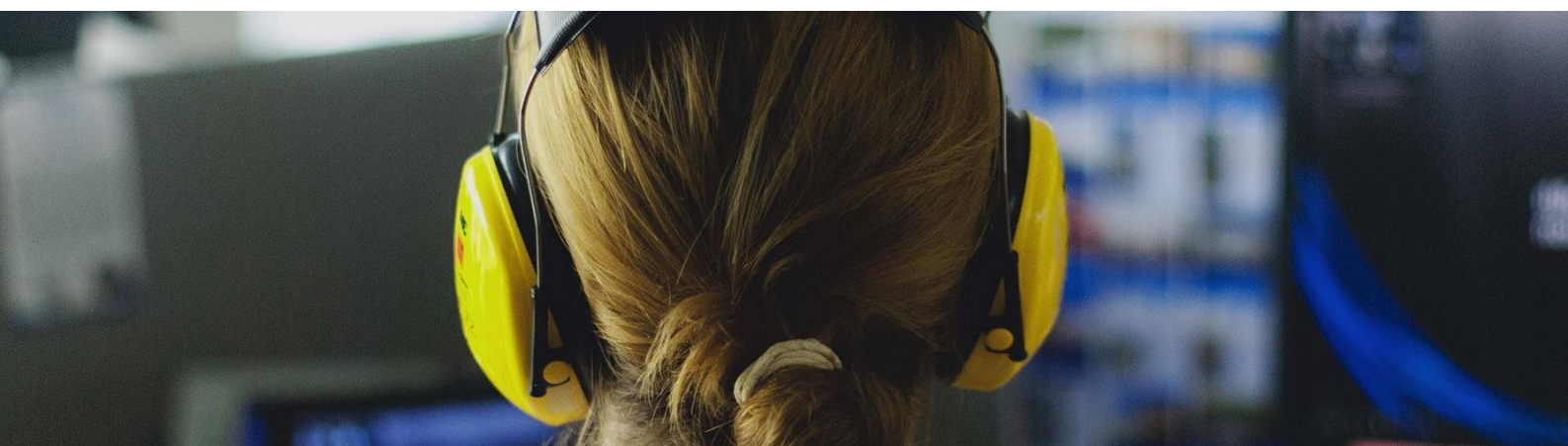

Headphone culture

Advocating for less noise
and more quiet

The global issue of hearing loss

World Hearing Day 2023: Ear and hearing care for all! Let's make it a reality



Each year on 3 March, World Hearing Day raises awareness of hearing loss and promotes ear and hearing care. In 2023 we highlight the importance of integrating ear and hearing care within primary care as an essential component of universal health coverage.

Ear and hearing problems are among the most common health issues, and 60% of them can be identified and addressed at the primary level of care, the point where most people first contact the health system.

Addressing hearing loss can have a positive impact on many aspects of an individual's life, leading to successful communication and interpersonal relationships; speech, language and cognitive development in children; healthy ageing; education and employment opportunities; and good mental health and wellbeing.

Integrating ear and hearing care into primary care services is an important step towards addressing preventable hearing loss and reducing the burden associated with untreated hearing loss.

In children, almost 60% of hearing loss occurs due to causes that can be prevented through immunization and improved maternal and

neonatal care. In adults, legislation on noise control and safe listening, as well as surveillance of ototoxicity (damage to the hearing system resulting from medicines and chemicals), can reduce the potential for hearing loss. Regular screenings ensure that ear diseases and hearing problems are identified at the earliest stage.

Primary ear and hearing care training manual and screening app

To further promote ear and hearing care, the World Health Organization will mark World Hearing Day 2023 with the launch of its new primary ear and hearing care training manual.

Intended for primary care health workers, the manual offers a practical guide to the prevention, identification and management of hearing loss and common ear diseases that may lead to it.

Launch of World Hearing Forum website

The World Hearing Forum (Deafness Forum Australia is a member) has launched a website under the banner 'Ear and hearing care for all!'.

The website contains powerful stories of high-profile supporters and everyday changemakers – people from around the world living with hearing loss. We hope their stories will help generate awareness while driving action on hearing loss. <https://worldhearingforum.org/>

Amplifying the global issue of hearing loss

Hearing loss affects 20% of the global population. In a decade, it has risen from the 11th leading cause of years lived with disability to the 3rd.

A complex web of determining factors impacts hearing at different stages of life, including genetic characteristics, health conditions, living and working environment and age.

Many causes of hearing loss are preventable through public health measures. But it can become a chronic condition and worsen over time if not managed.

Many people with hearing loss do not actively seek hearing care for various reasons including limited awareness, high cost, and stigma. People with uncorrected hearing loss can experience difficulties with communication, mental health problems, social isolation, and a high unemployment rate.

In the World Report on Hearing published in 2021, WHO recommended a comprehensive set of interventions covering prevention, management, rehabilitation, and environmental factors.

A study published last year in The Lancet Global Health used data from 172 countries to examine the cost-effectiveness of the interventions recommended by WHO. It estimates that 90% implementation of the core interventions will avert 130 million DALYs - ie, a monetary gain of \$1.3 trillion - in 10 years, corresponding to a return of \$15 for every \$1 invested.

Hearing aids are one major component of this set of cost-effective interventions, serving as first-line clinical management.



But for hearing aids to truly aid, some challenges must be tackled. First and foremost, cost.

The global supply of hearing aids is mainly controlled by manufacturers head-quartered in high-income countries, whose current pricing strategies seem to overlook affordability in low-income and middle-income countries (MICs).

Therefore, to bring down the price of hearing aids, investments and infra-structural support should be directed to new manufacturers located in MICs to develop safe and low-cost hearing aids with features that satisfy local needs.

In addition, national universal health coverage plans should consider including hearing aids and other hearing care to reduce out-of-pocket payment.

Affordable devices remove the financial barrier, yet other factors influencing people's willingness to use hearing aids still stand in the way.

A second challenge would be to mobilise people. Raising awareness of hearing loss and the harm of untreated hearing impairment is a crucial step.





Headphone culture is making young people deaf to health warnings.

Lengthy exposure to loud noises is affecting the hearing ability of a growing number of people, especially those who are part of the "headphone culture". But few are listening to the experts' concerns.

By Guy Kelly for The Sydney Morning Herald.
Image by Shutterstock.

If Nicole Russell could turn back the clock, she'd probably turn down the volume, too. In 2004, when she was seven years old, she picked up an Apple iPod, plugged in a pair of the standard white headphones, pressed play, cranked it up and formed a habit she'd enjoy for "at least five hours a day" for the next decade. She'd listen in the morning, on the way to school, during breaks, even as she fell asleep.

A few years later, she was in the car – listening to music, of course – with her father, Dave, when he told her to turn the volume down. "He was like, 'Niki, what the hell?'" Russell, now 24, says. "It made me so embarrassed, I'd just say, 'But it has to be this loud... it's the only way I can hear it.' I didn't know there was a problem then. I thought it was just me."

Throughout her school years in California – where the problem was made worse when headphones, used with iPads, became

mandatory for many lessons, as they are in some schools here – Russell struggled to hear in class and spoke loudly, often resulting in being shushed, "which isn't exactly great for self-esteem". When she watched television, she would turn the volume up high and add subtitles to help her follow.

Eventually, while at university, doctors diagnosed her with hearing loss in both ears, though for some reason it was slightly worse in her left and said there could only be one cause: the excessive loud music.

"I was told it had been accumulating over years, just getting worse," Russell says. "I didn't want it to be true, but it was a relief to know and be able to change things."

And change things she did. The volume came down; her awareness of noise went up. But the damage is going nowhere. She will have hearing loss for life.

The main form of preventable hearing loss in Australian adults is noise-induced, increasingly from lengthy exposure to loud music in young people. A [report by the World Health Organisation](#) claims that nearly half those aged between 12 and 35 – or 1.1 billion young people – are at risk of hearing loss "due to prolonged and excessive exposure to loud sounds, including music they listen to through personal audio devices".

The world we live in is louder than ever, but many people are exacerbating the strain on their ears by constantly listening to music or watching videos on smartphones.

“If you have a particularly noisy commute and turn the music up to hear it, try listening to it at that volume in a quiet room. It’s painfully loud. I’d like to say it was improving, but people just generally don’t know about safe listening levels, and in a culture where headphones are everywhere, that’s dangerous,” explains Francesca Oliver, an audiology specialist.

“Biologically, our ears have not adapted to withstand the volume of noise most of us encounter – or subject ourselves to – almost every day. For example, anyone using headphones should listen at less than half the maximum volume for no more than half an hour at a time, but how many people know that, let alone implement it? If you have a particularly noisy commute and turn the music up to hear it, try listening to it at that volume in a quiet room. It’s painfully loud. So imagine what that’s doing to your ears.”

There is nuance to the statistics, of course: genetic factors, such as mutations in inner ear sensory cells, make some people more susceptible to hearing loss – especially the age-related kind. (It’s believed the causes of this are 35 to 55 per cent genetic.) But while much is still being done to tackle going deaf in old age, the focus of many audiologists has shifted to avoidable, noise-related hearing loss.

“Another problem is that people are often quite reluctant to admit they have hearing loss, especially the young,” says Oliver. Put plainly: the human race is losing its hearing.

How loud is too loud?

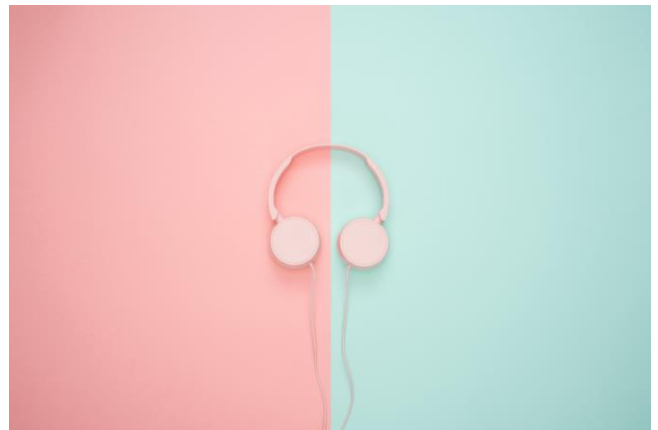
As anybody who has ever fought with an elderly person over the volume control on a television knows, there are competing definitions for what constitutes “loud”, but fortunately audiologists, such as Oliver and Howard, have a more concrete answer: most agree the “safe sound threshold” sits at around 80 to 85 decibels (dB) – somewhere between a vacuum cleaner and an alarm clock.

Where it gets more complex is when time is introduced. After eight hours’ exposure at 85dB, hearing is damaged. That’s fine, nobody listens to an alarm or Hoover for eight hours.

Most agree the “safe sound threshold” sits at around 80 to 85 decibels (dB) – typically somewhere between a vacuum cleaner and an alarm clock. Where it gets more complex is when time is introduced.

The scale is then exponential: each increment of 3dB doubles the pressure, therefore halving the safe exposure time. An iPod at full blast is around 100dB, the same as a nightclub or hairdryer. Just 15 minutes of that can result in hearing loss.

Moving up the scale, a rock concert is about 113dB – though some groups, like Motorhead, proclaimed “the loudest band on earth” for reaching 130dB in 1984, push it far more – meaning well over a minute can be dangerous. A pneumatic drill is harmful after one second. A gun blast is even quicker. Even gym weights crashing can reach 140dB, enough to give permanent damage in one go.



Sound is a force that can destroy more than ear-hair cells. One of the loudest noises ever recorded, the Krakatoa volcanic eruption in 1883 – estimated at 180dB at a distance of 160 kilometres – didn’t just burst eardrums within 65 kilometres, it was heard as two rifle shots in Alice Springs, 3600 kilometres away.

Slowly, governments and industries are starting to understand this information and legislate accordingly, but in reality, it’s up to us.





Advocating for less noise and more quiet.

Over the years, groups and organisations have been formed to deal with the growing noise problem in our world.

Arline Bronzaft writes, “In New York City, I have assisted local community groups in their efforts to reduce the city’s noise.”

On a larger scale, I have become affiliated with some more national organisations. One of them, Quiet Communities, is a non-profit group that aims to work with communities throughout the U.S. to reduce the harmful noises in their environments (<https://quietcommunities.org>).

I am most involved with two of its programs: Quiet American Skies and Quiet Coalition. The Quiet American Skies program works with anti-noise aircraft groups across the United States and assists with their efforts to provide a safer, quieter, and healthier aviation system.

The Quiet Coalition is comprised of a group of health, science, and legal professionals concerned about the impacts of noise on health. This group hopes to encourage public officials to study the growing literature on the link between noise and health to move forward in introducing public policies to address the issue of noise pollution and provide for a quieter and healthier environment.

I joined the Board of Right to Quiet in Canada (<https://quiet.org>). This group was established to raise public awareness of the dangers of noise pollution to our health and wellbeing and to advocate for better legislation and the comparable enforcement of this legislation to reduce noise.

As its name indicates, Right to Quiet views quiet as a basic human right.

More closely related to noise and hearing has been my association with the Center for Hearing and Communication (CHC) (www.chc.org) in New York City.

In 1996, I was especially pleased to join Nancy Nadler, the Deputy Executive Director of CHC, in initiating International Noise Awareness Day (INAD), celebrated on the fourth Wednesday of April. While INAD was a New York City event at its inception, it is now celebrated throughout the United States and globally, <https://noiseawareness.org/>.

As an academic, I endorse research, but when it comes to noise, I believe there is sufficient research to link noise to hearing deficits, health issues, and learning loss, allowing legislators to introduce policies to reduce environmental noise pollution.



By Arline L. Bronzaft PhD is Professor Emerita, City University of New York. Her article is from [Canadian Audiologist](#)



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Excessive noise is an often-neglected form of environmental pollution. We are constantly bombarded by excessive noise: from leaf blowers and lawn mowers, motorcycles, loud car stereos, barking dogs, helicopters, airplanes, noisy neighbours, car traffic, raucous restaurants, and honking horns.

All this acoustic chaos is very harmful. High noise levels are associated with heart disease, elevated blood pressure, hearing loss, sleep deprivation, ringing of the ears, headaches, and chronic fatigue.

Excessive noise is also a cause of reduced property values and decreased job and academic performance.

Noise is also a climate change issue.

Lawn and garden equipment is responsible for around 5% of the nation's air pollution. An EPA study indicates that a fuel-powered leaf blower creates as much nitrogen oxide emissions and volatile organic compounds in one hour as 11 cars being driven for one hour.

Noise is also an ecosystem issue.

High-intensity sound can induce fear, causing species to abandon their habitat. Birds are having to chirp louder because of the constant din. Since the 1960s, there has been a 16-fold increase in ocean noise, posing a threat to fish, dolphins, and other marine life.

Prevention better than cure.

An estimated one million Australians may be exposed to hazardous levels of noise at work in the absence of hearing protection. Occupational hearing loss is one of the most widespread, yet preventable, workplace injuries.

The industries with the highest number of claims were in manufacturing, construction and transport. Airline workers, DJs, emergency responders, tradies and farmers are also at risk.

According to [Safe Work Australia](#), 23,693 workers' compensation claims were made in Australia for hearing loss, between 2015 - 2020. Of these claims, 80% came from trades, labourers, and machinery operators.

"Noise induced hearing loss is irreversible, so we all have a part to play in preventing exposure while promoting awareness of the issue, especially in the industries of concern," says James Aldridge, CEO of medical service and health testing company Assist Group.

"In Australia, there is a culture of just getting the job done, no worries. But at what cost?"

"Prevention is better than cure, however in this case, there is no cure for noise induced hearing loss," said Mr Aldridge.

Repeated or lengthy exposure to sounds above 85 decibels can cause permanent damage. If a worker needs to frequently wear personal hearing protection to protect them from workplace noise above the noise exposure standard, an audiometric test must be provided to the worker at regular intervals throughout their employment as part of an ongoing hearing conservation program.

For more information on how you can manage noise and preventable hearing loss at work, download [Safe Work Australia's Model Code of Practice: Managing noise and preventing hearing loss at work](#).



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On track for reduced noise pollution.

The whistle coming down the tracks is the sound of Europe's rail renaissance. Coming round the bend is increased adoption of high-speed rail that promises to reduce road traffic and to curb harmful emissions.

Prioritising sustainable rail transport promises significant benefits but unfortunately, it comes with unseen dangers of its own and not just for passengers. One of the lesser-known hazards of rail transport is the kind of noise pollution nobody can hear. Inaudible, low frequency ground vibrations emanate from the rolling stock on the railway as it passes. As well as affecting the structural integrity of nearby infrastructure, these vibrations can have a detrimental effect on people's health, causing headaches, fatigue and even irritability in people experiencing them.

The [BioMetaRail project](#) is researching and developing special barriers deployed alongside the track to absorb the vibrations. The barrier walls rely on their shape for their noise reduction performance, rather than the properties of the material. Known as metamaterials, these synthetic composite materials have designer properties not found in nature. Their internal structures are engineered

to interact with the low frequency sound waves of a passing train to trap and insulate against them.

"Basically, the idea is that we use shapes that have some resonant effects at frequencies that are typical for vibrations in the railway sector," Capellari from Phononic Vibes, a company that specialises in noise and vibration technology said. In this context, the frequency of vibrations is typically between 30 and 60 Hertz. The result is a design for a two-by-three metre concrete structure that resembles a large window.

For ease of installation, there is no need to lift the railway line as these panels can be inserted into the ground alongside the track like a sunken fence, to protect clusters of homes or buildings.

Ultimately, these panels will be lining the ground alongside the track in residential areas, allowing rail networks to significantly boost their train traffic without adversely affecting the people and buildings nearby.

The European Union is committed to growing its rail transportation as part of [the European Green Deal](#) which aims to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050.

By Sarah Wild, [Horizon: The EU Research & Innovation Magazine](#)

Does lower-level noise play a factor in long-term health consequences?

By Marshall Chasin, AuD

The topic of how lower levels of environmental noise affects the body has been formally studied since just after WWII, yet has not really shown anything definitive about long-term effects related to sleep disruption, annoyance, or overall stress.

Some people, in some circumstances, and with some types of noise, are more susceptible to its effects than are others. This may be a dose-related effect or even a genetic predisposition, or not – the literature is unclear on this.

There are no “smoking gun” studies, that definitively describe predictable and associated effects of low-level noise exposures. All that can realistically be said is that for a range of low-level environmental exposures, some people are quite susceptible to its effects, whereas others are not, and these effects can include sleep disruption, potentially cognitive and educational issues, and an increase in stress and annoyance.

While lower levels of environmental noise alone do not cause measurable hearing loss, and it is questionable whether any of its effects are long-term, it is true that environmental noise can degrade one’s quality of life on a number of levels. And, despite the lack of any “smoking gun” studies, lower levels of environmental noise may be one of many factors that do contribute to long-lasting health issues.

Is someone with a hearing loss more susceptible to future hearing deterioration from loud noise?

One’s initial gut feeling is that if there is already cochlear damage, then this would increase the

chances of further hearing difficulty when compared with someone with normal cochlear function, given the same noise exposure. And shouldn’t that person therefore be counselled to double up on their efforts to wear hearing protection?

The answer was not known to this question until the work of Erik Borg and colleagues in 1995 was published. Borg, Canlon, and Eriksson published a meta-analysis but focused their work on experiments with rabbits. And one of their important findings was that a person (or a rabbit) with an already existing sensori-neural hearing loss was no less, nor more, susceptible to further hearing loss from loud noise as compared with their normal hearing colleagues.

Hearing protection against loud noise and music should be important regardless of one’s hearing status. Not sure how I would get a rabbit to wear hearing protection with those big floppy ears though.

Chasin M. Non-auditory effects of lower-level environmental noise. *Hearing Review*. 2022;29(8):22-23.

Borg, E., Canlon, B., & Eriksson, B. (1995). Noise-induced hearing loss: Literature review and experiments in rabbits. *Scandinavian Audiology, Suppl.* 40.



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Listen

From the chair of Deafness Forum Australia

Throughout the world, advocates and policy-makers are thinking about the actions that support the World Hearing Day theme of universal hearing care.

David Brady writes,

Deafness Forum Australia and its members will advocate a series of bold recommendations to the Australian Government that aim to address hearing loss among vulnerable groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, those requiring specialised programs to address their hearing needs, and people living on low income.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is life-changing for those who are eligible. My Aged Care is an essential support for mature-aged people. The Australian Government Hearing Services Program aims to reduce the impact of hearing loss by providing eligible people with access to hearing services. These are great initiatives and the envy of many other countries throughout the world, but there is much more to be done.

The objective of the Hearing Services Program is to ensure that vulnerable groups have access to high-quality hearing services at no cost or minimal cost. This includes individualised rehabilitation programs for people with complex hearing needs such as children, adults with severe to profound hearing loss or severe

communication difficulties, including those in aged care; and culturally appropriate programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

But many people who need these supports are missing out.

It is time that the Commonwealth Government extends the eligibility of the Hearing Services Program.

1. Include people on a Health Care Card, or Low Income Card

Low Income Health Care Card holders and Health Care Card holders who are not eligible for hearing supports under the NDIS, especially over 26 years of age, should have access to government-funded hearing services to improve their opportunities for further education, employment and promotion.

2. Include Seniors Health Care Card Holders

There are many self-funded retirees who do not have high levels of superannuation and they struggle to fund the hearing services they need. It is vital that the eligibility criteria be reviewed so that it is targeted to the broader ageing population who needs assistance but are not in a position to fund these services themselves.

3. Children of refugees

Children whose parents are waiting for citizenship or permanent residency are denied



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access to the health care and services provided by the Hearing Services Program. Changing the policy could equip this small and vulnerable population with the support it needs for them and their children to successfully settle into the Australian community and to access education and jobs.

4. People in the criminal justice system

People held in incarceration experience higher rates of hearing loss than the general population. We are hearing that prisoners are denied access to the Hearing Services Program because correctional facilities are a state and territory matter. Without adequate access to hearing health services will continue.

It is time the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments solve the bureaucratic obstacles to end the vicious cycle of social disadvantage, incarceration, and recidivism.

5. People in Aged Care

People in aged care have a much higher prevalence of hearing and communication impairment than those living in the community. They are also more likely to have more complex health conditions combined with hearing loss such as dementia, vision loss, and physical impairments, requiring a program that can provide specialist care and support. Servicing this group is financially unattractive to commercial audiology services. It should be managed through the Government's Community Service Obligation Program.

In the Spirit of Reconciliation

In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the prevalence of otitis media is 10 times the World Health Organization's public health emergency threshold of 4%.

The high prevalence of hearing problems in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has resulted in it being normalised.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are considerably overrepresented in police custody, in both the juvenile and criminal justice systems and are jailed at 13 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.

Our justice system remains ineffective in addressing these complex needs and vulnerabilities.

Last year, we published our report, [*Closing the Gap: Addressing the Hearing Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Criminal Justice System*](#). In this report, we make recommendations to address the perpetual cycle that exists between childhood ear disease and the disproportionately higher rates of incarceration.

In order to address the impact of hearing health on Closing the Gap targets, and to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system, we put forward two overarching recommendations to the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

The first recommendation is strengthening programs that target ear disease and hearing loss in children, improve school attendance, and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples gain employment.

The second is for targeted funding for a culturally appropriate hearing program to be established nationally to address the needs people within the criminal justice system, including the juvenile system.

For these recommendations to succeed requires cooperation between the two levels of government and that's a lofty goal.

We also believe that all such actions must empower and resource Indigenous people and their organisations. We need to progressively give control of the framing, design, and conduct of Indigenous health actions to Indigenous people.

In the spirit of reconciliation we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.





Significant hearing loss in Ukrainian refugees.

War, a word that evokes so many memories of destruction and grief, has been a staple in the news since February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine. The war has left many Ukrainians displaced. Millions have sought shelter and safety in neighbouring Poland.

Poland has received more than 8.4 million Ukrainian refugees. While many refugees have subsequently travelled to other countries or returned to Ukraine, approximately 1.4 million refugees have registered for Temporary Protection in Poland.

A group of students and faculty from Northern Illinois University and Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte in Brazil embarked on a humanitarian trip to Kraków. During the trip, they collaborated with local humanitarian organisations to provide free hearing services for school children and Ukrainian refugees.

Stories of hearing loss and survival

A 20-year-old woman with intellectual disability had hearing aids in Ukraine that were left behind while she and her family fled the country. Although the Polish government gave all the Ukrainian refugees two years of access to the Polish health system, which provides free hearing tests, hearing aids are not covered. As refugees, her family cannot afford to buy hearing aids. Now she is living without hearing aids, and communication with family has been very difficult.

Several women and older men were found to have perforated ear drums and many had hearing loss in both ears. Their hearing was damaged by the shockwaves of bombings.

A father had mild-to-severe hearing loss in the left ear and mild-to-profound hearing loss in the right ear. He said he and his son were both in a missile attack. He fell on his left side, leaving the right ear more exposed. Now he has tinnitus in the right ear. He said it was too painful to think about the event.

Two of the older women tested sobbed constantly during their time at the testing sites. They said they missed their homes and their family members. The thought of the war elicited sorrow. They could not afford hearing aids.

Raising awareness

While the impact of the war is often expressed in the media in the number of casualties, the damage to people's hearing is not mentioned. Ukrainian refugees are not only displaced by the war, but many are also left with a permanent disability that can cause long-term disability.

Hearing loss will likely to be one of the most prevalent noncommunicable disabilities among the people who stayed in Ukraine, because of the continuous and relentless missile attacks.

The team hopes more people will join their cause to provide hearing and amplification services and devices to the Ukrainian people.

From [The Hearing Journal](#).



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The life-changing impact of hearing loss

By Carly Sygrove, transformational coach.



Was your hearing loss life-changing? Mine certainly was, and it's not surprising really. Our hearing plays a big part in the way we interact with the world. Before my hearing loss, I relied on my hearing, without realising its value.

My crystal clear bilateral hearing enabled me to detect and locate the smallest of utterances in my classroom. Conversation came easily. Overlapping voices or background music didn't bother me or impact my ability to socialise.

My hearing enabled me to enjoy live music without sensitivity. With my two ears working in unison, I could walk down any street and hear if someone called my name and even from which direction they called me. I felt safe and confident in my surroundings, knowing my ears would alert me to any danger.

How my hearing loss impacted my identity

Of course, some challenges came with my hearing loss. My hearing loss happened suddenly, meaning I had no time to prepare for it. Initially, I didn't know how to deal with the practical and emotional impacts of hearing loss on my everyday life. In the early days following my loss, I lost self-confidence and struggled with identity issues.

Who was I with hearing loss? It took time for me to figure this out. The things I once enjoyed, such as going to live music events, now came with the worry of further loss and managing a sensitivity to sound meant that noisy events were not so easy to navigate.

A couple of years into living with hearing loss, my associated balance issues got the better of me. The busy classroom with abundant noise and visual stimuli served as a trigger, causing increased tinnitus, instability and a permanent headache and pressure—it was no longer a safe place for me to work. I sadly ended my teaching career of 14 years and was left again wondering: *Who am I?* I had spent my whole working life devoted to teaching. My pupils were at the centre of my world, and my education was my passion.

Revaluating my life

As often happens following a significant life event, I was compelled to take some time to reflect on my life. *Who am I as someone with hearing loss? Who do I want to be? What options do I have? What is important to me on my hearing loss journey?*

With time, contemplation, and a desire to not give up, I began to work through my feelings and make some changes to my life, which enabled me to craft a positive way forward.

Discovering a new me through writing

Through keeping a [blog](#), I developed a love of writing. I doubt I would have ever allowed myself time to begin a blog, or even have the inclination to, had I not experienced a hearing loss.



Images by [Markus Winkler](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Not only did I find writing therapeutic, but through sharing my story with others, I also started to realise the power of making connections with people living similar experiences.

I found a new purpose. I became passionate about advocating for people with hearing loss and promoting deaf awareness.

Crafting a new career

Though I ended a career I loved, I found a new purpose and passion in supporting others in their hearing loss experiences.

I created a [Facebook community](#) for people with hearing loss—a place for people to share their stories, ask each other questions and offer support and advice. I also founded a [support website](#) for people affected by sudden hearing loss.

The more time I devoted to the world of hearing loss and rehabilitation, the more interested I became. I was passionate about supporting people in moving forward with their hearing health conditions, and I trained as a

transformational coach to turn this interest into a career.

Now, armed with a toolkit of coaching skills and techniques, I help people, just like me, with hearing health issues make exciting changes in their lives.

Listening to my body

On reflection, I realised that I had put my career before my health for many years. I worked on listening to my body more; If I needed to rest, I took time to do so. This is an ongoing goal and a challenge for me—being a teacher, I was so used to persevering even when I wasn't feeling well. It will be a while before I am completely comfortable with allowing myself time to rest.

Uncovering a new love of sound

I took my hearing for granted. I never once contemplated what a wonderful sense my hearing was until I lost half of it.

Now, I treasure my remaining hearing, which allows me to hear the voices of my loved ones, enjoy my favourite songs, and listen to the relaxing sounds of the sea. It's not the same as it used to be with two ears, but I am thankful for my right ear which still has good hearing.

Moving forwards with positivity

Though I have encountered numerous challenges on my hearing loss journey, I prefer to focus on the positives that have come with my hearing loss, after all, it's here to stay.

In assessing my strengths, values and resources, and addressing my concerns and insecurities, I emerged from my hearing loss experience feeling empowered!

From Carly Sygrove's [blog](#) and website.



A group of people are seated at a long table in a restaurant, eating and talking. The table is set with plates of food, glasses of beer, and water. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the restaurant environment.

A campaign to help make the world a quieter place has published its report on citizens measuring sound levels in their local communities.

The Find Your Quiet Place Challenge, while mostly conducted in the United States has supporters in Australia – Deafness Forum and Better Hearing Australia Brisbane.

Overall, the report found that across all venue categories, noise levels increased in two years from an average 70 decibels measured in 2021 to 73 decibels in 2022. It's a significant and worrying increase. However, the good news is that it still remains below pre-pandemic levels.

The 2021 (76.4 dBA) and 2022 (76.5 dBA) sound levels for restaurants remained roughly the same. This is the most significant and potentially positive trend where restaurants may be adapting to a quieter world. It could take many forms ranging from lower background music, better table spacing, improved acoustic design, or venue managers simply being more sensitive to acoustics following the comparative quiet of the pandemic.

Additionally, the percentage of restaurants conducive to conversation, defined as either Quiet or Moderate, reached its highest level over the past five years at 43%. Similarly, the percentage of restaurants that endanger the hearing health of patrons and employees barely budged upwards at 27%.

Nightlife levels are still at elevated levels (81.5 dBA) and had a small increase over 2021 (80.9 dBA) but remain below pandemic levels (~83 dBA). The threshold by which sound levels

endanger hearing health is 80 dBA. These elevated sound levels are not surprising as patrons expect such venues to be loud and hence engender less noise complaints than restaurants and coffee shops and other venues.

World Hearing Day 2023 is held to raise awareness of how to prevent deafness and hearing loss, and to promote better ear protection and health across the world.

World Hearing Day in 2023 has the theme, 'ear and hearing care for all!'

President of Hearing Matters Australia, Rebecca Stewart, said World Hearing Day brings to the forefront the importance of reducing barriers to inclusion and improving access to supports and services for people with hearing loss.

"We welcome this year's call to action for ear and hearing care for all," she said.

"This event is an opportunity to remind people not only to take care of their own ears but to also better support those around us who live with hearing loss."

4 million Australians are living with hearing loss and this number is predicted to increase to almost 9 million by 2050 as the population ages.

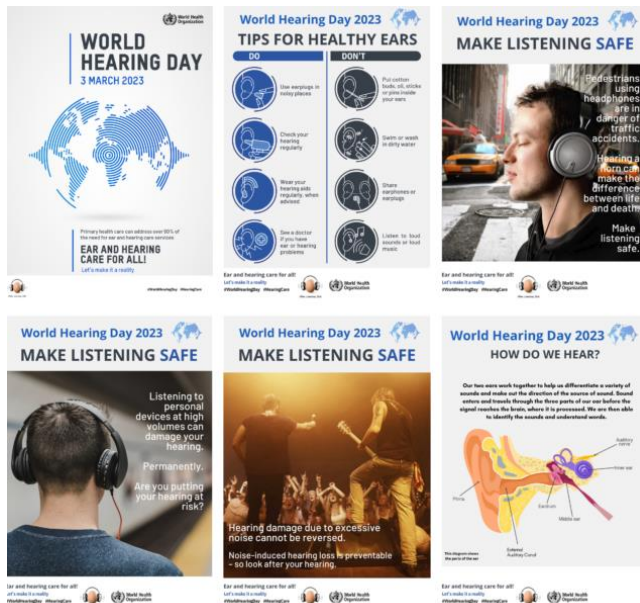
By [Cassie Harrex](#) for [The Canberra Times](#)



DEAFNESS FORUM AUSTRALIA

oneinsix

Free social media resources to promote World Hearing Day



It's only days away, but it's not too late to help promote [World Hearing Day](#) on Friday.

We have written a series of social media posts with associated images. All the materials are copyright-free so you can use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your style, or treat them as an encouragement to do your own thing.

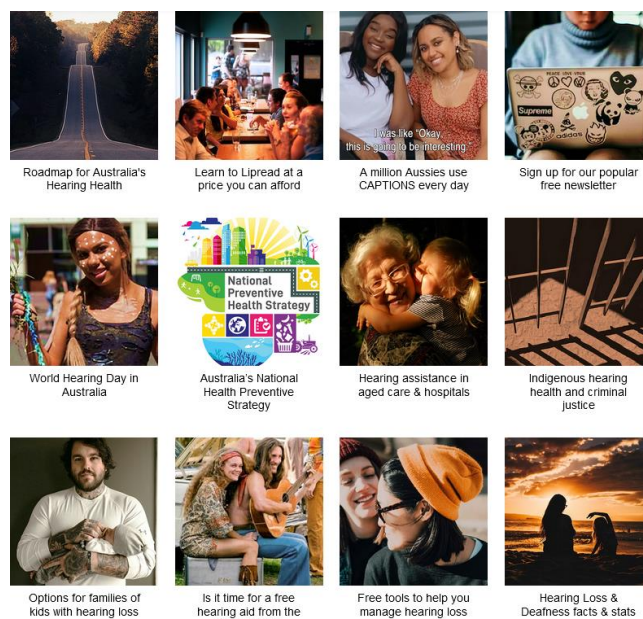
For organisations, we have left some space at the bottom-right of each image for you to add your logo.

You can access the words and the images (social media tiles) on the Deafness Forum [website](#).



CONNECT, COLLABORATE, IMPACT. ®

Deafness Forum's [website](#) is a rich source of information.



Know someone who deserves their own copy of One in Six?

Drop us a line to hello@deafnessforum.org.au

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