

WHA RESOLUTION AND ACTION PLAN FOR PREVENTION OF DEAFNESS AND HEARING LOSS

Background Document

Context

The global prevalence of hearing loss is on the rise. Current estimates suggest that over 360 million people live with disabling hearing loss. Many more are considered to be at risk of developing hearing loss, due to the threats posed by noise, infections and age-related degeneration. Despite the great need for prevention of hearing loss and intervention to address this issue, there is an overall lack of awareness about the prevalence and importance of hearing loss. Few countries, mainly high income ones, have taken any steps to address this problem. Hearing is directly linked to development of language, cognition, education and economic independence. However, its relevance is continually disregarded by most decision-makers. A coordinated global action is required to make global health leaders, policymakers and governments aware of this issue.

Role of the World Health Organization and World Health Assembly

The World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int/en/> is the United Nations' specialized agency for all issues related to health and works closely with Ministries of Health in most of its 194 Member States. Each year, WHO organizes the World Health Assembly (WHA) (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/wha/en/>), where all countries gather to share information, discuss important health issues and determine the global health agenda. Decisions made by the Assembly are often in the form of WHA resolutions, which provide guidance to both countries as well as the WHO in determining priorities and planning actions.

WHA resolution on hearing loss

After a long gap, the issue of hearing loss was finally brought up at the World Health Assembly (WHA) in 2015. The issue was highlighted again in 2016 when there was a request for a resolution on hearing loss. Considering that the last resolution was passed in 1995 (http://www.who.int/pbd/publications/wha_eb/wha48_9/en/), this request denotes a big leap in prioritization of hearing care.

A resolution on hearing loss has been proposed by Russia (http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB139/B139_R1-en.pdf) and was discussed and supported by many countries in May 2016. The resolution will now be tabled at the WHA, which will be held in Geneva, Switzerland in May 2017. Based on the support and endorsement received from member countries the resolution may be approved by the WHA.

16.02.17

What difference can the WHA resolution make?

A WHA resolution denotes a commitment on part of WHO and its Member States to work in the field of hearing. It is a strong tool of political advocacy and can be used to undertake advocacy with policymakers, international agencies and funding bodies.

How you can contribute

All countries, big and small, which are members of the United Nations have a vote and equal opportunity to speak at the WHA and offer their views. Ministers and Secretaries of Health are the key people who discuss these issues at WHA. Each one of us can access our own governments through petitions, requests, letters, discussions and other such means to support this resolution, and make a statement in its favor.

The WHA resolution is a unique opportunity to increase awareness about the issue of hearing loss and a chance to work together to support a cause that we all believe in.