

WHO highlights the high global cost posed by unaddressed hearing loss

1 March 2017 | GENEVA: On the occasion of World Hearing Day, 3 March 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) is drawing attention to hearing loss, its economic impact and the cost-effectiveness of interventions to address it. 360 million people worldwide have disabling hearing loss; 32 million of them are children. Factors contributing to hearing loss include genetic causes, complications at birth, certain infectious diseases, chronic ear infections, the use of particular drugs, exposure to excessive noise and ageing.

This year the theme of World Hearing Day is "Action for hearing loss: make a sound investment". In a new report released today, *Global costs of unaddressed hearing loss and cost-effectiveness of interventions*, WHO estimates that lack of attention towards hearing loss poses an overall annual cost of 750 billion international dollars globally. The financial costs to the health sector alone are 67-107 billion international dollars every year.

Hearing loss can be addressed

In some settings strategies to prevent hearing loss are well-established, and the actions taken in those settings have resulted in financial savings and significant return on investment. The establishment of early intervention programmes is improving access to ear and hearing care services generally. Moreover, technology is available to detect hearing loss at the earliest stage of development. When their needs are met, people with hearing loss are better able to access education, learn skills and be employed.

Interventions to address hearing loss are cost-effective

WHO's new report focuses on solutions for lowering the prevalence and mitigating the impact of hearing loss. It highlights cost-effective strategies, namely:



- prevention through early identification and treatment of ear infections and reduction of noise exposure;
- early intervention programmes that help identify hearing loss through the screening of newborn and school-aged children and adults above 50 years of age;
- provision of appropriate hearing devices, accompanied with rehabilitation.

"Unaddressed hearing loss poses a great challenge not only for those who are affected by it, but also for their families, communities and countries," says Dr Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department for Management of Noncommunicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention. "Cost-effective interventions can reduce the impact of hearing loss and ensure that people with hearing loss have the same opportunities in life as their hearing peers. These interventions, which bring benefit to people and save costs to governments, should be replicated wherever there is a need."

This report forms part of WHO's advocacy efforts to promote global action on hearing loss and calls upon policy-makers to address this challenge through:

- allocation of suitable resources;
- planning strategically to integrate ear and hearing care into health systems;
- training appropriate human resources;
- implementing early identification and intervention programmes;
- establishing awareness programmes.

RELATED LINKS

Report: *Global costs of unaddressed hearing loss and cost-effectiveness of interventions*

<http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/world-hearing-day/2017/en/>

Infographic brochure: Action for hearing loss: make a sound investment!

<http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/world-hearing-day/WHD2017Brochure.pdf>

Corporate fact sheet on deafness and hearing loss

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs300/en/>



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