

# IAMP Statement: “A Call for Action to Strengthen Healthcare for Hearing Loss”

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## **Trieste, Italy, 3 March 2015: International Ear Care Day**

The InterAcademy Medical Panel (IAMP) today issued a statement on ‘A Call for Action to Strengthen Healthcare for Hearing Loss’. The release is timed to coincide with the World Health Organization’s International Ear Care Day<sup>1</sup>, which takes place on 3 March each year.

In the statement, IAMP highlights the fact that, worldwide, 360 million people suffer from hearing loss – including 32 million children. If left undiagnosed and untreated, then such children typically experience delays in developing speech, language and cognitive skills – with knock-on effects such as unnecessary learning difficulties in school and difficulties interacting with family and friends. In adults (it is estimated that about two-thirds of adults over the age of 70 suffer from hearing loss) evidence is accumulating that associates hearing loss with a greater risk of dementia and disability.

Hearing loss, therefore, doesn’t just affect the individual, it is a problem that also affects how whole sections of society function.

As Manfred Gross, of the Department of Audiology and Phoniatics, Campus Virchow-Klinikum (Language, Speech and Hearing), Berlin, Germany, says:

“The figures are concerning, but it is a fact that many of the conditions that lead to hearing loss can be detected and either avoided or treated. Simple tests on newborn children, for example, can reveal if the child has hearing problems. Regular childhood vaccinations that prevent diseases

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<sup>1</sup> WHO International Ear Care day: <http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/news/IECD/en/>

like rubella can avoid complications that lead to hearing loss. And simply reducing exposure to loud noises in the workplace can prevent impairment of hearing function in adults.”

Despite the range of solutions available for diagnosing and treating hearing loss, the problem persists especially in developing countries where awareness of the issues and access to suitable medical care is often limited.

The IAMP Statement, therefore, specifically calls on governments and other healthcare providers to implement a number of practices, including:

- improved healthcare provision in the area of hearing loss, such as universal hearing screening in birthing centres and making hearing aids and cochlear implants accessible and affordable;
- ensuring public health measures account for the causes of hearing loss;
- addressing hearing loss in both children and adults while acknowledging the differences between these groups;
- addressing broader societal needs, such as providing educational programmes for children with hearing loss, their relatives and communities; and
- establishing research and innovation programmes targeted at hearing loss priorities, including the development of novel screening and diagnostic techniques to improve the early identification of hearing loss in children and encouraging innovation to develop affordable high quality low-cost hearing aids and low-cost batteries.

Lai Meng Looi, of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia and IAMP co-chair, says: “The fact that so many of the problems associated with hearing loss are preventable means that we already have solutions in hand. In many cases, especially in low- and middle-income countries, the challenge is not just funding, but also raising awareness. That is what we hope to do by releasing this Statement. We expect that IAMP’s 73 member academies will now present it directly to their national governments and that they will start to implement some of our recommendations.”

“Like all IAMP Statements, this current Statement has been thoroughly reviewed and presents the best impartial advice from our member academies, based on the latest evidence, that we can provide to policy-makers, whether at national or international level, as well as to healthcare providers and others in the medical and aid professions,” says IAMP’s other co-chair, Detlev Ganten, of the German National Academy of Sciences - Leopoldina.

“Hearing loss is a major global health challenge, but because it is often preventable and avoidable, the time has come to rally round the key areas highlighted in the IAMP Statement,” adds Looi. “What is needed is a global, concerted and sustained effort to improve the lives of

everyone who suffers from hearing loss. Such an effort will be worth it – not only to those who suffer directly, but also to their families, friends and wider societies.”

In parallel with the release of the statement, a ‘Comment’ article is being published in the leading medical journal, *The Lancet* on 3 March.

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#### **Notes for Editors:**

- The IAMP Statement on ‘A Call for Action to Strengthen Healthcare for Hearing Loss’ is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/q4rk27w>

*Translations into German, Italian, and other languages are also being made available.*

- In parallel with the release of the IAMP Statement, a ‘Comment’ is being published by *The Lancet*: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60208-2/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)60208-2/abstract)

- The Working Group responsible for reviewing the IAMP Statement ‘A Call for Action to Strengthen Healthcare for Hearing Loss’ consisted of:

- Vicente G. Diamante, Argentina
- Ricardo F. Bento, Brazil
- Gao Zhiqiang, China
- Alejandro Torres Fortuny, Cuba
- Josef Syka, Czech Republic
- Claude-Henri Chouard, France
- Hans-Peter Zenner, Germany
- Otmar Schober, Germany
- Annette Grüters-Kieslich, Germany
- Tibor Zelles, Hungary
- Sandra Kuške, Latvia
- Somefun Oladapo Abayomi, Nigeria
- Charlotte Chiong, Philippines
- Daniël C. de Wet Swanepoel, South Africa
- Mohamadou Guélaye Sall, Senegal
- Mark P. Haggard, UK.

The process of developing the Statement was led by the German National Academy of Sciences - Leopoldina.

- IAMP, a network of 73 of the world's medical academies and medical sections of academies of science and engineering, is committed to improving health world-wide. The goals of IAMP are: to strengthen the capacity of academies to provide evidence based advice to governments on health and science policy; to support the creation of new academies; to support the creation of



projects by member academies to strengthen research and higher education in their countries; and to issue consensus statements on matters of importance to global health. The IAMP Secretariat is hosted by TWAS, in Trieste, Italy.

More information about IAMP can be found at: [www.iamp-online.org](http://www.iamp-online.org)

- Through IAMP, the world's academies of medicine and medical branches of science academies have been producing statements since 2002, when they produced their first statement on infectious diseases, 'Controlling Infections in the 21st Century'. Statements since then have covered topics including the health co-benefits of climate change mitigation, and a call for action to strengthen health research capacity in low and middle-income countries. In November 2013, IAMP released a Joint Statement with IAP – the global network of science academies, 'Antimicrobial Resistance: A Call for Action'.

Previous IAMP Statements can be found at: <http://www.iamp-online.org/statements>