



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

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Submission to the Senate Inquiry
into Hearing Health in Australia

October 2009



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Extent, Causes and Cost of Hearing Loss

- **Prevalence:** In 2005, hearing loss affected one in six Australians¹:
 - 10,268 children aged under 15 years;
 - 3.5 million adults aged 15 years and older.
- Hearing loss prevalence in the adult population is expected to more than double by 2050 to one in four, largely driven by the ageing population¹.

¹Access Economics (2006). *'Listen Hear! The economic cost and impact of hearing loss to Australia'*



Extent, Causes and Cost of Hearing Loss (cont)

- **Causes of Hearing Loss:** The most common causes of hearing loss are ageing and excessive exposure to loud sounds.
 - **Conductive:** caused by damage or blockage to the outer and/or middle ear preventing sound getting to the middle ear.
 - **Sensorineural:** results from damage to, or malfunction of, the cochlea or the hearing nerve.
 - **Mixed:**
 - Noise Induced
 - Recreational
 - Occupational
 - Acoustic Shock and Acoustic Trauma
 - Tinnitus



Extent, Causes and Cost of Hearing Loss (cont)

- **Costs:** In 2006, Access Economics estimated that the cost of hearing loss in Australia was \$23 billion per annum. Of this, \$11.75 billion attributed to direct economic costs:
 - \$6.7 billion in lost earnings to individuals with hearing impairment;
 - \$3.2 billion in costs of carers;
 - \$1 billion in losses from taxation revenue and alternative sources of taxation to fund welfare and health services;
 - \$674 million in direct health costs, including hearing aids and cochlear implants; and
 - \$191 million for education and support services and non-health communication aids.
- The balance of \$11.8 billion was the assessed value of DALYS (Disease Adjusted Life Years – estimated years of healthy life lost due to disability caused by disease).



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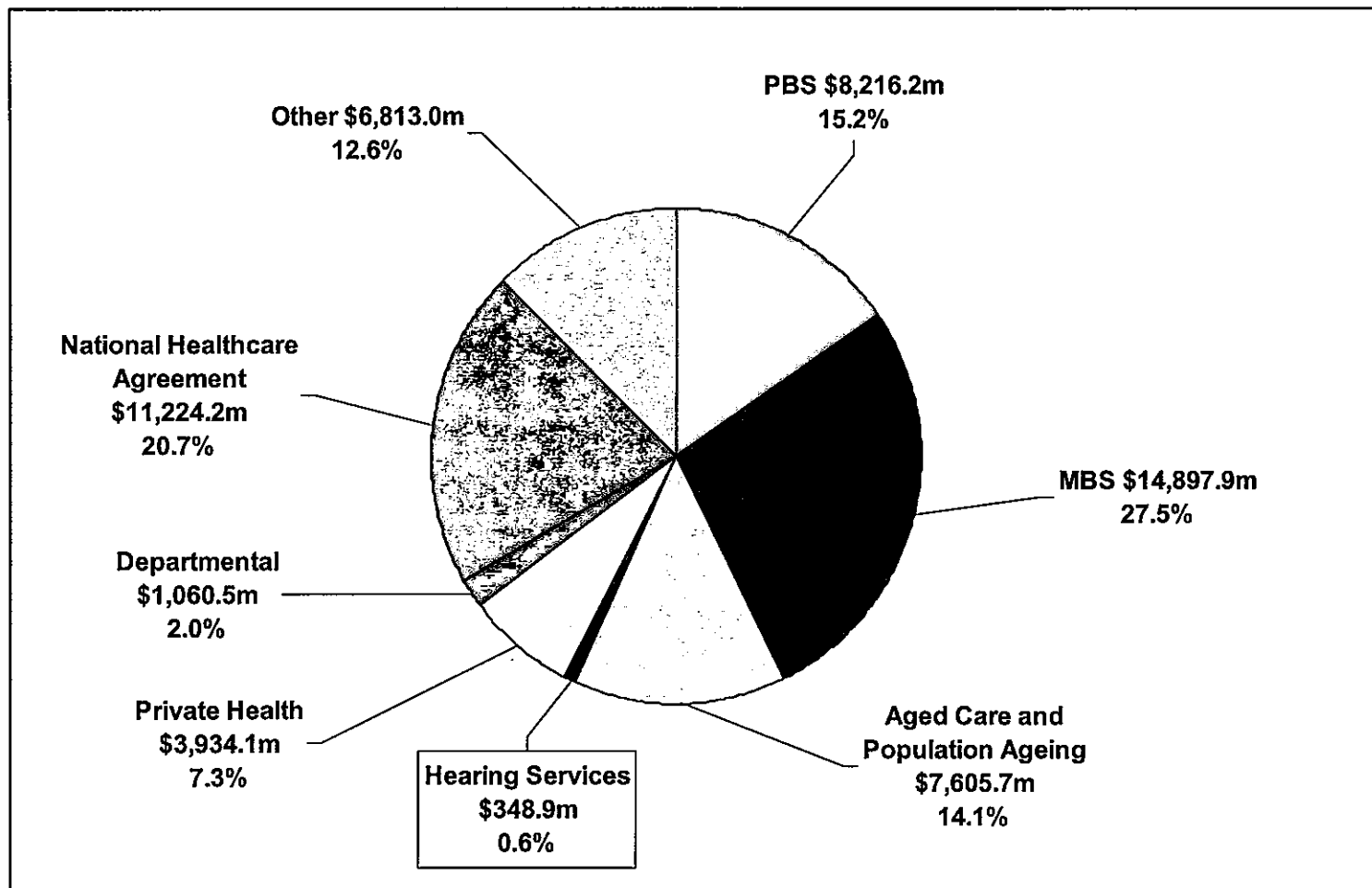
Implications of Hearing Loss

- Hearing loss has significant social impact on the individual and this impact differs greatly between children and adults.
- **Adults:** There may be significant social impacts in particular loss of social participation and in work settings through earning and working less in paid employment.
- **Children:** Hearing loss has significant social impacts, in particular the social, speech, language and educational development of children.
- **Mental Health:** Though the extent is unknown, hearing loss has significant social impacts which may include isolation, depression and anxiety.



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Portfolio for the Department of Health and Ageing Programs



Source: Portfolio of Health & Ageing 2009-10 Portfolio Budget Statements

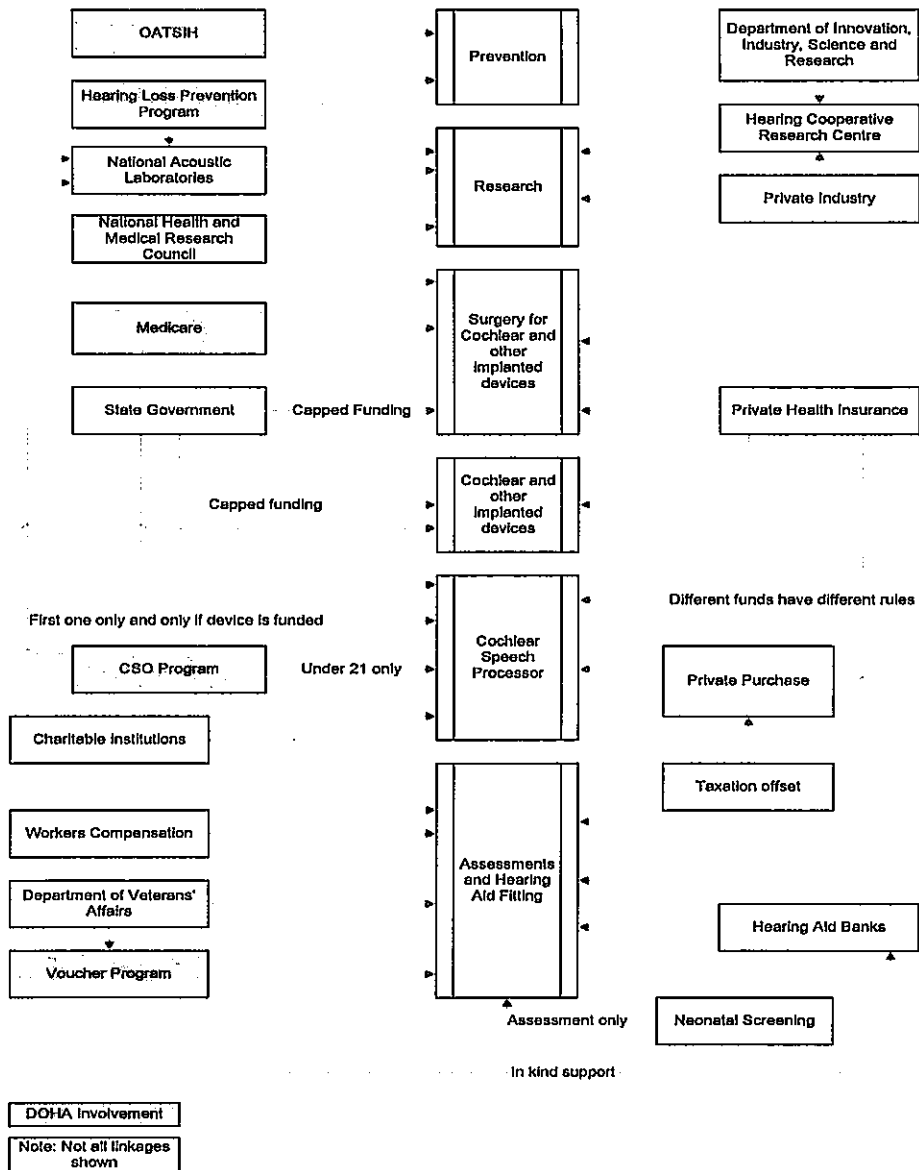


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Sources of funding for hearing services

SKETCH OF FUNDING SOURCES FOR HEARING SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA





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The Australian Government Hearing Services Program

Office of Hearing Services \$309 million (2008-09)

Voucher Services

Services provided at administered cost of \$262.4 million

945,000 registered clients

494,000 of those are 'active'

Coverage:

- Eligible clients

Community Service Obligations (CSO)

Funding capped at \$45.9 million

47,837 clients

Coverage:

- Children and adults under 21;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People over 50; and
- Adults with 'complex' hearing needs
- Australian Hearing Specialist Program for Indigenous Australians (AHSPiA)

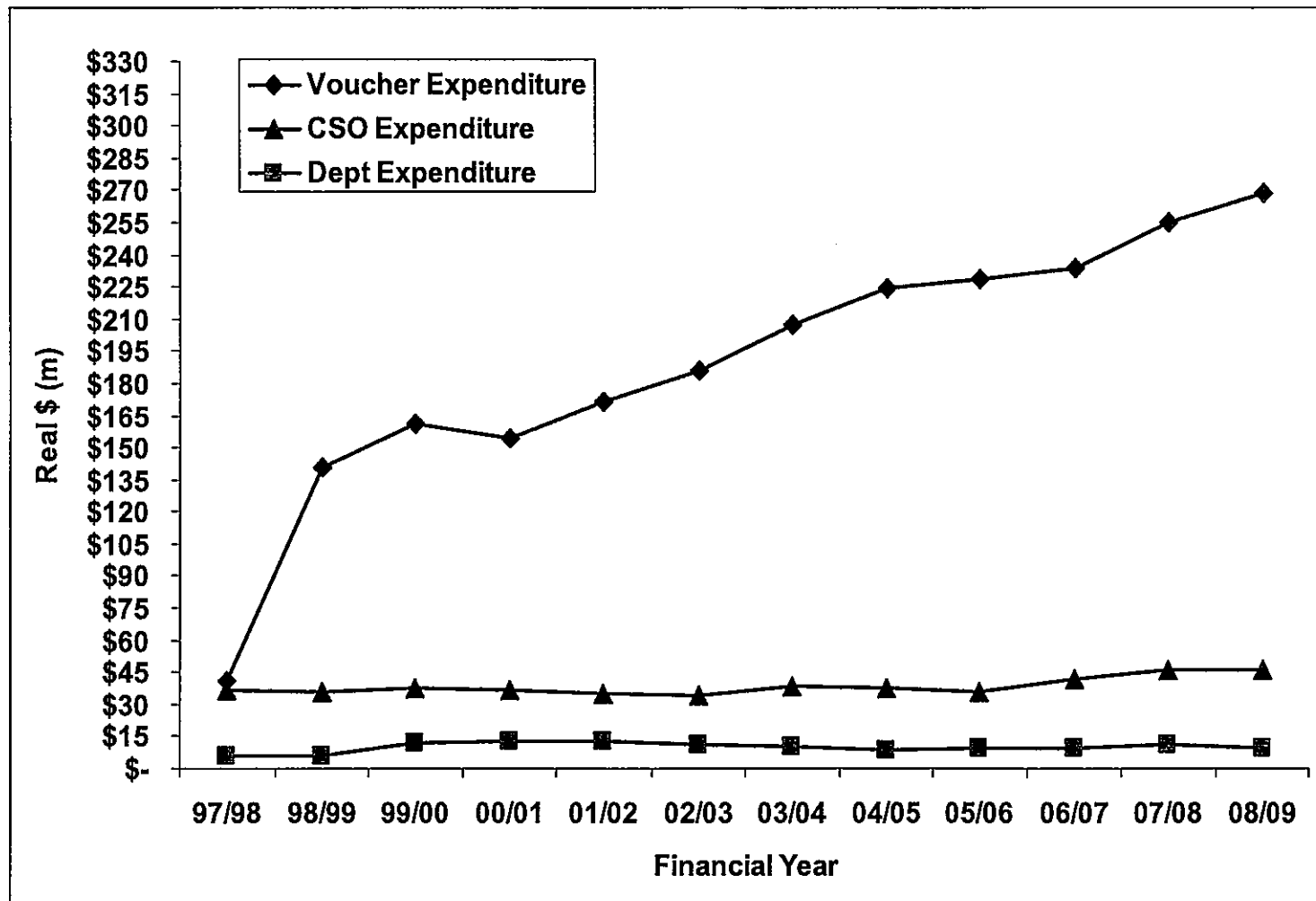
Hearing Loss Prevention Program (HLPP)

\$1.2 million

- 6 research projects (\$3.5 million) addressing:
 - Occupational Noise
 - Prevalence of Hearing Loss
 - Noise Exposure in School Aged Children
 - Lifetime Profiles of Exposure to Sound
 - Otitis Media
- 4 prevention programs (\$1.3 million) aimed at:
 - School aged children
 - Indigenous training
 - Recreational noise



Voucher Program expenditure

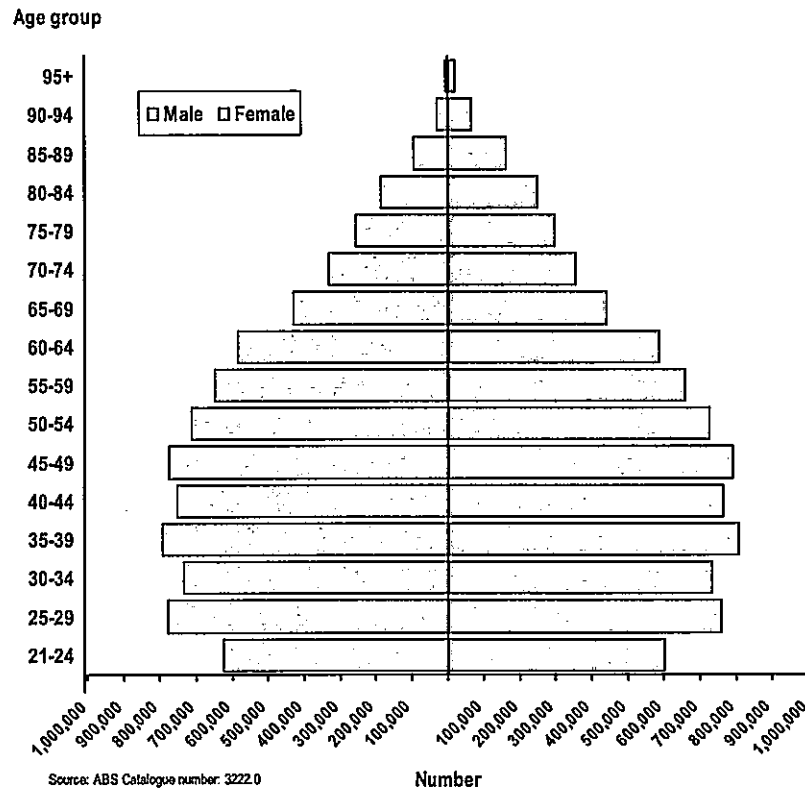




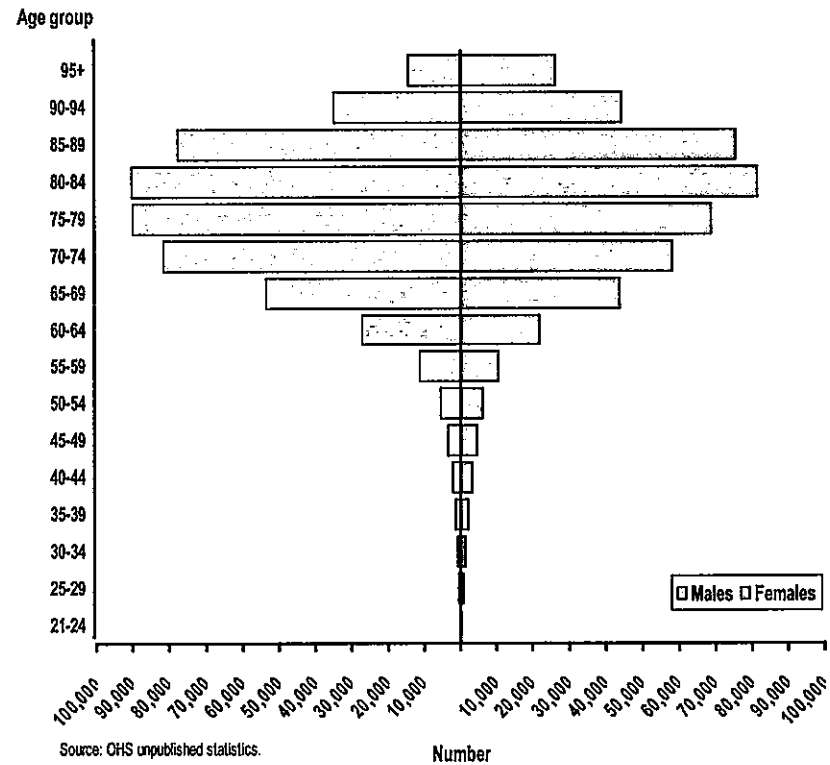
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Voucher Program – Age Cohort June 30, 2009

ABS Population Projections, June 2009



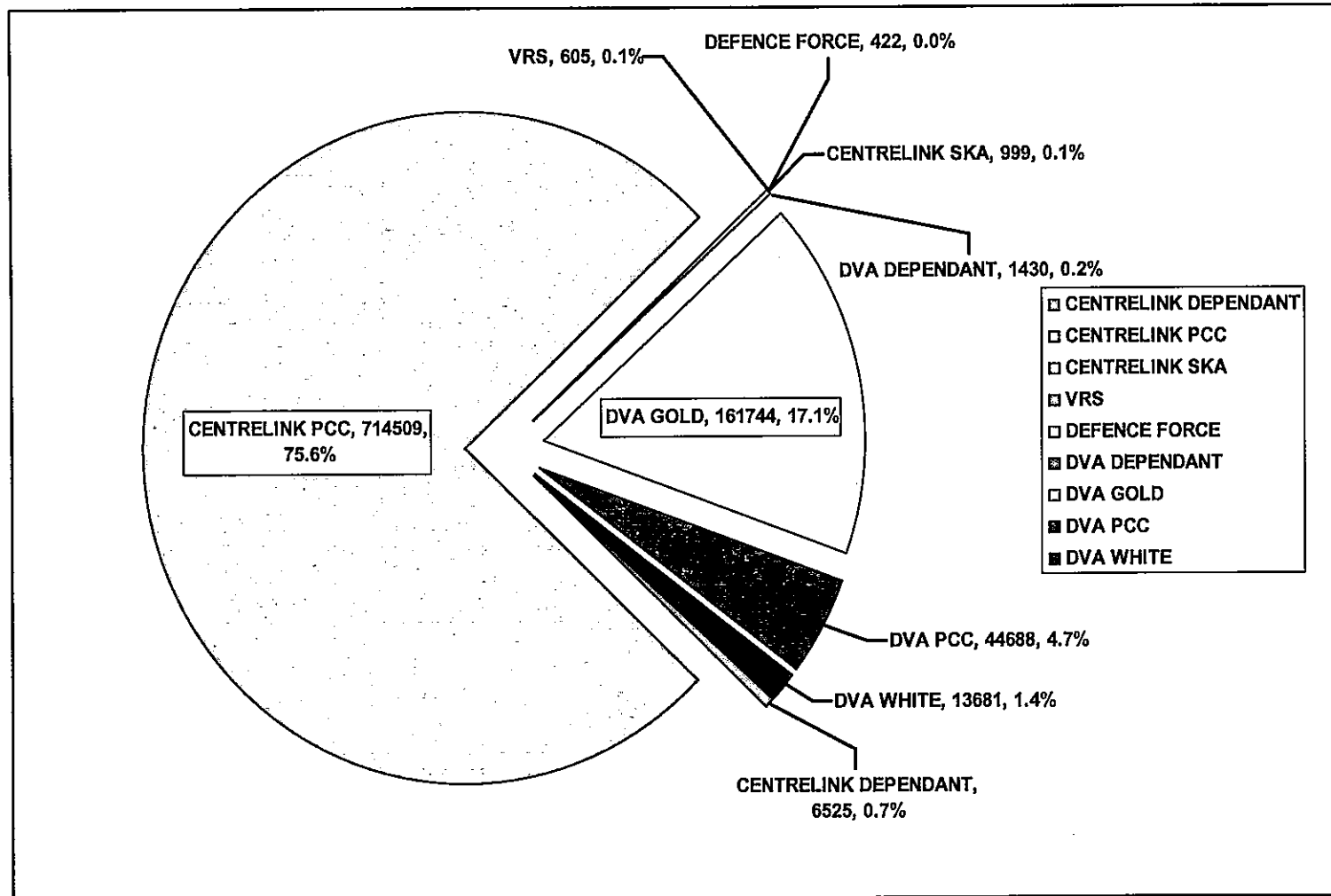
OHS Voucher Program Client Population





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Voucher Program – Client Distribution by eligibility type (30 June 2009)



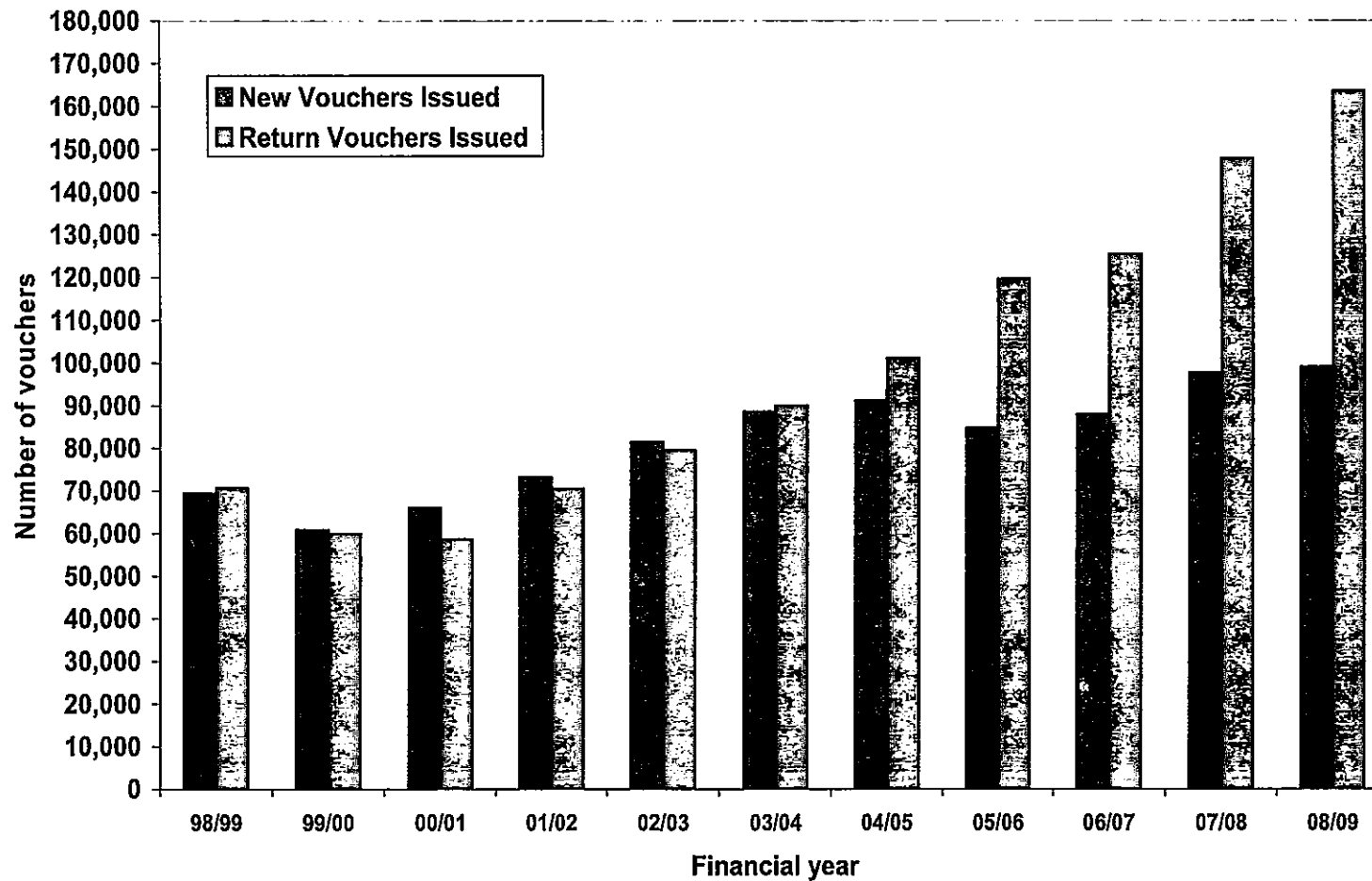
Source: OHS unpublished statistics

Date: 1/7/09



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New and Return Vouchers Issued under the Voucher Program



Source: OHS unpublished statistics



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Research

- Hearing Loss Prevention Program (HLPP)
- NHMRC
- HEARing CRC
- National Acoustics Laboratories



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Ear and Hearing Health in Indigenous Communities



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Incidence of Ear and Hearing Problems

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2004-05) ear or hearing problems in:

- 10% of Indigenous Australian children
0-14 yrs
- 3% of non-Indigenous Australian children



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Otitis Media

(Middle ear infection)

More severe and persistent in Indigenous children compared to non-Indigenous children

- Causes fluctuating hearing loss
- Prevalence may range from 10%-54%
- Rates of Chronic Suppurative Otitis Media above 4% considered public health problem (WHO)



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Previous Australian Government Initiatives

- National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989)
- National Hearing Strategy (1996)
- Strategies for Future Action (2002)
- Work Plan for Future Action (2003)



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Current Australian Government Initiatives

- Historical OATSIH investment
- Improving Eye and Ear Health Services for Indigenous Australians for Better Education and Employment Outcomes
- Investment in the Northern Territory



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Current Australian Government Initiatives (cont)

Hearing components include:

- additional ear and eye surgery, particularly for remote Indigenous clients
- training of health workers for hearing screening
- maintenance and purchase of medical equipment for hearing screening
- hearing health promotion



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Current Australian Government Initiatives (cont)

Closing the Gap – Northern Territory:

- 4,497 audiology checks
- 2,285 ENT consultations
- 342 ENT surgical procedures
- \$4.5 million committed in 2009-10 for ENT services