Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 30 & 31 May and 1 June 2012

Question: E12-202

OUTCOME 7: Hearing Services

Topic: Research Grants [under the Hearing Loss Prevention Program]
Hearing Loss Prevention Program (HLPP) – research grants

Type of Question: Hansard Page 111, 31 May 2012

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Fierravanti-Wells

Question:

What has been the result of the work? [Studies related to hearing loss in young people]

Answer:

Three completed Hearing Loss Prevention Program (HLPP) projects dealt specifically with young people, music and hearing loss.

1. Edith Cowan University's project "Using auditory simulations to enable prevention of noise exposure in school-age children and young adults" focused on regular users of personal stereo systems and those exposed to loud recreational noise. The project aimed to determine whether a fear appeal augmented by simulations of hearing loss and tinnitus would be more effective than health warnings alone.

The project results suggested that the use of hearing loss simulations increased young people's motivation to protect themselves against excessive noise and to change their listening habits.

The project created educational resources including a DVD. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and Education Services Australia have been approached by the Project Officer regarding inclusion of the educational material in the national curriculum.

2. Australian Hearing Services, through National Acoustic Laboratories' (NAL) project "Prevalence of hearing loss and its relationship to leisure-sound exposure" (also known as iHEAR – Investigation of Hearing Loss Epidemiology, Attitudes and Recreation) used a representative population of young people to test the hypothesis that the prevalence of hearing loss in adolescents is increasing and is associated with increased exposure to high levels of leisure sound.

The project concluded that most young adults are exposed to acceptable (safe) levels of noise during leisure and work activities, and only a minority of young adults are exposed to noise levels that pose a risk of long-term hearing damage. Preliminary analysis found no association between reported leisure noise exposure and hearing loss or inner ear function.

The project findings have been disseminated in a peer reviewed journal, at professional conferences, and combined with the results of other projects (including the NAL project outlined below) to produce the Australian Hearing (2010) report "Binge Listening: Is exposure to leisure noise causing hearing loss in young Australians?" which was widely publicised in both Australia and New Zealand.

3. The Australian Hearing Services, through National Acoustic Laboratories project "Lifetime profiles of exposure to sound – what is a safe noise exposure" constructed a typical life-time noise exposure profile of 18 to 35 year olds and identified the activities that pose the greatest potential risk for long-term hearing health.

The project concluded that 10% to15% of 18 to 35 year olds are potentially at risk from life-time noise exposure and that dance club noise possibly poses the greatest risk to the hearing health of young people.

The project findings have been disseminated in peer reviewed journals and as technical or professional reports in international and Australian journals. The findings also contributed to the "Binge Listening: Is exposure to leisure noise causing hearing loss in young Australians?" report.