

## WHO Releases First ‘World Report on Hearing’

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The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the launch of the first [World Report on Hearing](#) on its website on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.

Nearly 2.5 billion people worldwide – or 1 in 4 people – will be living with some degree of hearing loss by 2050. At least 700 million of these people will require access to ear and hearing care and other rehabilitation services unless action is taken.

“Our ability to hear is precious. Untreated hearing loss can have a devastating impact on people’s ability to communicate, to study, and to earn a living. It can also impact on people’s mental health and their ability to sustain relationships,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “This new report outlines the scale of the problem, but also offers solutions in the form of evidence-based interventions that we encourage all countries to integrate into their health systems as part of their journey towards universal health coverage.”

A copy of the report can be obtained here:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/world-report-on-hearing>

## **Main Findings**

Lack of accurate information and stigmatizing attitudes toward hearing loss often limit people from accessing care for these conditions, according to the WHO. In most countries, ear and hearing care is still not integrated into national health systems and accessing care services is challenging for those with ear diseases and hearing loss.

But the WHO says the most glaring gap in health system capacity is in human resources. Among low-income countries, about 78% have fewer than one ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist per million population; 93% have fewer than one audiologist per million; only 17% have one or more speech therapist per million; and 50% have one or more teacher for the deaf per million. Even in countries with relatively high proportions of ear and hearing care professionals, there is unequal distribution of specialists, posing challenges for people in need of care.

## **Main Causes of Hearing Loss and Prevention Strategies**

In children, almost 60% of hearing loss can be prevented through measures such as immunization for prevention of rubella and meningitis, improved maternal and neonatal care, and screening for, and early management of, middle ear disease.

In adults, noise control, safe listening, and surveillance of ototoxic medicines together with good ear hygiene, can help maintain good hearing and reduce the potential for hearing loss.

Identification is the first step in addressing hearing loss and related ear diseases. Clinical screening at strategic points in life ensure that any loss of hearing and ear diseases can be identified as early as possible.

Recently developed accurate and easy-to-use screening tools can identify ear disease and hearing loss at any age, in clinical or community settings, and with limited training and resources, even in underserved and remote areas of the world.

## **Access to Timely and Appropriate Care**

Once diagnosed, early intervention is key. Medical and surgical treatment can cure many ear diseases, but where hearing loss is irreversible, rehabilitation can ensure that those affected avoid the adverse consequences of hearing loss. A range of effective options are available. Hearing technology, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, when accompanied by appropriate support services and rehabilitative therapy are effective and can benefit children and adults alike.

Sign language and speech reading are important options for many deaf people; hearing assistive technology and captioning can further improve access to communication and education for those with hearing loss. Integrating ear and hearing care interventions within national health plans and delivering these through strengthened health systems, as part of universal health coverage, is essential to meet the needs of those at risk of or living with hearing loss.