WHO Programme for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Loss

Activity report 2015

Blindness and Deafness Prevention, Disability and Rehabilitation (BDD)
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World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva, Switzerland
The WHO programme for prevention of deafness and hearing loss is working with the mandate provided by the World Health Assembly resolution WHA48.9, 1995 to promote hearing care as part of primary health care within its Member States (MS). The vision of the programme is that of a world in which no person lives with hearing loss due to preventable causes and those with unavoidable hearing loss can achieve their full potential through rehabilitation, education and empowerment. The programme is working with the overall aim to establish community-based sustainable and inclusive strategies for prevention and management of hearing loss integrated within the primary health care systems of WHO's MS.

The objectives for the programme work-plan 2014-17 are to:
1. Generate and use evidence to advocate for increased political and financial commitment of Member States (MS) and other stakeholders for hearing care.
2. Support development and implementation of national hearing care strategies, plans and policies within the framework of primary health care.
3. Develop suitable tools for promoting hearing care in WHO MS.
4. Strengthen multisectoral engagement and effective partnerships for improved hearing care.

Activities in 2015

Objective 1: Generate and use evidence to advocate for increased political and financial commitment of MS and other stakeholders for hearing care.


The theme for the International Ear Care Day (now known as the World Hearing Day) was Make Listening Safe. The purpose was to raise awareness and promote community-based activities for hearing care with special focus on hearing loss due to sound exposure in recreational settings.
Some of the activities undertaken were:


- Media campaign through WHO internet site, intranet and social media.

- Advocacy materials, including posters, banners, pamphlets and an infographic, were developed and released. [http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/activities/MLS/en/](http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/activities/MLS/en/)

- Monitoring sound exposure with Zoey, the listening mannequin, was offered to all staff and visitors at the WHO headquarters.

- Most WHO Collaborating Centres (CC) and many MS undertook activities to mark this day including organization of walks, concerts, awareness sessions, meetings with policy-makers, screening camps and provision of medical and surgical services. Many partner organizations shared the information through their websites and supported the Day through a variety of activities. [http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/news/INTERNATIONAL_EAR_CARE_DAY_3_March_2015.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/news/INTERNATIONAL_EAR_CARE_DAY_3_March_2015.pdf?ua=1)

2. **World Health Assembly (WHA), May 2015**

   In response to a request by South Africa, a report on the 1995 WHA resolution (WHA 48.9) was presented at the 68th WHA in May 2015. The report was well received and many countries highlighted the need for a new resolution on prevention of hearing loss in view of the continued high prevalence, emergence of new threats to hearing and the advances in technology and possible solutions for hearing care.
A side event on **Action for better hearing: promoting ear and hearing care at primary level** was organized during the WHA, in collaboration with the International Society of Audiology (ISA) and the International Federation of Otolaryngological Societies (IFOS). The governments of Russia and South Africa participated in the event along with the International Federation of the Hard of Hearing (IFHOH) and Global Foundation for Children with Hearing Loss.

3. **First World Congress on Ear and Hearing Care**

The First World Congress on Ear and Hearing Care was organized by the Society for Sound Hearing in collaboration with CBM, and with the technical support of WHO. The theme of the Congress focused on ‘action towards better hearing’. The congress was attended by delegates from all WHO regions and promoted the concept of primary ear and hearing care amongst the participants.

**Objective 2:** Support development and implementation of national hearing care strategies, plans and policies, within the framework of primary health care.

1. **An ad hoc consultation on promoting ear and hearing care in WHO MS** was held on 1-2 April 2015. The consultation brought together experts in the fields of otolaryngology, audiology and public health. During the two-day meeting, discussions were held on the framework of ear and hearing care and possible strategies for its promotion in WHO MS.
The key recommendations from the meeting focused on efforts to raise awareness on hearing loss, provide technical support to MS in the planning and implementation of hearing care strategies as well as the development of suitable tools for effective planning and provision of ear and hearing care services.

2. **A Regional workshop on ‘Ear and Hearing Care in Life Course: development of a strategy for the WHO Region of the Americas’** was held in Panama city, Panama on 4-5 December 2015. The workshop was organized in close collaboration with the WHO Regional Office. It was attended by eight MS from the Region of the Americas. The regional strategy for hearing care 2014-16 and its implementation were reviewed. Participating experts shared updates from their countries. Discussions were held on how to integrate hearing care within the life course approach and an outline of the strategy was prepared.

3. **A report on ‘Status of Ear and Hearing Care in the South-East Asia Region’** was developed with inputs from MS, in collaboration with the Regional Office.

4. **Technical support was provided for the development of a national ear and hearing care strategy** in the following countries:
   
   a. Kenya: national strategic plan has been developed through a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Health, WHO Country Office and other stakeholders. A national committee is in place and the national strategy is expected to be launched in 2016.
b. Zambia: national strategic plan for Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) services developed through collaborative effort between the Ministry of Health, CBM and WHO.

c. Zimbabwe: the process of development of a national strategic plan has been initiated and the planning process is expected to continue in 2016.

Ongoing technical support to other countries which are in the process of implementation of a national ear and hearing care strategy including Guinea, Malawi and Morocco.

5. Participation (online) in the ‘Public Health Planning for Hearing Impairment course’ organized by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in:
   - Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
   - Nairobi, Kenya
   - Islamabad, Pakistan
   - Lima, Peru
   - Cape Town, South Africa

Objective 3: Develop suitable tools for promoting hearing care in WHO MS.

1. The following technical documents have been initiated or advanced in 2015 and are in varying stages of development:

   a. Ear and hearing care: planning and monitoring of national strategies: the guidance manual has been prepared in collaboration with Dr Andrew Smith. It has been peer reviewed by a group of experts. The document is expected to be released in March 2016.

   b. Ear and hearing care: situation analysis tool: the tool has been developed through discussions with a working group. The tool has been field tested in different WHO regions prior to finalization. It is also expected to be released in March 2016.

   c. Hearing loss and ear diseases survey protocol: work on revision of the existing survey protocol was started in November 2015. A meeting of the working group was held in London, UK on 5-6 November 2015. The meeting was organized in
collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The review is expected to be completed by the end of 2016.

d. **Factsheet on Childhood hearing loss: act now, here is how:** this document is expected to be released on 3 March 2016 as part of the World Hearing Day activities. The document will include information and data on preventable causes of hearing loss in children. It will also highlight public health strategies for reducing the occurrence and adverse impact of childhood hearing loss.

2. **Make Listening Safe initiative:** The Make listening Safe initiative was launched on 3 March 2015. It highlights that over a billion young persons are at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening practices in recreational settings. The initiative aims to raise awareness about safe listening and develop various technical tools to support the effort. These include:

  - **Standards for safe listening devices:** In order to promote safe listening, WHO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), in collaboration with other standardization bodies and stakeholders, have initiated the development of standards for personal audio systems. A gap-analysis on standards for safe listening devices has been undertaken as a first step. As part of this effort, the *WHO-ITU stakeholder’s consultation on safe listening devices* was held in WHO headquarters on 1 October 2015.

The meeting was attended by nearly 80 participants representing academia, standardization agencies, industry, professional associations and civil society.
organizations. The meeting was followed by the **WHO-ITU expert meeting on safe listening devices on 2 October 2015**. The process and scope of standard development were discussed and next steps agreed upon during this meeting.

- **Safe listening media player app**: A media player which can monitor the dose of sound received by an individual is under development. The app is being developed by Hortech of Germany, under the guidance of WHO and a working group.

- **Messages to promote safe listening behaviour** amongst users of personal audio systems: the process has been initiated and is expected to be completed in 2016.

- **Standardized protocol** for assessment of hearing loss due to recreational sound exposure.

3. **Development of a background paper on ageing and hearing loss for the World Report on Ageing**. The paper has been developed through a working group led by Dr Adrian Davis and Dr Kelly Tremblay. The paper has served as the information source on hearing loss for the World Ageing Report.

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**Objective 4. Strengthen multisectoral engagement and effective partnerships for improved hearing care.**

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1. **WHO network of collaborating centres (CCs) for prevention of deafness**: The 2\textsuperscript{nd} meeting of the WHO CC network on prevention of deafness and hearing loss (PDH) was held on 28-29 October 2015 in Nanjing, China.
The meeting was hosted by the Jiangsu Province Hospital, a WHO CC for PDH. The meeting was attended by the five existing CCs and four CCs in informal collaboration.

2. **International Society of Audiology (ISA):** ISA was admitted as an organization in official relations with WHO in May 2015.

3. **International Federation of Otolaryngological Societies (IFOS):** triennial review of IFOS’ status as an organization in official relations with WHO.

4. **Society for Sound Hearing International:** continued engagement with the Society for situation analysis in South East Asia and promotion of ear and hearing care in the Region.


6. **British Academy of Audiology (BAA) and British Academic Conference in Otolaryngology (BACO):** delivered the keynote address at the conference held in Harrogate, UK on 26 November 2015.

7. **Strengthening partnerships** with traditional partners including Hearing Conservation Council and fostering of new relationships with selected professional bodies, INGOs, associations of manufacturers and disabled persons organizations.

8. **Collaboration with other departments within WHO**
   - Ageing and Life-Course department: collaboration to promote inclusion of hearing care in newly developing programmes and initiatives on ageing.
   - Disability and Rehabilitation: collaboration for integration of hearing into the WHO Model Disability Survey.
   - Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property: member of task force for the development of the GATE initiative, which will serve to promote access to essential assistive devices including hearing devices in low- and middle-income countries.
Upcoming activities in 2016:

- World Hearing Day: 3 March 2016, with the theme: **Childhood hearing loss: act now; here is how!**
  - Release of a booklet and information products on the theme
  - Seminar in WHO headquarters, Geneva on the theme
  - Media campaign

- Launch of the:
  - Manual on *Ear and hearing care: planning and monitoring of national strategies*
  - *Ear and hearing care: situation analysis tool*

- Development of
  - booklet on *National ear and hearing care strategies: current practices*
  - monitoring and indicators for ear and hearing care


- Revision of *Primary Ear and Hearing Care Training Resources* to be initiated in 2016.

- Sub-regional meeting on primary ear and hearing care in the Western Pacific Region to be held in Beijing, China in November 2016.

- Setting standards for safe listening devices, in collaboration with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

- Development of a safe listening software application.

- Developing awareness messages for safe listening.

- Screening protocol for assessment of hearing loss due to recreational exposure.

- Discussion on a new resolution on hearing loss at the WHO Executive Board meeting to be held in May 2016.