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## Ear disease experts in Canberra to address Indigenous deafness crisis

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Appalling ear disease rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia still exist.

Ear disease experts including surgeons, audiologists, paediatricians, researchers and Aboriginal medical service workers are in Canberra today to discuss a national solution.

Australia's first Aboriginal surgeon Associate Professor Kelvin Kong says disadvantage is being compounded by a 'pandemic of deafness' among Australia's first people.

"Otitis media, or middle ear infections, should not be a normal part of childhood - yet we are seeing extraordinarily high rates of hearing loss from this condition," Dr Kong said.

"This is not just a rural issue. In Newcastle where I work, one fifth of the local health district catchment identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and rates of ear disease are on par with other parts of Australia. The further out bush you go, the worse it gets.

"Ear disease and hearing loss can lead to delayed speech and educational development, low self-esteem, unemployment and a range of other health, social and economic problems.

"What we have is a national disgrace. If children can't hear, they can't learn. They may become truants, leave school early, and then be stuck with no job or income. Beautiful bright children can then become unemployable, due to circumstances over which they have little control."

"Sixty per cent of children in youth detention centres are Aboriginal, of whom approximately 80 cent have ongoing significant hearing issues when tested.

"In adult facilities, a study in the Northern Territory found that overall 94 per cent of Aboriginal inmates had significant hearing loss.

"This group of experts wants a more coordinated and effective approach to address the difficult but treatable ear disease issues and it's timely considering the investigations into correctional facilities. The Assistant Minister for Health Ken Wyatt and other Parliamentarians have been supportive but we need action.

"We must work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to help end this preventable disease, which doesn't exist in other first world countries, and we need the government's support to do it."

Watch a short video about the issue: <https://vimeo.com/rollingball/review/187118895/b625d2fd1c>

Join the conversation on Twitter: #EarHealthForLife

### About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

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