

# "HEARING FOR ALL" A WORLDWIDE ACTION



*INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF OTO-RHINO-LARYNGOLOGICAL SOCIETIES*

*Non-Governmental Organisation in Official relationship with the World Health Organization  
Member of the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, C.I.O.M.S.*

## Hearing is essential for human life in developing as well as developed countries in the 21st Century Information Society

### The issue:

Hearing loss is the most occurring handicap in the world. 10% of the World population has problems with hearing leading to unemployment, poverty and exclusion from society. If no action is taken, more than 700 million people will suffer from hearing loss in 2015.

### At risk:

- Children in developing world (chronic middle ear infections rubella and meningitis)
- Children in developed and developing world (noise pollution)
- Industrial workers around the world (noise pollution)
- Elderly excluded from society, no rehabilitation

These problems can be prevented.

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### Actions worldwide:

- Awareness for prevention of hearing loss
- Children prevention and care programs
- Vaccination programs
- Screening programs
- Noise protection programs
- Rehabilitation programs (affordable hearing aid)

### Give your support:

In order to eliminate preventable hearing loss, "Hearing for All" is calling for support from governments, health care workers, business corporations and the public to raise awareness and resources.

### Contact:

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## MISSION STATEMENT

*HEARING FOR ALL* is a worldwide concerted effort designed to raise awareness of the importance of hearing and to prevent 50% of the avoidable hearing loss by 2020. Hearing loss affects 10% of the world population. Hearing loss has enormous social and economic impacts, limiting the education, employment and social participation of otherwise healthy people. As hearing is essential for becoming part of the 21st Century Information Society, this effort will enable all parties and organizations involved in eradicating preventable hearing loss to work in a focused and coordinated way. Hearing for All is taking on the following responsibilities: Increasing awareness of the importance of hearing for social participation Supporting prevention, cure and care of avoidable hearing loss. Creating an infrastructure to manage the problem

*HEARING FOR ALL* is sponsored by the world's leading public health organizations, medical researchers, non-governmental organizations, and charities concerned with public health. We support activities that deliver solutions to hearing problems in the developed and developing world. Our activities are carefully targeted to achieve the maximum possible benefits with the available resources. The hearing of children in developing countries is at risk from diseases such as rubella and meningitis. Industrial workers, particularly in developing countries, are exposed to high levels of noise. Today's living and working environments continually threaten the hearing system of people of all ages with high levels of noise pollution. Many of these problems are preventable, since effective and cost efficient solutions are available. The application of these solutions can transform the lives of many people around the world.

Hearing loss is a major and in many respects under recognized global health problem with severe economic and social impacts. It affects around 10% of the world population. In developing countries, hearing loss is part of the vicious circle of poverty and poor health existing in the least developed countries.

Healthy populations with the ability to hear and communicate effectively would help set these countries on the course of development. In economically developed countries, the economic and employment impact of hearing loss is particularly visible. Unemployment is higher

among people with hearing impairment, and their earnings are substantially lower than the non-hearing impaired population. The social impacts of hearing loss can be seen clearly in elderly people. Without treatment, elderly people with hearing loss experience social isolation, and are more prone to psychological illnesses such as depression, anxiety and paranoia.

While threats to hearing are increasing, healthy hearing is essential to participating in the modern information intensive economy and society. The underpinnings of the economy are based now as much (if not more) on knowledge as on land, labour and capital. As knowledge and information increasingly become the basis for economic growth, and the sources of jobs, the participation of workers in the factors of production goes up tremendously. Most workers are now "knowledge workers", even if they work on what has traditionally been called the "shop floor". Accordingly, full participation in networked teams has become an essential component of work. Being a hearing member of that team is essential to full participation. Loss of hearing means loss of information, loss of a networked team member, and loss of economic power for the individual and the economy.

If no action is taken soon, the problem of hearing loss is likely to increase beyond 10% of the world's population, as the percentage of people over 55 increases and their average life expectancy rises. It is estimated that in the developed world, the number of hearing-impaired people will reach 190 million. In the developing countries the number will be twice as large. If no radical improvements are made, more than 700 million people world-wide will suffer from hearing loss of more than 25 dB in 2015, meaning that they have difficulties communicating in a noisy environment (people with a hearing loss of more than 35 dB need a hearing aid)

The saddest part of this story is that it is often lack of awareness of prevention and rehabilitation that leads to suffering rather than the lack of cures or new technologies.

Fortunately, a large percentage of hearing loss can be prevented or rehabilitated, but this requires increased awareness. Hearing impairment is one of the disabilities that can be treated most inexpensively and with the greatest benefit - for the individual as well as for society. For children,

especially in developing countries, screening and awareness programs, disease prevention and vaccination are crucial to avoid preventable hearing loss. Infant screening enables hearing problems to be identified early, thereby improving the likelihood of cure. In developing countries, improvements in primary health care services can prevent many of the diseases that lead to deafness. In the working age population, prevention of noise induced hearing loss, through either public health measures or hearing protection for individuals, deserves priority. Awareness needs to be promoted among employers and employees of the dangers of hearing loss. Appropriate regulation and monitoring of conditions in the workplace should be encouraged, so that workers are not exposed to hazardous noise levels. In the elderly population, hearing loss can often not be prevented. However, hearing aids can prevent hearing impaired elderly from being socially excluded. Great leaps forward can be made in this respect as research shows that four out of five people, who actually need hearing aids, do not use any.

In some situations, access to affordable hearing aids is a problem that hearing aid manufacturers can help resolve. The science behind hearing has also taken significant steps forward. Research into the physiology of hearing and molecular biology has produced exciting results that may have a very near term pay-off for those suffering from hearing loss. In addition, developments in electronics are being put to use to create vast improvements in the technologies of hearing aids and implants. These developments are exciting, but they are not well connected, nor are they focussed as closely as they could be on the specific needs of hearing impairment.

These opportunities and imperatives associated with the needs of those suffering hearing loss, the opportunities posed by rehabilitation and prevention, and the needs of the economy all combine to create a forceful motivation to take concerted action now to address the problems of hearing loss in every aspect of society. Investments in prevention, remediation, and research can all have significant, profound, and long-term pay-offs for individuals, for communities and for economies. These are just a few of the reasons why IFOS has created "Hearing for All". We hope you join us in our campaign against hearing loss.