



HEARING AWARENESS WEEK 2009



Media Release

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Loud noise sending Australians deaf

More than half of older Australians blame loud noise for their hearing problems later in life, sending a clear message to younger Australians to protect their ears.

The Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Human Services, announced the new research today that confirmed the perceived impact of noise on hearing loss in older Australians.

The survey conducted by Galaxy Research of 300 Australians aged over 65 with a hearing loss found 52 per cent of all Australians and 80 per cent of men consider workplace noise to be a factor in their hearing loss. Only seven per cent believed loud music contributed to their hearing loss.

Mr Bowen said the findings were a reminder to all Australians to protect their ears, whether it is at work or during leisure time.

“The most significant cause of hearing loss in Australia is exposure to loud sounds,” Mr Bowen said. “This research highlights that people are aware of the effect that noise has on them after the damage is done, yet it keeps happening.”

Among those who believed that work noise was the main cause of their hearing loss, the main influences were metal working, serving in the armed forces, working with firearms and explosives and occupations involving electrical tools such as saws, chippers, chainsaws and drills.

“Fortunately, there is better awareness today about noise damage and there are practices available to ensure workplaces are safeguarded from loud noise, but they need to be used” Mr Bowen said.

Professor Harvey Dillon, Director at Australian Hearing’s research division, the National Acoustic Laboratories, said that young people need to be aware that noise damage accumulates gradually and is not noticed until it’s too late.

“While only a small proportion of older Australians attribute their hearing loss to loud music, it is probably that this statistic will grow when today’s MP3-listening, club-going Generation Y’ers reach retirement or probably earlier,” he said.

Listening to a personal stereo at maximum volume is about the equivalent to listening to a chainsaw.

“It is important to protect your ears whether you like the sound of what you hear or not,” Mr Bowen said. “One quarter of younger Australians don’t realise that once your hearing is damaged, it can’t be restored.”

Australians can check their hearing over the telephone by calling Telscreen toll-free on 1800 826 500. Most age pensioners are entitled to free hearing services from Australian Hearing.

Contact: Rena Richmond at Australian Hearing on 0408 863 201

About Hearing Awareness Week

Hearing Awareness Week (HAW) is an industry-wide promotion of hearing held each year in the last week of August. HAW is an initiative of the Deafness Forum of Australia, the peak non-profit body for the hearing impaired community.

This year, HAW is being held from Sunday 23 to Saturday 29 August. However, Australian Hearing promotes HAW for the entire month of August via a program of national and local activities.

Summary of the report

The survey asked 300 Australian Hearing clients about their hearing loss and hearing aids. A summary of its findings are flowed below.

- Less than four per cent of those surveyed first experienced hearing loss at younger than 18 years of age, highlighting that environmental factors play a very large part in hearing lost.
- Half of all people with hearing loss say that workplace noise was the main factor in their hearing loss. Eighty per cent of men with hearing loss say that workplace noise is a factor in their hearing loss. Occupations that have exposure to continual high sound levels or bursts of very loud noise seem most at risk. These include:
 - boilermakers, fitters and turners, metal workers, joinery makers, carpenters, Armed forces (exposure to guns, explosives and jet engines), and firearms (hunters).
- For two in three people with hearing loss, hearing aids help overcome the difficulty in connection with family and friends, and for more than half hearing aids bring an improvement in their social life.
- The main benefits of hearing aids are that they allow the user to hear better and more clearly and thereby to also participate in things that the normal of hearing may take for granted such as listening to the television or having intimate conversations.

References: Galaxy Research, *The social and lifestyle benefits of hearing aids*, July 2009