

AADC Workshop 25 October 2023
Hearing Loss, AOD, NDIS and First Nation peoples over representation in the criminal justice system.

Talking points

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- Hearing loss is massive among First Nations people in Australia – 40%-60% depending on where they live, because of chronic childhood ear disease. But among First Nations inmates the prevalence of hearing loss is even higher – 94% in the NT.
 - The fact that a higher proportion of First Nations people in prison have hearing loss points to mostly unidentified hearing loss being a significant factor on the pathway to prison for many, many First Nations People.
 - Hearing loss interacts synergistically with other factors that contribute to First Nations people's involvement in the criminal justice system, including AOD. AOD fuelled interpersonal violence is a common antecedent to First Nations people's involvement in the criminal justice system. This is compounded for people with hearing loss as AOD use can be a way some people:
 - manage frustrations related to hearing loss and communication barriers
 - cope with hearing loss related anxiety, stress and challenges in social situations. The disinhibiting effects of alcohol can also release pent up frustrations and anger arising from hearing loss related social difficulties.
- https://www.ilc.unsw.edu.au/sites/ilc.unsw.edu.au/files/articles/ILB%207-28%20Hearing%20Loss%20-%20Vanderpoll_Howard.pdf
- Hearing loss can also diminishes the effectiveness of AOD programs. Most AOD services do not consider for the communications challenges of First Nations people with hearing loss. AOD services need identify which participants have a hearing loss and cater for their communications needs during the delivery of AOD services.
 - For example: at the end of a First Nations AOD program, the participants hearing was tested. AOD facilitators were also asked to rate the engagement of each participant. Those with hearing loss were seen to have engaged least during the training and were seen to have gained least out of the training.
 - As well as AOD support services, NDIS supports also can be improved by a better understanding of the synergistic effects of how hearing loss and AOD use foster behaviours that propel people's involvement in the criminal justice system. AOD, NDIS and criminal justice workers can all benefit from understanding how hearing loss complicates the life trajectories and support needs in each of these sectors as well as assisting the collaboration interface of these three systems.
 - The research team have recently completed a project examining the NDIS experiences of First Nations participants who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Many participants experienced challenges in

relation to AoD and increased interaction with the justice system. For some, access to the NDIS provided some supports to help address underlying contributing factors to AoD and justice issues, but it remains a very complex interface to navigate for most. Link to the report

<https://www.ndrp.org.au/project-hey-hear-me-out>

- The team are currently working on a NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission funded project to help disability support workers better engage with First Nations people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. This resource is also likely to benefit workers in other sectors. For more information about this project or for other potential collaborations and training opportunities, please contact us on: jody@deaficc.com.au; damienatphoenix@gmail.com; or alexandra.devine@unimelb.edu.au
- If you would like to work on improving identification of First Nations people with hearing loss in your programs and learn how to improve communication outcomes with them contact jody@deaficc.com.au or damien@phoenixconsulting.com.au