COMHeLP—a manual for audiological practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

Amarjit Anand¹, Paul Hickey²
¹Audiology Australia/NT Department of Health, ²Audiology Australia

Introduction: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have the highest rates of hearing loss described in research literature, mostly due to conductive hearing loss secondary to otitis media.

The clinical management of conductive hearing loss in this population differs from that recommended for other populations because the underlying middle-ear disease is highly persistent and difficult to manage medically.

Consequently, audiological management is required concurrently with medical and educational management, often for extended periods. Special considerations and specific recommendations for providing audiological services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are required to achieve better audiological practice and outcomes.

While Indigenous Australians are present in all parts of the country, in central and northern parts many reside in rural or remote locations. With increased distance from urban centres, health professionals must cooperate closely, learning skills from each other to enhance identification and management of their clients’ conditions. Hence much of the advice provided in these guidelines will apply equally to non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australian populations in rural and remote locations.

Methods: In 2001, Audiology Australia developed guidelines for audiological practice designed to inform and support audiologists who provide hearing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in urban, rural and remote areas.

However, a need for revised guidelines became apparent and Audiology Australia developed ‘Chronic Otitis Media and Hearing Loss Practice (COMHeLP)—A Manual for Audiological Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’.

These guidelines represent preferred practice patterns resulting from a synthesis of information derived from expert opinion and supported by the available literature as there have been no systematic reviews of the audiological literature in this specific area.

Conclusion: This paper will introduce COMHeLP, including an overview of otitis media and hearing loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the purpose of the revised guidelines, implications for scope of audiological practice, and provide an overview of COMHeLP, including sections and appendices.

This manual has a very broad scope, therefore health and education professionals embarking on rural and remote work and Aboriginal health workers working with this population may benefit from an improved insight into this significant health challenge and find COMHeLP helpful in their own pursuit of better practice.