

# Hearing loss – the facts



- In Australia, three to six children in every thousand have some degree of hearing loss. Approximately 250-400 children born each year have significant permanent hearing loss. Permanent hearing loss is where the hearing threshold (or hearing level) is more than 40dB in both ears and where this threshold is permanent.
  - Each year in Victoria between 65 and 75 children are born with a moderate or greater degree of hearing loss in both ears.
  - More than 11,000 Australian children under the age of 17 years are fitted with hearing aids or a cochlear implant.
  - According to Australian Hearing's aided child demographics (2006), nearly 3,000 Victorian children under the age of 17 are fitted with hearing aids or a cochlear implant. Of these children:
    - 37 per cent have a mild loss
    - 38 per cent have a moderate hearing loss
    - 13 per cent have a severe hearing loss
    - 12 per cent have a profound hearing loss.
  - Each year approximately 1,300-1,500 Australian children under 17 years are fitted with hearing aids for the first time. Of these children:
    - approximately 25 per cent live in Victoria
    - 36 per cent are under the age of four.
- The tests used to diagnose a baby with a hearing loss are reliable.
- Research has shown that early diagnosis and early intervention do make a difference. Babies who are diagnosed early and start wearing hearing aids and attending early intervention services by six months of age have better language and learning outcomes than those who begin late.<sup>1 2 3</sup>
- Types of hearing loss can be unilateral (one ear) or bilateral (two ears), congenital (present at or soon after birth) or acquired and
  - conductive
  - sensorineural
  - mixed.

1 Markides, A., Age at fitting of hearing aides and speech intelligibility. *British Journal of Audiology*, 1986, 20; pages 165-168

2 Robinshaw, H., The pattern of development from noncommunicative behaviour to language by hearing impaired and hearing infants. *British Journal of Audiology*, 1996, 30; pages 177- 198

3 Yoshinaga-Itano, C., Sedey, A.L., Coulter, D., et al, Language of early- and later-identified children with hearing loss, *Pediatrics*, 1998, 102; 1161-1171.

- Most children born with a hearing loss will benefit from hearing aids, and some may benefit from a cochlear implant. Hearing aids are available free of charge to babies and children from Australian Hearing. Hearing aids and cochlear implants assist the child to hear and develop speech and language.<sup>4</sup>
- You don't need to be able to hear to communicate. Babies use many types of communication including vision, gestures, touch, body language and hearing.
- Young babies can start to communicate their needs using sign language even before they can talk. Many families whose child has a hearing loss learn to sign to their child.
- Auslan is the name of the sign language used in Australia. It is a complete language in its own right, capable of all the functions of any other language. Young children learn sign language at the same time and pace as any other language.
- Typically the main priority for parents is to communicate with their child by whatever means suits their child and family best. Parents will need to make decisions about such matters as using sign language, fitting a hearing aid or the child having a cochlear implant.
- A number of risk factors that are associated with deafness are also known to cause other disabilities - for example certain syndromes or viral and bacterial risk factors. Having a hearing loss does not automatically mean your child will have other disabilities. However, many babies with hearing loss will be referred to a paediatrician so that their health and development can be assessed and assistance provided where necessary to ensure the child has the best chance of achieving their potential.

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<sup>4</sup> Footnote: Aussie Deaf Kids, [cited 5 July 2006], *Building blocks - Helping a friend whose baby has been diagnosed with a hearing loss* [website <http://www.aussiedeafkids.com>]