

AUDIOLOGICAL STAFFING SHORTAGE

New Zealand is facing a major shortage of audiologists which will significantly impact on the hearing health of both young and old.

According to the latest NZ Audiological Society Staffing and Resources Survey published in July 2008 there are 28% of audiological positions sitting vacant in the country's DHBs and educational Audiology sector. Some positions are taking up to three years before being filled.

The affects will resonate at both ends of the age spectrum.

The introduction of the national Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Early Intervention Programme (UNHSEIP) in a further nine DHBs over the next 12 months will add extra pressure onto public audiology services. It is vital to the success of the programme that any workforce issues are identified and addressed to improve the staffing and resource levels of public health Audiology.

Staffing shortages have an extremely detrimental affect on services provided to children. The limited capacity of DHBs to diagnose hearing loss in children, whether chronic, temporary or congenital hearing loss, and to provide appropriate intervention will have long term impacts on the lives of these children.

Service restrictions will also severely impact on the elderly. Hearing loss incidence also increases with age. Population studies show that over 20% of adults aged 65 years plus have significant hearing loss. The current economic situation is exacerbating this issue as fewer people are able to access private provision of these services.

We rely on a comprehensive Audiology service to meet the needs of all New Zealanders. With current trends there are no guarantees that everyone will get the services they are entitled to.

**National Foundation for the Deaf
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