Bright issue hurting kids

The nation's leading ear experts descend on Top End

Nine out of 10 indigenous kids in remote communities have a chronic ear infection which researchers fear is limiting their educational opportunities.

Charles Darwin University chancellor Neil Balnaves said an infection called oitis media was one of the biggest health issues currently affecting indigenous Australians.

"Ninety percent of indigenous children that are not in major cities suffer from it," Mr Balnaves said.

"More than half of them will grow up as adults with real deafness problems."

"We have an epidemic on our hands. How the heck can these kids learn? How the heck can these kids get direction?"

Mr Balnaves said children with oitis media were at a disadvantage before school started - a disadvantage which continued into adulthood.

"The reason behind a lot of the incarceration of older indigenous kids is a lot to do with the fact they haven't been able to be educated," he said.

"Any kid that can't function, they're going to wash up."

This week, the nation's leading ear health experts are in Darwin for the 5th Oitis Media Australia Conference, hoping to find the answers to Australia's hearing problems.

The NT News understands that at midnight today, the NT Government will make a major funding commitment to help prevent and treat oitis media.

"Medical ear health research program leader Professor Amanda leach, who will speak at the conference today, said hearing problems could have a lifelong impact.

"It's preventable if we didn't have the overcrowding and cross infection issues," she said.

"It's important for the Territory because, sadly, we do have the highest prevalence of oitis media and the most severe cases of oitis media."

"It's a chronic condition, and the cumulative effect is that it reduces and limits kids' readiness for school and life after school, but it is a treatable condition."