The Victorian Infant Hearing Screening Program (VIHSP) is a state-wide screening program which provides
- newborn hearing screening tests to all infants born in Victoria, and
- guidelines for targeted surveillance of infants at risk of progressive or acquired hearing loss.

At present, VIHSP newborn hearing screening (NHS) is available to approximately 78% of all Victorian births and by December 2010, all babies born in Victoria will be offered a VIHSP hearing screen.

The role of VIHSP NHS is to provide hearing screening to identify infants with moderate to profound bilateral, sensorineural hearing loss. For those infants identified with the target condition, VIHSP aims to monitor their progress through the diagnostic and intervention services using a web-based data repository.

VIHSP aims to:
- screen all babies within one month of birth,
- have those who obtain a refer result on the screen complete their diagnostic audiology assessment by three months, and
- ensure that those who have hearing loss will receive support and intervention by no later than six months (Figure 1).

Universal newborn hearing screening programs lead to measurable improvements for hearing impaired children in terms of language, social, emotional and educational outcomes. The success of a population health screening program depends upon the quality and accessibility of diagnostic services to receive the screening referrals.

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**Figure 1: The newborn hearing screening pathway**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Early Intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By 1 month</td>
<td>By 3 months</td>
<td>By 6 months</td>
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</table>
Where a baby receives a positive (refer) result on the VIHSP screen, VIHSP staff arrange referral for diagnostic testing at paediatric audiology services throughout Victoria, without the need for a referral through a general practitioner or specialist. Early identification and diagnosis of hearing impairment needs to be supported by accessible and effective early intervention programs for children with hearing loss. VIHSP is working with other stakeholders to improve the transition from screening to diagnosis and early intervention services.

There are advantages to a state-wide population based screening program such as VIHSP, including the assurance of quality standards across the state. Funds are provided by the Victorian Department of Health to the Royal Children’s Hospital Melbourne to manage the newborn hearing screening services, and support is provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for distribution of resources to MCH nurses. These allow for screening and targeted surveillance to occur within the standards and guidelines set out by VIHSP in accordance with the National Hearing Screening Committee, and the Maternal and Child Health Key Ages and Stages framework. Additionally, this means that VIHSP is responsible for ensuring all babies have the opportunity to participate in the screening pathway.

Related VIHSP Resources:
VIHSP website
www.rch.org.au/vihsp or www.vihsp.org.au

Website for professionals working with families who have a child with a hearing loss

DEECD Hearing Impairment Information Kit

Australian Hearing

Audiology Society of Australia Inc
http://www.audiology.asn.au/

For more information about VIHSP, please contact the VIHSP Head Office

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