

PRESS RELEASE

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Hearing Australia launches 'Spirit of Sound' to support First Nations children's hearing health

Hearing Australia's *Hearing Assessment Program - Early Ears* (HAPEE) is collaborating with First Nations communities across Australia to raise awareness of the importance of ear and hearing health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with the launch of a new storybook and series of events centred around the 'Spirit of Sound'.

The new children's book the 'Spirit of Sound', is a collaboration with artist Davinder Hart, of the Noongar nation and will be made free to organisations who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across the country in an effort to raise awareness about the importance of regular hearing checks early in life.

"I'm very proud to work with Hearing Australia to highlight the importance of sound to myself and to Indigenous people," said Davinder.

"When we hear sound it travels through our ears into our bodies and wakes up our feelings. In this book you can see the spirits of sound and how it moves around like a message being sent. When we start to listen, we can start to learn."

To coincide with World Hearing Day, the Spirit of Sound will be released as an eBook on the Hearing Australia website, along with a suite of new resources and a Q&A for parents and community with Worimi man and ear, nose and throat surgeon Professor Kelvin Kong.

Professor Kong is joined by First Nations HAPEE spokespeople from across the country, Wiradjuri man and father Luke Carroll, Gumbaynggirr, Dhungatti, Torres Strait Islander mother Elsie Seriat, and Noongar mother and grandmother Daniella Borg.

Professor Kelvin Kong says the issue is close to his heart.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids and our mob are more likely to get affected by hearing issues and their effects," said Kelvin.

"The problem with that is that it means our language, our development, our speech, and our progression through life can be hampered"

"I encourage all our community to take that first step, book in and get your kids, your nieces, nephews or grandkids a hearing check so they can be ready to listen and learn."

Father and actor, Luke Carroll, stresses the cultural significance of regular hearing checks.

"A lot of our traditions are passed down orally and you need to be able to listen to your Elders," Luke said.

“It’s extremely important for our culture and traditions to be able to be passed down and for young people to get hearing checks.”

This program is a result of a \$30 million investment by the Australian Government to reduce the long-term effects of ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The program was launched in 2019 with funding recently extended to support the continuation of HAPEE until June 2023.

HAPEE was developed with [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service](#) representatives, including the Department of Health, key people from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hearing health sector and Hearing Australia.

Elsie Seriat, a proud Torres Strait Islander woman and Daniella Borg, a Noongar woman from Western Australia, recently joined the HAPEE Program as spokespeople alongside Luke Carroll and Gumbaynggirr, Dhungatti, Yamatji and Bibbulman woman Emma Donovan.

Elsie knows first-hand how important hearing checks are with her nine year old niece experiencing hearing loss requiring hearing aids.

“I joined the HAPEE Program to be able to influence community on how important it is for kids to have regular hearing checks and how it can affect kids’ participation in school.” Elsie said.

Daniella Borg, mother of nine has experienced the impact hearing health has on schooling when her daughter experienced difficulties at school and later received grommets.

“My daughter couldn’t hear directions from the teacher, so I took her for a hearing check, and she later had grommets put in her ears,” Daniella said.

“Her schooling would have been severely impacted if we didn’t do the hearing check early and hearing issues can start at any age, so it’s important to get checked regularly and often.” Daniella said.

Kim Terrell, Managing Director of Hearing Australia, said that the program is seeing positive results, not only in detecting and treating hearing loss, but also in building confidence and capability in communities to identify, manage and monitor children for hearing health issues. “Over the last 75 years we have been proud to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve hearing health, and we are here to provide ongoing support to families and children, providing hearing care and information,” said Kim.

“The HAPEE Program will continue to conduct hearing checks through face-to-face and telehealth, provide local training and support services, and work alongside communities to address hearing loss.”

“We remain committed to working with our partners to improve the ear and hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,” Kim added.

Resources are available for parents and educators to support hearing health through the HAPEE Ears for Early Years Program. Visit <https://www.hearing.com.au/HAPEE> for more information.

A series of community events will kick off across the country with storybook sessions and opportunities to meet with Hearing Australia community engagement officers.

*The Hearing Assessment Program is an initiative of Hearing Australia and funded by the Australian Government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids aged 0 - 6 not yet attending full time school are eligible to be seen. All services provided under this program are free of charge. A hearing check includes a number of age-appropriate tests of hearing and middle ear function.



ENDS

References

1. Health, A.G.D. (2019). Roadmap for Hearing Health - Hearing Health Sector Committee. [online] www1.health.gov.au [Accessed Sep. 2020].

Background

Hearing Australia's HAPEE Ears for Early Years Program is dedicated to the prevention, early detection and treatment of hearing loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0 – 6 not yet attending full time school.

HAPEE uses world leading hearing screening resources developed by the National Acoustic Laboratories (NAL), the research division of Hearing Australia, to identify hearing problems earlier in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. NAL developed the Parent-evaluated Listening and Understanding Measure (PLUM) and the Hearing and Talking Scale (HATS) in collaboration with Aboriginal health and early education services.

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