



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

CHHA-NL Position Paper

Public Awareness & Education Campaign for Hearing Protection

Introduction

Hearing loss is a growing problem in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as across North America, and around the world. In fact, a recent study (<http://www.hear-it.org/more-young-people-hearing-problems>), stated that, “...one in four 18-44-year-olds using headphones reports hearing problems.” More troubling is the fact that while hearing loss was considered by many to be a ‘seniors issue’, (thus not of their concern), however, recent studies have shown that the fastest growing demographic for hearing loss are young people. A 2004 study in Germany stated, “... the young person of today will grow up to hear like today's 60 year-olds by the age of 40 (<http://www.hear-it.org/noise-warning-for-young-people->). In addition, the vast majority of people will confirm, if asked, that they have someone in their family, a co-worker, or social network, with some degree of hearing loss.

While hearing loss is not preventable for many people due to complications caused by genetics, disease, chronic infections, or accidents, studies have shown that **Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL)**, is the number one cause of hearing loss (CDC/NCHS, 2002), which is 100% preventable when appropriate hearing protection measures (ear plugs, ear muffs, noise reduction methods, etc.), are used. However, for the vast majority of people, these measures are not utilized generally, or if they are, are not used consistently across all aspects of people’s daily lives, despite efforts by some agencies, associations and others that hearing protection should be more widely utilized.

What exists then is almost a ‘secret’ health issue with alarming consequences that is given very little attention and more must be done by government, health professionals and support agencies such as CHHA-NL. While it is already too late to prevent hearing loss for many, even if they don’t show the effects of it yet, with appropriate awareness and education measures, noise induced hearing loss can be prevented with the implementation of appropriate hearing protection measures.

Background

The physiological damage to hearing mechanisms causes **primary effects** (reduced hearing and communication), and **secondary effects** (social isolation, reduced confidence and self-esteem, challenges to gaining education and employment, depression, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and in extreme cases – suicide). In most cases, the reduced hearing cannot be fixed by medication or surgery and some sort of hearing assistive technology (hearing aids, Frequency Modulation (FM) & Infra-Red (IR) listening systems are required to improve audibility and communication efforts. In addition, other systems are needed for communication notification and life safety and include such things as special and expensive visual or tactile alerts. The total cost annually to health agencies and society in general is many billions of dollars.

Despite the warnings of doctors, various other hearing health experts and researchers around the world, the percentage of persons with hearing loss or reduced hearing continues to grow dramatically and alarmingly, especially among children and young adults. In fact, some of these experts are stating that a looming epidemic of hearing loss will be realized within the next decade, however the damage to peoples hearing is happening every day, but the effects of excessive noise to hearing structures is cumulative over many years. This is why noise induced hearing loss is so dangerous, especially to youth and young adults. To view some alarming statistics on hearing loss, please see **Appendix A: Key Facts and Statistics on Hearing Loss**, compiled by the Hearing Foundation of Canada.

CHHA-NL Position on a Public Awareness and Education Campaign for Hearing Protection:

It is the position of CHHA-NL that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should develop and implement a *Better Hearing for Life Public Education & Awareness Strategy* to create awareness among the public of the dangers of Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) and to educate them regarding the appropriate hearing protection strategies that should be utilized to prevent hearing loss and the primary and secondary effects of same.

It is further recommended that the components of the education and awareness strategy should include, but not necessarily be limited to:

1. To provide education and awareness strategies and innovative and comprehensive media messages for the public that would include school children (primarily grades four & five); teens in junior and senior high, young adults, and working adults in specific industry sectors where exposure to noise is hazardous to hearing (oil & gas, construction, manufacturing, etc.);
2. To raise the visibility and profile of Canadian Hard of Hearing Association - Newfoundland Labrador (CHHA-NL) and communicate its mission, vision and priorities as a provider of hearing support services province wide;

3. Provide targeted education, awareness, marketing and communications plans that would include the use of print publications, unique website, social media, e-mail, newsletter, newspapers, direct mail, brochures, posters, billboards, electronic signage;
4. Development of a comprehensive media kit.

Rationale for Position

As noted above, noise induced hearing loss, is a significant disability and health issue around the world and is one that is on the verge of becoming a health epidemic. Also noted was the fact that NIHL is a disability that is 100% preventable if appropriate hearing protection measures are implemented on a consistent basis.

Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic condition in older adults and the most widespread disability (Fook 2000; Yueh 2003). Almost 25% of adult Canadians report having some hearing loss (CHS Awareness Survey 2002), although closer to 10% of people actually identify themselves as culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing (50,000 people in NL).

The Worker's Compensation Commission of Newfoundland and Labrador reports that hearing loss claims are their top claim issue and costs per year to support these claims is over two million dollars. It is estimated that 46% of people aged 45-87 have hearing loss (Dalton 2003). Given that the incidence of hearing loss rises with age and the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest number of seniors per capital in Canada, the number of residents experiencing hearing loss is growing exponentially which means that the costs to the health care system will also increase exponentially if preventative steps aren't taken .

Communication is how people participate and interact in society, and how everyone builds relationships. Thus, untreated hearing loss affects the quality of communication with others, inhibits relationships, opportunities for work and also impairs the ability to hear certain sounds such as safety alarms and telephones.

Conclusion

It is clear that **Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL)** is a significant and growing, hearing and overall health issue in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Research has shown that NIHL left unchecked will become a very significant and negative issue for tens of thousands of people in this province, especially younger adults in their 20s, 30s and 40s. It will cause huge costs to the health care system and create many secondary costs to individuals that will negatively impact their overall quality of life (social isolation, reduced education and

employment prospects, strained relationships, mental health issues, alcohol and drug dependency and others).

It is the position of CHHA-NL that a strong public awareness and education campaign is needed to encourage residents of Newfoundland and Labrador to adopt appropriate hearing protection measures to prevent the effects of hearing loss and to maintain a positive quality of life. If such a program is not implemented, thousands of people in this province will needlessly suffer from hearing loss and all the negative effects that will result from it, however, this need not happen if appropriate measures are taken to create awareness of the extent of the problem and to educate about mitigation measures that can be easily implemented. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL) is ready to be a strong partner and to share its expertise in assisting the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in this important health initiative.

APPROVAL AND COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

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Association Contact Information:

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Appendix A: Key Facts and Statistics on Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is the fastest growing, and one of the most prevalent, chronic conditions facing Canadians today. While hearing loss has many causes, age-related (presbycusis) and noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) are the two most common types. Here are some interesting statistics that drive our work at The Hearing Foundation of Canada:

According to Statistics Canada, more than one million adults across the country reported having a hearing-related disability, a number more than 50% greater than the number of people reporting problems with their eyesight (Stats Can, 2002). Other studies indicate that the true number may reach three million or more Canadian adults, as those suffering from hearing problems often under-report their condition.

One in five teenagers, aged 12 to 19 years, have some degree of hearing loss, according to a study by the American Medical Association from statistics from the NHANES 2005-2006 health survey. This represents a 30% increase over the preceding 10 years, and is at least partly attributable to noise damage (Shargorodsky et al, 2010).

Based on a study from Tel Aviv University, 80% of teens use personal listening devices regularly, including 21% who listen to them 1 to 4 hours a day and 8% who listen for more than 4 hours, without a break. The findings of the study suggest that a quarter of the participants in the study are at severe risk for hearing loss (Muchnik et al, 2011).

The cost of hearing loss to the Canadian economy could be in the tens of billions of dollars. A 2006 Australian study estimated that costs to that nation's economy from hearing loss amounted to \$10.6 billion per year. On a per capita basis, this could mean a Canadian equivalent of almost \$18-billion per year.

A major US study first published in the journal Paediatrics found that "approximately 12.5% of American children and young adults in the U.S. are suffering from a hearing disability known as noise-induced hearing threshold shifts (NITS). NITS is basically a change in hearing sensitivity that is experienced as temporary hearing dullness" (Niskar et al, 2001).

Research shows that over the last 10 years, the percentage of second graders with hearing loss has increased by 280%, while hearing loss for eighth graders has increased over 400% (Montgomery and Fujikawa, 1992).

A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that nearly 15% of school-aged children had hearing deficits at low and high frequencies (Niskar et al, 2004).

Note: The statistics quoted here are taken verbatim from the website of The Hearing Foundation of Canada (<http://www.hearingfoundation.ca/statistics/>)

General Information about CHHA-NL

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL) is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to advocacy, awareness, prevention and the provision of programs and services that promote a better quality of life for hard of hearing and late-deafened people of all ages and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHHA-NL was founded in 1984 under the name of the Newfoundland Hearing Association (NHA). In 1994, the NHA became the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-Newfoundland Chapter (CHHA-NC) when it became part of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA). In 2002, when the province changed its official name to Newfoundland and Labrador, the association changed accordingly to its current name of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL).

The association is run by and for hard of hearing people of the province. Its operations are guided and conducted through the efforts of a Board of Directors, seven full-time staff, and volunteers. While it has a paid membership of all ages, the association provides a diversified program of support services to its members and the public at large.

To obtain additional information about the association, or to request a copy of the association's Annual Report, including information related to the ongoing operations of the association (financial, fundraising, strategic plans, types and delivery of programs and services), please contact the Executive Director, Leon Mills, at (709) 753-3224 (voice), by fax (709) 753-5640, by cell (709) 689-8239 or by e-mail at lmills@chha-nl.ca.