

## EDITORIAL: HEARING DAY

People with hearing loss often experience social isolation, stigma, and discrimination, have poorer access to health services, and have higher rates of mental health problems. Their physical health may also be poorer than that of hearing individuals

Being born without, or losing, the ability to hear can be devastating. More than 360 million people have disabling hearing loss, according to new global estimates released by WHO for International Ear Care Day on March 3.

Disabling hearing loss refers to hearing loss greater than 40 decibels in the better hearing ear in adults and loss greater than 30 decibels in the better hearing ear in children. Hearing loss can be congenital; for example inherited, following maternal infections (e.g., from maternal rubella), or following complications during labour (e.g., birth asphyxia). Other causes include ageing, certain infectious diseases such as meningitis, chronic ear infections, use of ototoxic drugs, and exposure to excessive noise. Prevalence of disabling hearing loss is highest in South Asia, Asia Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa.

According to some reports, more than 28 million people in the U.S. have experienced hearing loss due to prolonged exposure to dangerous sound levels. Drummers, in particular, are at the greatest risk of hearing loss. In order to preserve and protect our hearing, we must employ some type of noise reduction between our ears and loud sound sources.

What can be done? First, countries can do a lot more to prevent hearing loss; half of all cases of hearing loss are avoidable through primary prevention such as childhood vaccination programs and improved antenatal and perinatal care.

Beyond prevention, people with hearing loss can benefit from devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and access to sign language, and educational and social support. Additionally, health professionals must understand the needs of those with hearing loss and help tailor health facilities for this community—a lack of adaptation to hearing loss in society is often what disables an individual rather than their condition.

As the population ages globally, more and more people will lose some of their ability to hear. One in three people older than 65 years (165 million people worldwide) already lives with hearing loss. Scaling up prevention and care services will be essential to reduce the burden of hearing loss, and improve the lives of those living with the condition. Hearing loss can be devastating for an individual but it doesn't have to be disabling.

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