



The Hearing for Learning Initiative (HfLI)

An innovative community-based service-enhancement model to address the crisis in ear and hearing health of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory: a Phase III stepped-wedge cluster randomised trial

Summary

The Hearing for Learning Initiative July 2018 – June 2023 is a \$7.9m **community-based service enhancement program** which aims to integrate locally-based ear health project officers into existing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with ear and hearing problems.

The Hearing for Learning Initiative is a Phase III stepped-wedge cluster randomised trial. Phase III means a study of the effect of a novel innovation (service enhancement) to be tested in the population. The 20 participating communities are called 'clusters'. Clusters will be allocated a start date at random, with all communities eventually trialing the service enhancements. Random allocation makes it fair and removes the bias of factors that are not well-understood, but which may influence outcomes.

The goal of the initiative is to work with communities to establish reliable, sustainable, culturally appropriate services that ensure every ear of every child is healthy and hearing every day. Hearing loss is not just about "ears". Ear disease affects speech and language development, many of life's enjoyments like music, and access to culture, education, and employment. If left untreated, it can have a significant impact on a child's cognitive development and entire life trajectory.

Workshop objectives

To proceed with ethics approval, stakeholder support for the program is needed in the form of letters of support. The objective of the workshop is to identify how best to align the program activities with the needs of program funding partners, stakeholders and existing priorities, to formalise this support.

Research question

In urban, rural and remote Aboriginal communities in the NT, does employment, training, and integration of local Ear and Hearing Clinical and Education Support Officers into health and education services, compared to current practice, increase ear checks, reduce the prevalence of ear and hearing problems, and improve education outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children during a four-year trial period?

Contractual requirements

- Progressively recruit, train and resource 40 Indigenous community members as Ear Health Project Officers, and integrate these positions into Primary Health Care Services in the NT.
- Implement the Hearing for Learning Initiative across 20 sites throughout the NT.
- Reach a minimum of 5,000 children aged 0-16 years.
- Deliver education programs to help identify children with hearing problems.
- Implement strategies with educators to improve learning outcomes for children with hearing problems.

Eligibility criteria for study centres

- Urban, rural or remote NT Aboriginal communities.
- Government or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service.
- A resident doctor, Aboriginal Health Practitioner or nurse to support the program goals.
- Communicare or PCIS database and access to these.
- Pre-school and/or school teachers to support the program goals.
- Infrastructure – equipment storage, access to a dedicated space to conduct ear assessments.

The Hearing for Learning training model

- Community-based, part time 0.25 FTE positions. Skills requirements will be discussed at the workshop.
- Certificate II in Community Health Research (Accredited Course 10513NAT) includes six units relating to being in the health workforce, and research. The learning program will be designed specifically for the Hearing for Learning Initiative.
- Training will be delivered by experienced people with a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (clinical trainers).
- At least six on-site four-day training weeks (one per month), plus six-monthly refresher courses and competency assessments.
- Clinical assessments will be conducted jointly during training weeks by clinical trainers and EHCSOs.

What we'd like to know from you

1. With regards to implementing this program, what are your organisation's:
 - a. Needs?
 - b. Constraints?
 - c. Enablers?
2. How can we best tailor the Hearing for Learning Program activities to meet the priorities of your services and clients?
3. How can we ensure your services and communities receive maximum benefit from the additional employment?

Funding Partners

