

## **TOWARDS A NATIONAL HEARING HEALTH STRATEGY: AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE**

### **Backgrounder**

#### **Our Call to Action:**

Backed by an abundance of representation and research, we call on the Government of Canada to play a leadership role and create a multi-stakeholder national committee with a goal to launch a comprehensive *National Hearing Health Strategy*.

#### **Our Goal**

Our goal is to stimulate a national dialogue, foster stakeholder collaboration and crystalize a national effort to create a *National Hearing Health Strategy*. We hope it will further inspire individuals, organizations, governments, researchers, educators, advocacy organizations, health care providers and communities of interest to work together towards a national outcome.

#### **Five Compelling Truths ... Some Background**

##### **1. Hearing loss is widespread in Canada**

Hearing health remains a low public policy priority in Canada. And that's despite the abundance of research and statistics showing that hearing loss is both widespread and with severe impacts on health and quality of individuals and economic cost to governments. As a result, accessing hearing health care can be difficult, especially for Indigenous peoples and communities facing systemic barriers (e.g., related to income, education levels, employment and occupational status).

##### **2. There remains a chronic lack of awareness**

Statistics Canada's 2016 Canadian Health Measures Survey discovered that many Canadians are unaware that they have experienced some level of hearing loss. This can lead to more serious impacts: ones that may have been avoided through protection, earlier awareness and appropriate treatment and reduce the negative consequences for relationships, social engagement, academic and workplace performance, quality of life and cognitive and mental health. Thus adding, for example, to the costs of health care.

##### **3. The impact of hearing loss needs to be better recognized**

The health, social and economic consequences of unaddressed hearing loss are widespread and yet not well understood. It's a challenge that places considerable burden on Canadian society through lower productivity, diminished income, increased health and insurance costs and poorer quality of life.

#### **4. Setting priorities today is a crucial step**

There are four priority areas where the *National Hearing Health Strategy* must focus on:

- reduce the prevalence of hearing loss.
- detect and treat hearing loss early.
- ensure equitable access to quality hearing healthcare.
- support research in hearing health.

#### **5. We can make a difference...together**

Given the growing number of Canadians affected by hearing loss, hearing health must be made a public-policy priority. Urgent action by the Government of Canada is required. It must lead and work closely with provincial and territorial governments and communities of interest to create a *National Hearing Health Strategy*.

We recognize there aren't simple solutions to address the complex challenges associated with having a comprehensive, accessible hearing health system in Canada. No single organization, government or community can be expected to solve this challenge. That's why we advocate for a collaborative approach to hearing health: partnerships among federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, health and education professions, consumers, and other communities of interest.

#### **About Our Alliance**

The Hearing Health Alliance of Canada comprises the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility, Association of Hearing Instrument Practitioners of Ontario, Canadian Academy of Audiology, Canadian Hearing Instrument Practitioners Society, Cochlear Canada Inc., Hearing Industry Association of Canada and Speech-Language & Audiology Canada.

- Raise the profile and awareness of hearing health and the impact of hearing loss.
- Facilitate a unified national voice through advocacy on issues of common interest.
- Play a leadership role and facilitate the creation of a national strategy for hearing health.
- Advance policy, legislative, regulatory and consumer aspects of common interest.
- Coordinate proposals or submissions to the government on issues of common interest.