



AFRICA HEALTH  
ORGANISATION

# PREVENTING

## DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS

AN OUTLINE

AHO PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE PREVENTION OF  
DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS: an outline

## Partners



# Hearing loss: the looming epidemic

Currently, an estimated 5.3% of the world's population (360 million) lives with disabling hearing loss including 32 million children. It is likely that the coming years will see a rise in hearing loss prevalence, due to:

- ongoing demographic shift and greater number of older adults, one-third of whom are expected to have hearing loss.
- the increasing practice of listening to loud music over long periods and exposure to damaging levels in noisy entertainment venues. It is estimated that over 1 billion young persons (12-35 years of age) are at risk of hearing loss due to unsafe listening.
- Persistence of other risk factors including ear infections, infectious diseases, birth complications, exposure to occupational noise and ototoxic medicines.

## Need to address hearing loss

Unless hearing loss is addressed suitably, it has a profound impact on the lives of those affected by it, as well as their families and communities. Hearing loss is a barrier to communication and language development, is associated with delayed cognitive development in children and early cognitive decline in older adults. Unaddressed hearing loss restricts educational and employment opportunities, hampers social interaction and emotional well-being and often poses an economic challenge. As a matter of fact, it is one of the leading causes of morbidity, in terms of 'disability adjusted life years (DALYs)' and years lived with disability (YLD), globally. Moreover, it is estimated that globally, unaddressed hearing loss poses an annual cost of \$750billion.

Many of the causes that lead to hearing loss are preventable. In children, 60% of hearing loss can be prevented through public health strategies. Those who have hearing loss can be greatly benefitted by timely and appropriate interventions.

## AHO programme for prevention of deafness and hearing loss (PDH)

The relevance of hearing loss and required actions have been highlighted by the World Health Assembly

### AHO's vision

'A world in which no person experiences hearing loss due to preventable causes and those with unavoidable hearing loss can achieve their full potential through rehabilitation, education and empowerment'.

These resolutions have called upon Member States and partners to integrate strategies for ear and hearing care within the framework of their health systems and undertake actions to ascertain that ear and hearing care is accessible to those who need it. In the context of these resolutions, AHO objectives are to:

- Raise awareness for prioritization of ear and hearing care.

- Mitigate preventable causes of hearing loss.
- Ensure that ear and hearing care is accessible for all.

**Action points 2020-30:**

- Development and adoption of a Resolution on prevention of deafness and hearing loss.
- Organization of the World Hearing day each year from Africa with an annual theme; evidence-based advocacy messages and information products.
- release of African data on prevalence of hearing loss in 2025.
- Launch of report on ‘Multi-country assessment of national capacity to provide hearing care’ in 2024.
- Launch of ‘Make Listening Safe’ initiative to address the growing risk of hearing loss due to loud music, in 2025 with release of global data.
- Release of data on causes of childhood hearing loss in 2026.
- Launch of report on Global costs of unaddressed hearing loss and cost effectiveness of interventions in 2027.
- Development of a global network of collaborating centres on prevention of deafness and hearing loss with biennial meetings held in 2023 and 2025.

Release of the following technical documents:

- Promoting ear and hearing care through Community-Based Rehabilitation, as part of WHO CBR Guidelines
- Strategies for prevention and care of childhood hearing loss
- Ear and Hearing Care Situation Analysis Tool
- Manual for planning and monitoring of national strategies
- Preferred profile for hearing aids in low and middle-income settings

AHO has identified the following strategic areas of work for 2020-2030:

- Gather and collate data to drive action for hearing loss
- Undertake effective evidence-based advocacy for prioritization of ear and hearing care
- Support strategy development and implementation in AHO Member States
- Develop and promote the ‘Make Listening Safe’ initiative

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