

INQUIRY INTO HEARING HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA

a. the extent, causes and costs of hearing impairment in Australia;

- ✦ Hearing loss (CHL) ^{conductive hearing loss} has a significant impact in every classroom in all remote schools in the NT. In the provision of education in one jurisdiction this needs to be seen as a fundamental part of the business of DET.
- ✦ In the NT the tyranny of distance coupled with high incidence in a low overall population increases the cost of delivering support services and the difficulty of using any economies of scale.

b. the implications of hearing impairment for individuals and the community;

- ✦ A large majority of students with CHL will have English as a Second Language; they also may not have been able to adequately develop their first language due to the hearing loss. This situation is further exacerbated by teachers who need to learn to teach in an appropriate way in cross-cultural settings.
- ✦ Hearing Loss directly affects school attendance and needs to be taken into consideration in programs that aim to improve school attendance.

c. the adequacy of access to hearing services, including assessment and support services, and hearing technologies;

- ✦ Currently there are 4 officers and 1 coordinator in the NT DET Hearing Team to cover all schools in the Territory; this includes over 80 schools in urban/rural areas and over 90 in remote areas, plus Homelands.
- ✦ Officers are based in Alice Springs; Palmerston & Rural; Darwin City/Northern Suburbs; and Arnhem (based in Darwin due to accommodation difficulties in Nhulunbuy). There are no officers based in Katherine or the Barkly Regions. These schools are serviced by officers from Darwin and Alice Springs respectively.
- ✦ A huge effort is required to coordinate the range of services both from outside agencies such as NT Hearing and Australian Hearing, and at the community level with the school and clinic, with a range of complications that arise in the delivery of services.

d. the adequacy of current hearing health and research programs, including education and awareness programs;

- ✦ There is a need to skill remote teachers to help reduce the transference of Otitis Media and the impact of Conductive Hearing Loss, particularly as most teachers in the NT come from interstate and will not have had experience in these issues
- ✦ A high level of expertise is needed by members of the Hearing Team to deal with all aspects of Sensori Neural Hearing Loss and Conductive Hearing Loss including medical issues and modes of communication



e. specific issues affecting Indigenous communities.

- ✚ Indigenous students in the main NT urban areas (Darwin and Alice Springs) are able to receive the same support as non-Indigenous students. The ability to provide appropriate levels of support to students in remote areas is a significant issue.
- ✚ Aboriginal Ear Health workers have been an excellent resource to assist with the OM/CHL issues. To be most effective they need to be empowered to work both within the clinic and the school to ensure successful referrals and follow up between the two agencies.

Additional details on the Department of Education and Training Hearing Team programs and services can be obtained from Ms Denise Bainbridge Senior Education Advisor 08 89205 606, densie.bainbridge@nt.gov.au,