Loss might contribute to drug events, hospitalisation, and emergency visits. The higher risk of falls could be attributed to increased cognitive load, reduced environmental awareness, or other sensory impairments.

Actions

Research on the causes, consequences, and optimal treatment of Hearing Loss is underfunded. Increased investment in hearing loss research is necessary to address the global burden of this condition.

The study highlights that people with hearing loss constitute a high-risk group that requires prioritised interventions, especially considering the potentially preventable nature of many adverse outcomes.

The study supports the need for coordinated national strategies for ear and hearing care, involving diverse stakeholders and addressing the lack of public health actions in this domain.

The high burden of serious medical illness among people with hearing loss, the potential for early intervention to improve outcomes argue in favour of increased investment aimed at preventing hearing loss while improving health care for those already affected.

Read the complete article at [eClinicalMedicine](#)

Training Resources for Hearing Assistance in Aged Care & Hospitals.



Up to 80 per cent of Australians aged over 70 have some hearing loss. This increases to around 85% in residential aged care. However, staff of aged care service providers and hospitals are seldom adequately trained to assist those with hearing loss.

An effective hearing assistance program benefits staff as well as those they care for and, if performed systematically, should not be time-consuming.

[These free resources](#) may be helpful for family carers and volunteers who support hearing-impaired people in the community.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care commissioned a suite of [Aged care workforce online training tools](#). The module, Hearing Health Introductory and Refresher Module is one of a series of free online learning modules to support aged care workers with foundational knowledge on key concepts in aged care.

National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing

The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care commissioned the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University, in partnership with Consumers Health Forum, to develop a **National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing**.

The purpose of this strategy is to mobilise a person-centred prevention system by involving communities and consumers in preventive health policy design and implementation in order to enable and support a more engaged population and improved health outcomes for all Australians.

This strategy will equip policy-makers (those involved in informing, designing and developing policy) and program developers with knowledge, frameworks and skills to engage effectively and purposefully with consumers and communities in the design and development of preventive health policies and programs. This Strategy will also support the engagement of consumers, community groups and consumer and community organisations with policy-makers.

The strategy is one of the early priorities in the [National Preventive Health Strategy](#).

The Mitchell Institute has developed a draft strategy for public consultation. The feedback received from this consultation will be used to finalise the draft strategy.

You can find the Consultation on the draft strategy on the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's [Consultation Hub](#).

It is important to the development of the National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing that a broad range of views are heard.

Visit the [Consultation Hub](#).

Important Information About Changes to Child Care Subsidy.

Child Care Subsidy is the main way the Australian Government is helping families with the cost of early childhood education and care. Changes to Child Care Subsidy commenced from 10 July 2023. Most families using early childhood education and care will now get more and some families previously not eligible will now get it.

The changes mean early childhood education and care is now more affordable for more families. Out-of-pocket costs will reduce for around 96% of families currently using child care, and no family will be worse off.

To find out more you can visit childcaresubsidy.gov.au

For translated materials, you can visit child-care-subsidy-campaign/translated-materials

A resources kit contains:

- [Fact sheet](#) in English, Arabic, Chinese Simplified and Traditional, Greek, Italian, Korean and Vietnamese.
- [Infographic](#) in English and translated into 7 languages as above.
- [Poster](#) in English and translated into 7 languages as above.

Should you have questions or require assistance, please contact projects@embracesociety.com.au

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