Primary care providers and hearing healthcare

Lorienne Jenstad, PhD, RAUD
Associate Professor, Hamber Professor in Clinical Audiology
Associate Director, School of Audiology & Speech Sciences
University of British Columbia



I would like to acknowledge that I live, work, and play on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil- Waututh Nations.



Conflict of Interest disclosure

- Lorienne: no conflicts to disclose

Agenda / Learning Objectives

1. Describe the role of primary care providers as agents of change for patients seeking hearing healthcare
2. Identify barriers to promoting hearing healthcare for older adults in primary care
3. Identify practices to promote hearing healthcare access in primary care

Acknowledgments







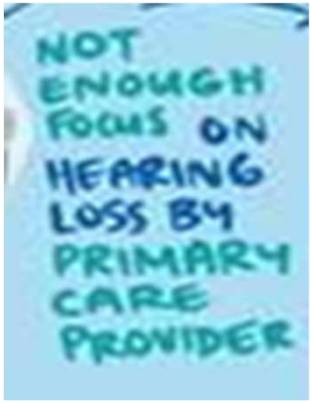






Why primary care?

Overlap between highest ranking priorities from community consultations and researcher expertise and interest



Primary care providers:

- A *first point of contact* for health concerns
- Refer about 50% of their patients who have hearing concerns
- Expected by patients to play a key role in hearing health decisions

"…the most important social influencer with respect to seeking hearing help"

Sources: Holliday, Jenstad, et al. 2015; Strom, Beck et al., 2020; Wallhagen & Strawbridge, 2017

Project Purpose

How can we support **primary care providers** to ensure their patients with **hearing concerns access** hearing health care and commit to treatment?



Project Overview



Literature Review



Survey to Primary Care Providers



Focus Groups

Understanding Providers'

- Knowledge & attitudes on hearing health
- Practices
- Barriers & facilitators to making referrals

Recommended Messages and Practices for PCPs

Adult Hearing Pathway / Webinar

Community Advisory Group

- Consists of
  - Audiologists
  - Primary care providers
  - Community organizations
  - Hard of hearing individuals

- Provided feedback to research team throughout the project (2-3 meetings per year)



--> Advisory role only

Community Advisory Group – annual anonymous survey

Patient Engagement in Research Scale (PEIRS)

CAG members reported that…

- The research team was very receptive to their ideas
- Participants felt very safe in the space
- Participants felt respected and valued
- Hoped for increased participation in activities

"I appreciate the diversity of the group and their different perspectives. "

"I feel honored to be part of this important project in my field."

"I value knowing I may help improve the long-term possibility of increased awareness of the impact of hearing loss"

Project Overview



Literature Review

Survey to Primary Care Providers



Focus Groups



Understanding Providers'

- Knowledge & attitudes on hearing health
- Practices
- Barriers & facilitators to making referrals

Recommended Messages and Practices for PCPs

Adult Hearing Pathway / Webinar

Literature Review

Medical practitioners' attitudes to hearing rehabilitation for older adults

Megan Gilliver & Louise Hickson

Clinical Study

Diagnosing Patients with Age-Related Hearing Loss and Tinnitus: Supporting GP Clinical Engagement through Innovation and Pathway Redesign in Audiology Services

Adrian Davis,[1] Pauline A. Smith,[2,3] Michelle Booth,[4] and Margaret Martin[3]

The Role of the General Practitioner in Managing Age-Related Hearing Loss: A Scoping Review

Rebecca J. Bennett,[a,b] Nicole Conway,[a] Susan Fletcher,[c] and Caitlin Barr[a,d]

Addressing adult hearing loss in primary ca

Marjorie C. McCullagh & Karen Frank

Speaking up for older patients with hearing loss

By Gretchen Laubach, BSN, RN, RN-BC

Lit review

- Brief overview of the populations studied



Primary care providers:

- Family doctor (15)
- Nurse (3)
- Medical practitioner (5)
- Health professional (2)
- Multiple medical professionals (5)
- Medical professionals working with people with dementia or learning disabilities (2)

Patients:

- Adults, no diagnosed hearing loss (6)
- Adults with hearing loss (3)
- Older adults, no diagnosed hearing loss (1)
- Older adults with hearing loss (5)
- Older patients (hearing not specified; 13)

Only one study from Canada!

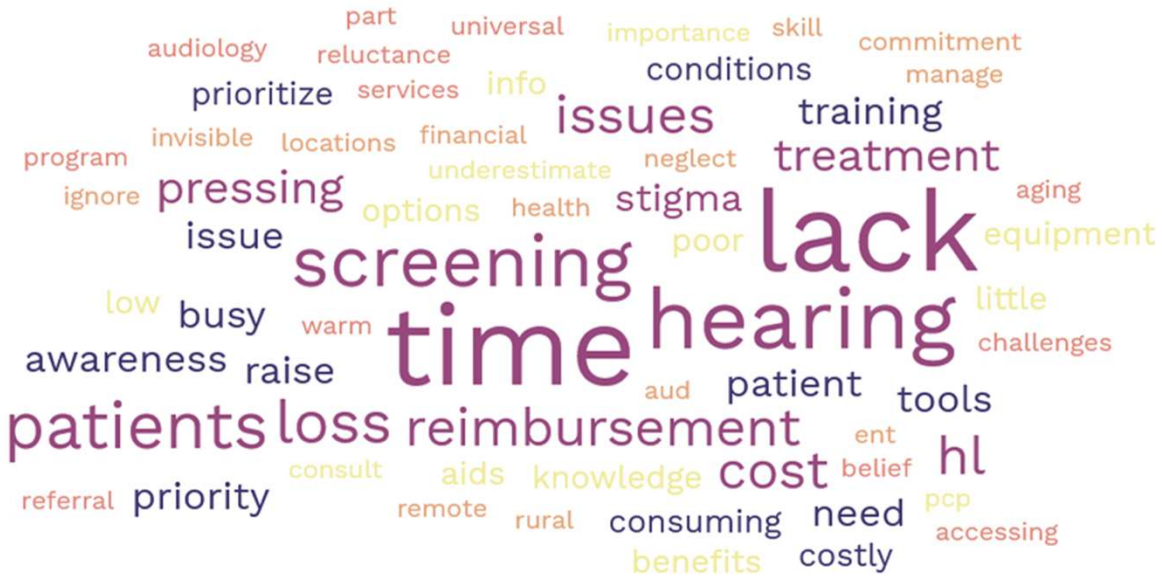
Literature review

- PCP attitude
  - Actual
  - Recommended
- PCP behaviour/practices
  - Actual
  - Recommended
- PCP knowledge
  - Actual
  - Recommended



Literature review

Barriers



Literature review

Facilitators



Project Overview



Literature Review

Survey to Primary Care Providers



Focus Groups



Understanding Providers'

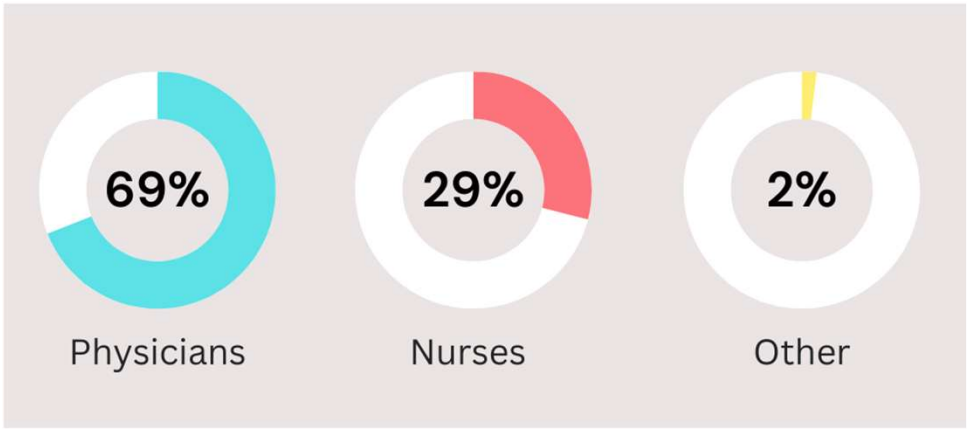
- Knowledge & attitudes on hearing health
- Practices
- Barriers & facilitators to making referrals

Recommended Messages and Practices for PCPs

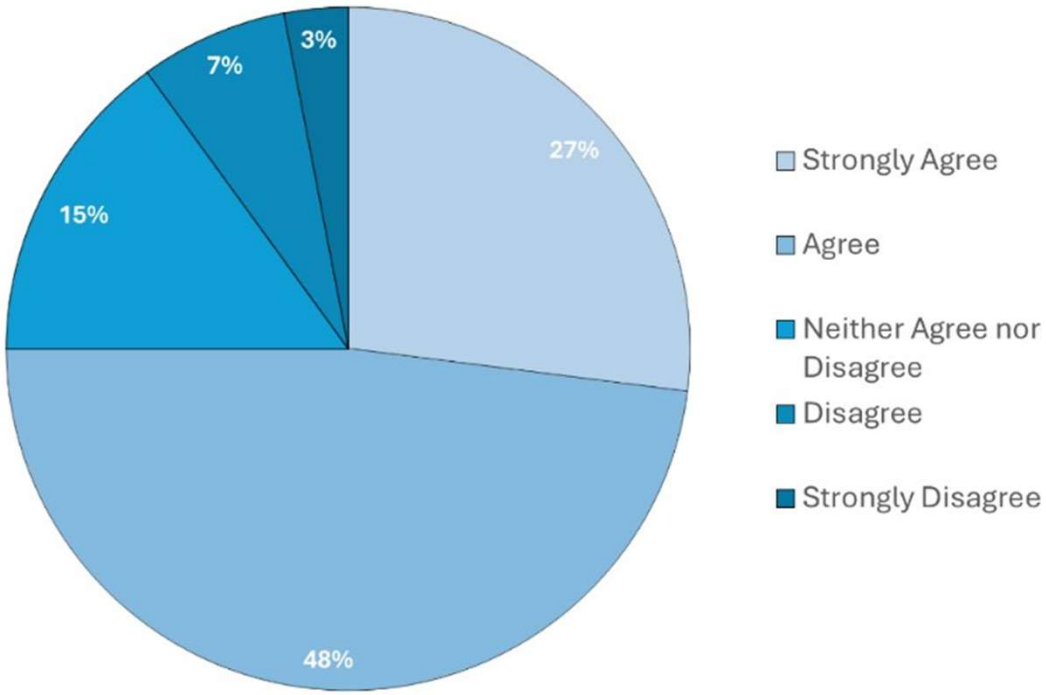
Adult Hearing Pathway / Webinar

PCP Survey

- Distributed to PCPs in BC who are currently practicing or recently retired
- 370 responses to closed ended questions.
- 241 responses to open ended questions

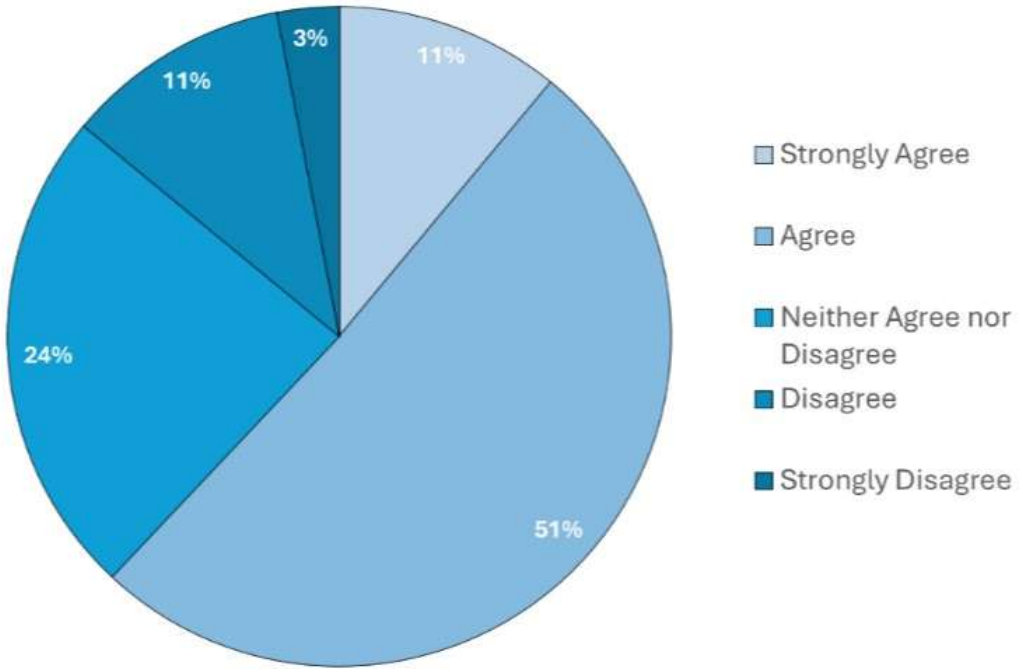


Survey Results – quantitative



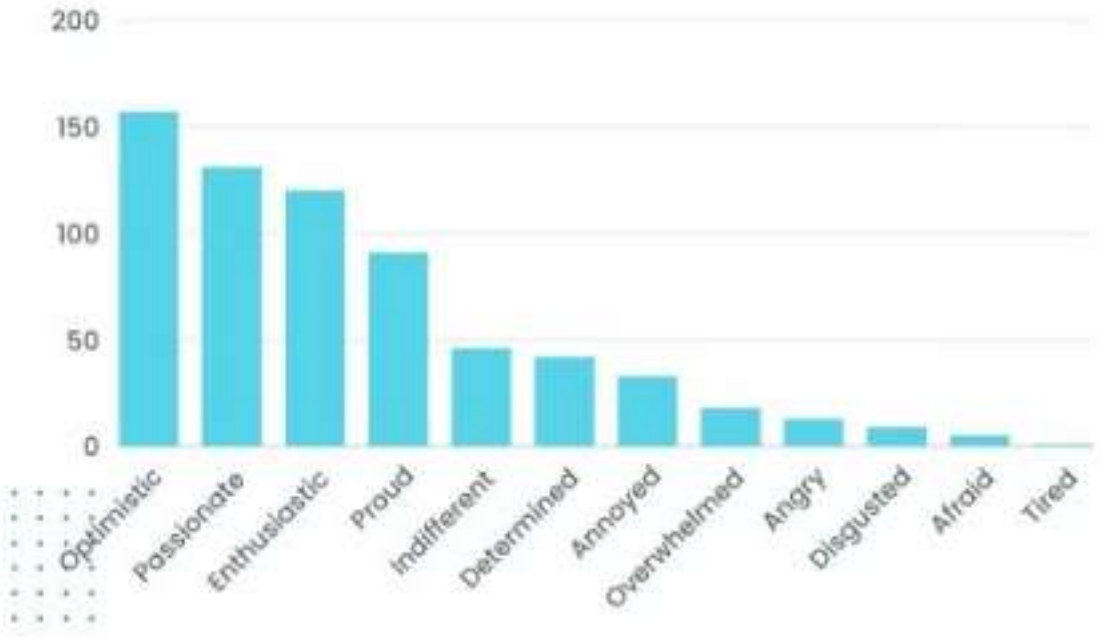
Hearing loss often causes difficulties for people aged 50+ in their relationships.

Survey Results – quantitative



"I find it easy to discuss hearing healthcare and assessment with my patients"

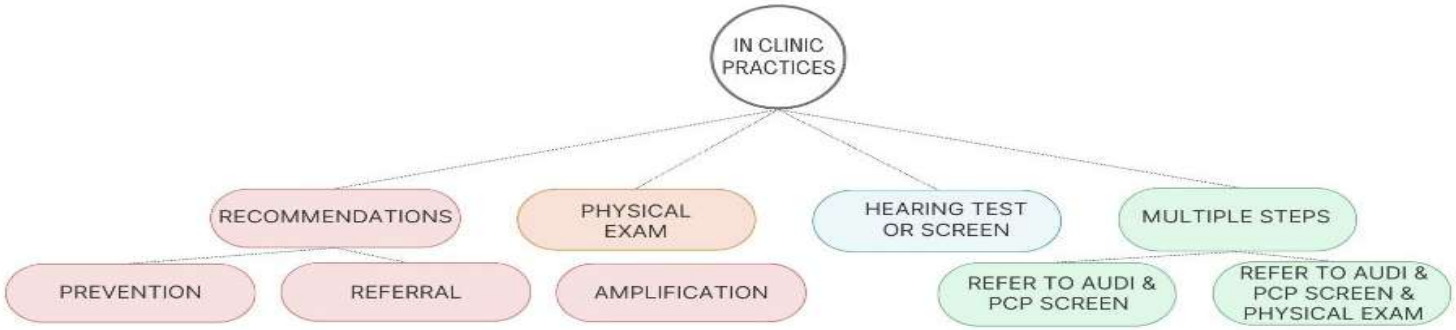
Survey Results - quantitative



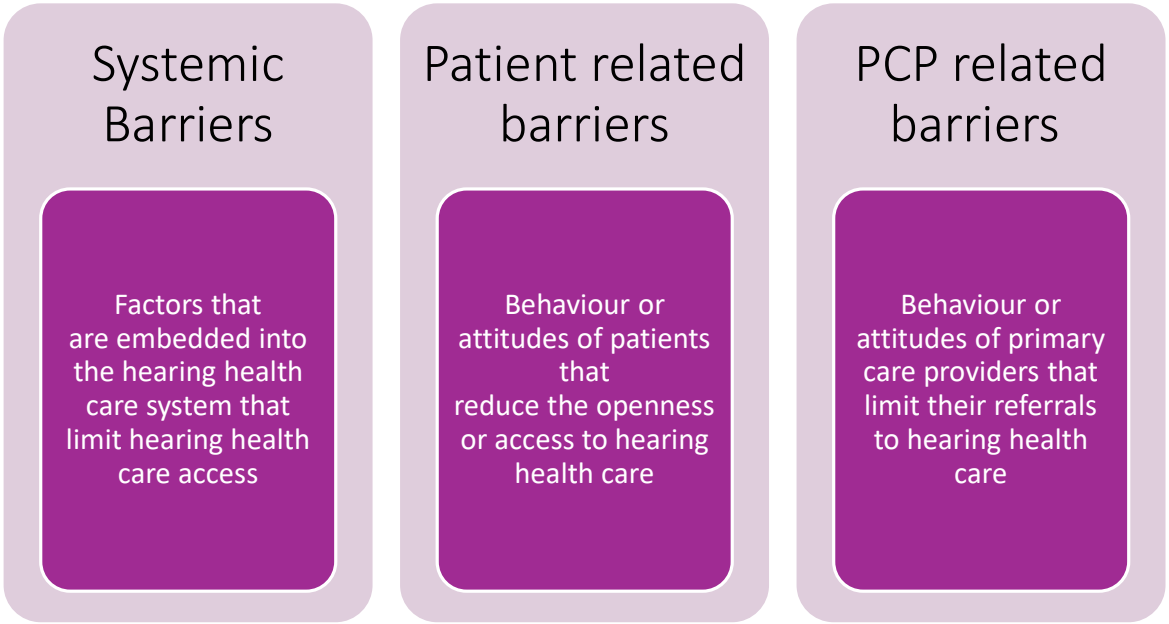
How do you feel about being a champion for hearing health?

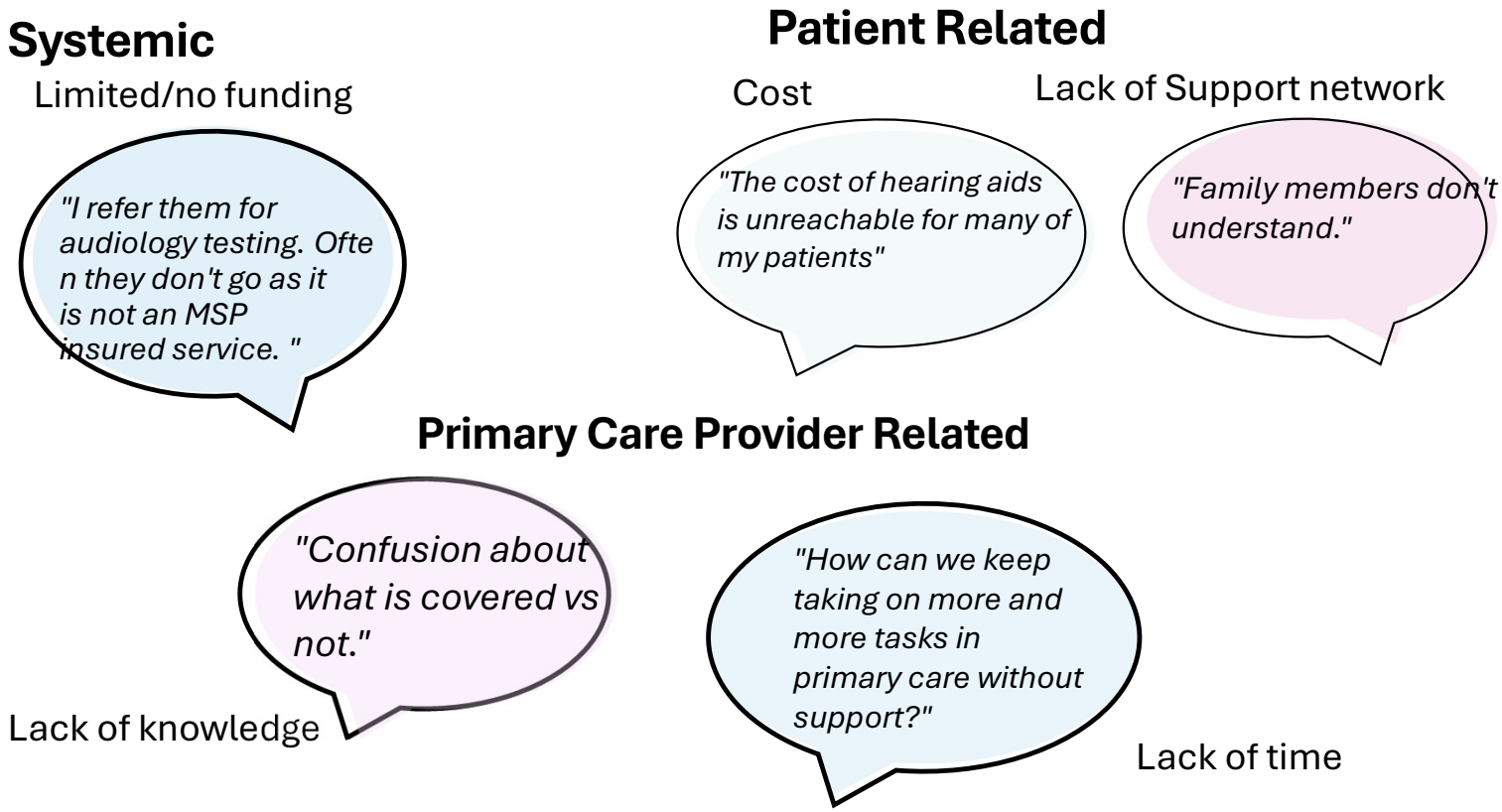
Survey Results - qualitative

What steps do you take if you are concerned about the hearing of a patient aged 50+?

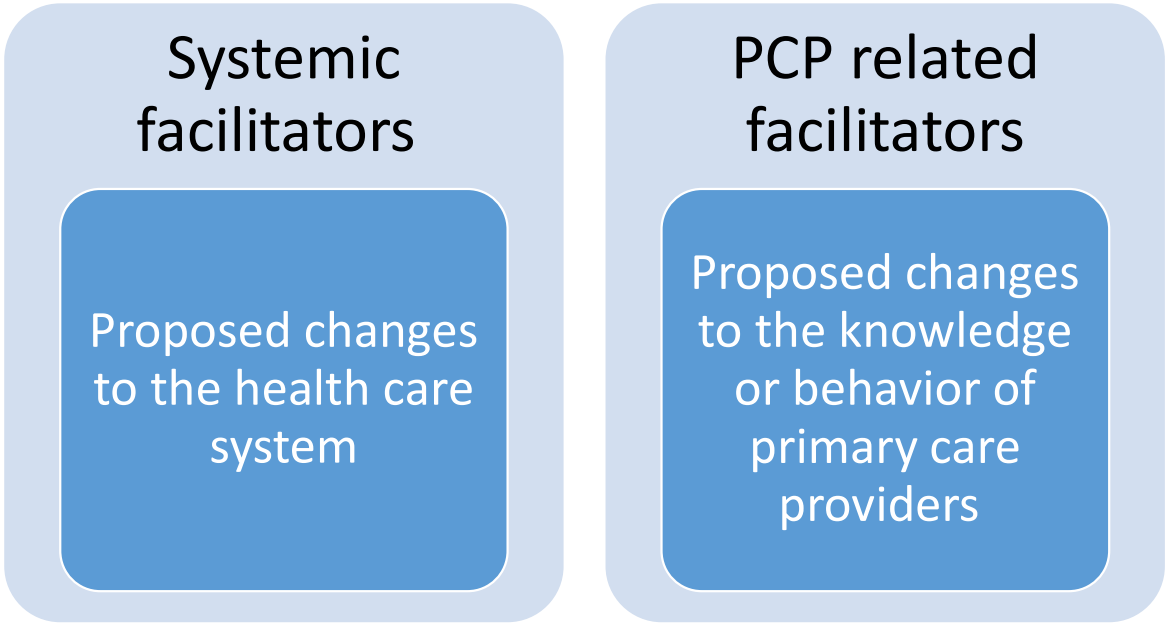


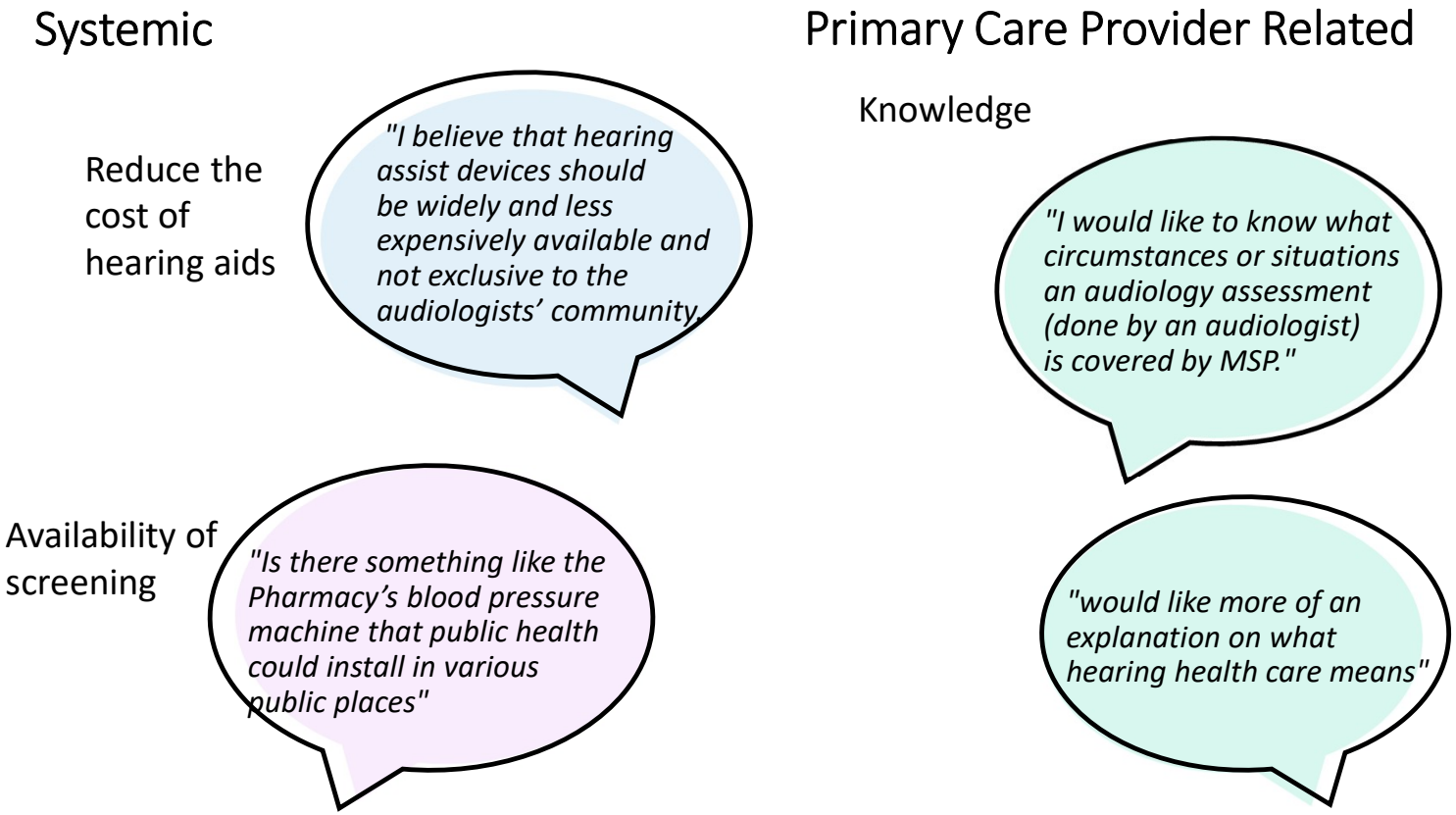
What are the Barriers?




Systemic
Limited/no funding
"I refer them for audiology testing. Ofte n they don't go as it is not an MSP insured service. "
Patient Related
Cost
"The cost of hearing aids is unreachable for many of my patients"
Lack of Support network
"Family members don't understand."
Primary Care Provider Related
"Confusion about what is covered vs not."
Lack of knowledge
"How can we keep taking on more and more tasks in primary care without support?"
Lack of time

What are the Facilitators?




Systemic
Reduce the cost of hearing aids
"I believe that hearing assist devices should be widely and less expensively available and not exclusive to the audiologists' community.
Availability of screening
"Is there something like the Pharmacy's blood pressure machine that public health could install in various public places"
Primary Care Provider Related
Knowledge
"I would like to know what circumstances or situations an audiology assessment (done by an audiologist) is covered by MSP."
"would like more of an explanation on what hearing health care means"

Project Overview



Literature Review



Survey to Primary Care Providers



Focus Groups

Understanding Providers'

- Knowledge & attitudes on hearing health
- Practices
- Barriers & facilitators to making referrals

Recommended Messages and Practices for PCPs

Adult Hearing Pathway / Webinar

Focus groups

Three focus groups

- Primary Care Providers
- Hearing Health Care Providers
- People with Hearing Loss



" What would you most want a primary care provider to do or say to support a patient's hearing health?"

What should a PCP do, think, and say to a patient with hearing loss?

Primary Care Providers	Hearing Health Care Providers	Patients
Get a thorough case history	Educate patients on hearing loss	Changing perception/ reduce stigma
Educate patient	Provide list of hearing healthcare providers	Referrals to hearing healthcare
Audiology and ENT referral	Pre referral action items (e.g., check for wax and in clinic screening)	Annual hearing assessment

Project Overview



Literature Review



Survey to Primary Care Providers



Focus Groups

Understanding Providers'

- Knowledge & attitudes on hearing health
- Practices
- Barriers & facilitators to making referrals

Recommended Messages and Practices for PCPs

Adult Hearing Pathway / Webinar

Common messages across data sources (subset of the data)

"How can we support PCPs to ensure that their patients with hearing concerns seek help and commit to treatment"



Practical (in office):

- PCPs need quick clinical screening tools (time is a barrier!)
- Pathways or sequence of steps (who to refer to and how)

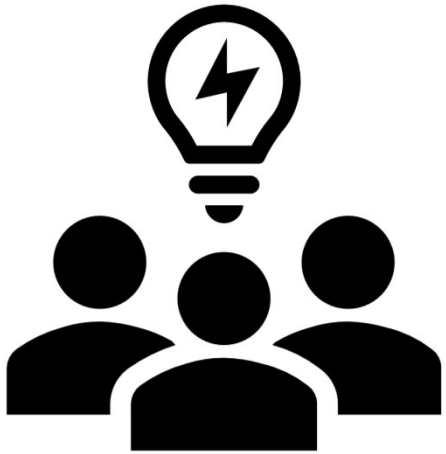
Education (for PCPs, patients):

- What is the role of a PCP (beyond earwax!)

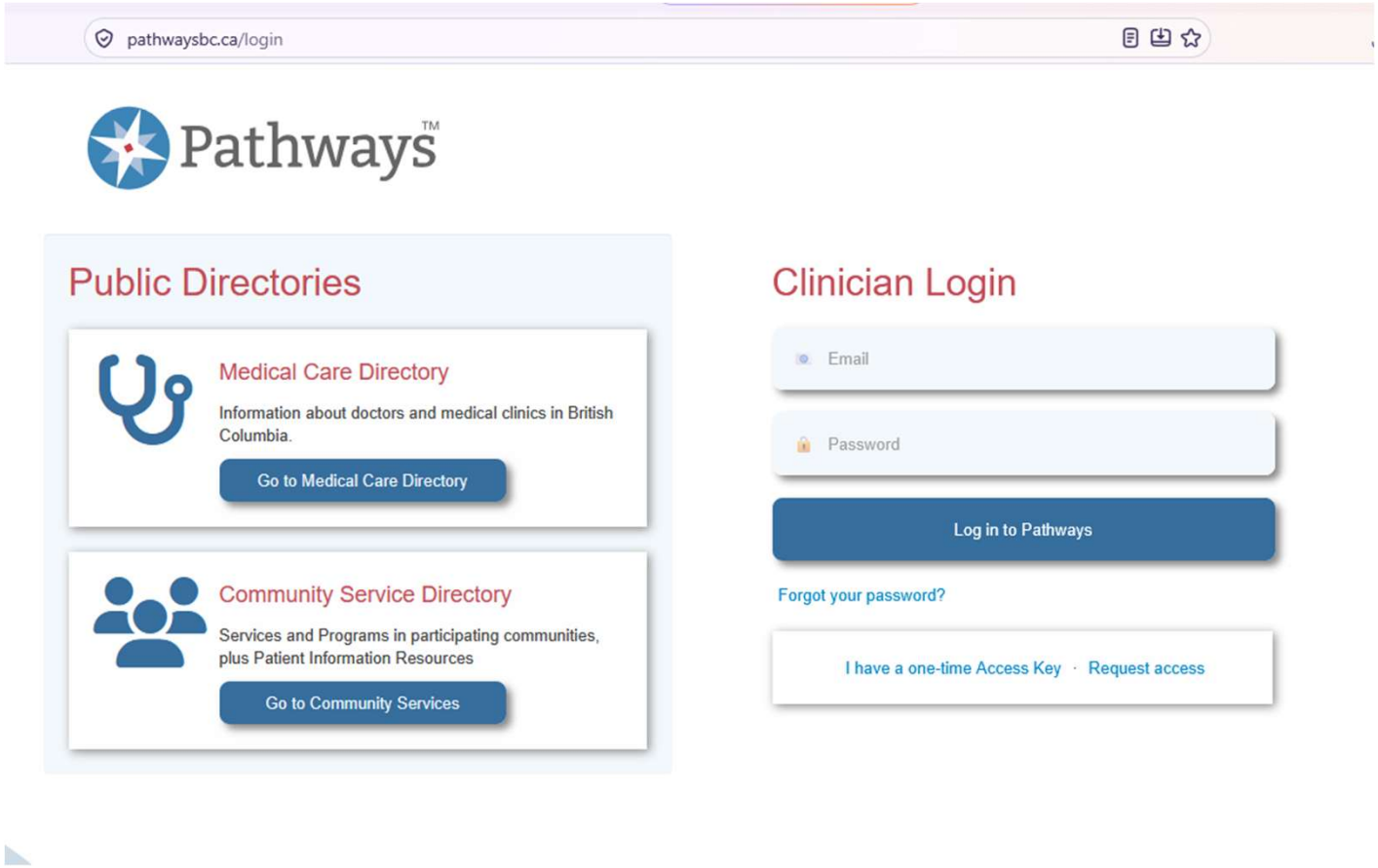
Systemic:

- "Hearing is not considered that important"
- Anything related to hearing is costly (to the patient) and time consuming (for the PCP)

Working group (subset of community advisory group)



Pathwaysbc.ca



RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO HEARING LOSS IN ADULTS: WHAT EVERY PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER NEEDS TO KNOW

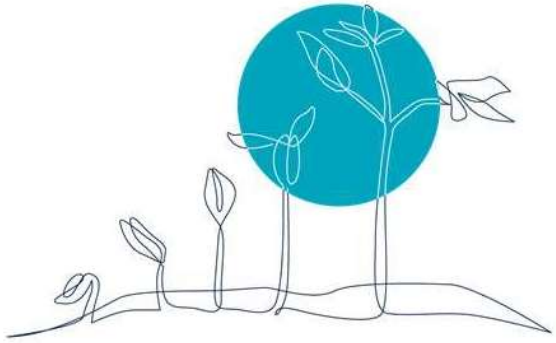
April 9, 2026 | 6:30-8:00PM PT



Live Captions:
https://bit.ly/[illegible]



Ask your questions:
slido.com | [illegible]



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Continuing Professional Development
Faculty of Medicine

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify and implement strategies for optimal communication with patients who have hearing loss
2. Describe roles of primary care providers, hearing healthcare providers, and otolaryngologists in patient hearing healthcare
3. Screen for hearing loss
4. Use tools in Pathways BC to support patients' hearing health

UBC CPD
Medicine
CONTINUING
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

SPEAKER PANEL

Otolaryngology resident

Hearing loss advocate, writer, speaker, humorist

Recently retired audiologist

Family nurse practitioner who is hard of hearing

Two family physicians (one of whom wears hearing aids)

Moderator: emergency room physician

UBC CPD
Medicine
CONTINUING
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

PLANNING TEAM

Research team co-leads

Three experts in continuing professional development

Otologist (as back up for the resident)

UBC CPD
Medicine
CONTINUING
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

What can you do?

- If in BC:
  - Reach out to PCPs to let them know about the Pathway resource on Adult Hearing Health
  - Update your listing on SHBC website Find a Professional page!

- Anywhere in Canada:
  - Set aside appointments for urgent hearing tests. Connect with local PCPs to let them know you offer the service
  - Work on a provincial level to find the best venues to reach PCPs

Thank you
Questions?

Contact information:
Ljenstad@mail.ubc.ca

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA