

Self-reported hearing loss in urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults: Unmeasured, unknown, and unmanaged

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Introduction & Objectives

We know very little about hearing loss and its management in Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander adults in Australia. This is despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having increased risk for hearing loss (due to high rates of childhood middle ear disease and adult conditions such as diabetes) and the potential for hearing loss to compound existing social disadvantage in the areas of social inclusion, education, employment, & mental health.

This study aimed to:

1. Measure **rates of self-reported hearing loss** in a large, urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary healthcare service.
2. Measure **subsequent management** of persons self-reporting hearing loss, and
3. Use findings to improve aural health care **at local level.**

Methods

Health Check Analysis

Responses to a hearing question were identified for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15+ years who attended an annual health check at an Indigenous primary health clinic between August 2018 to September 2021.

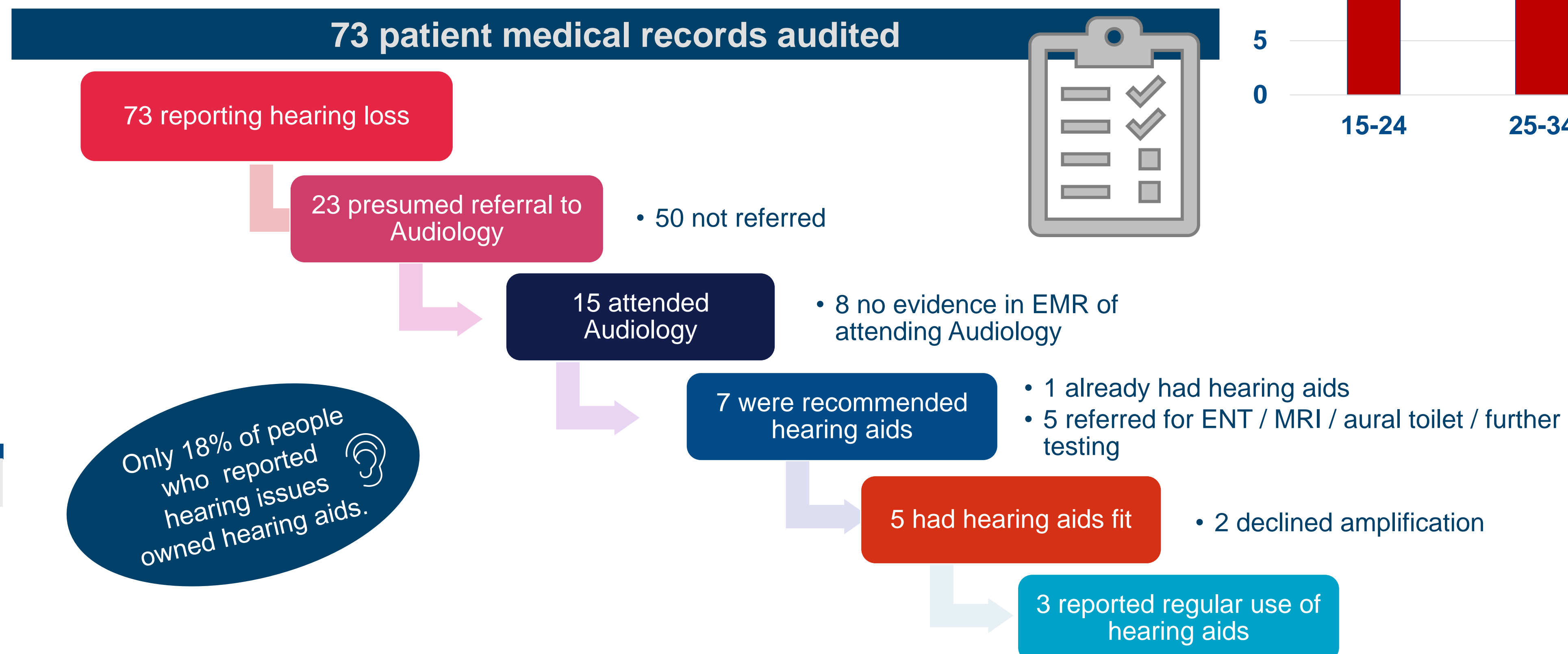
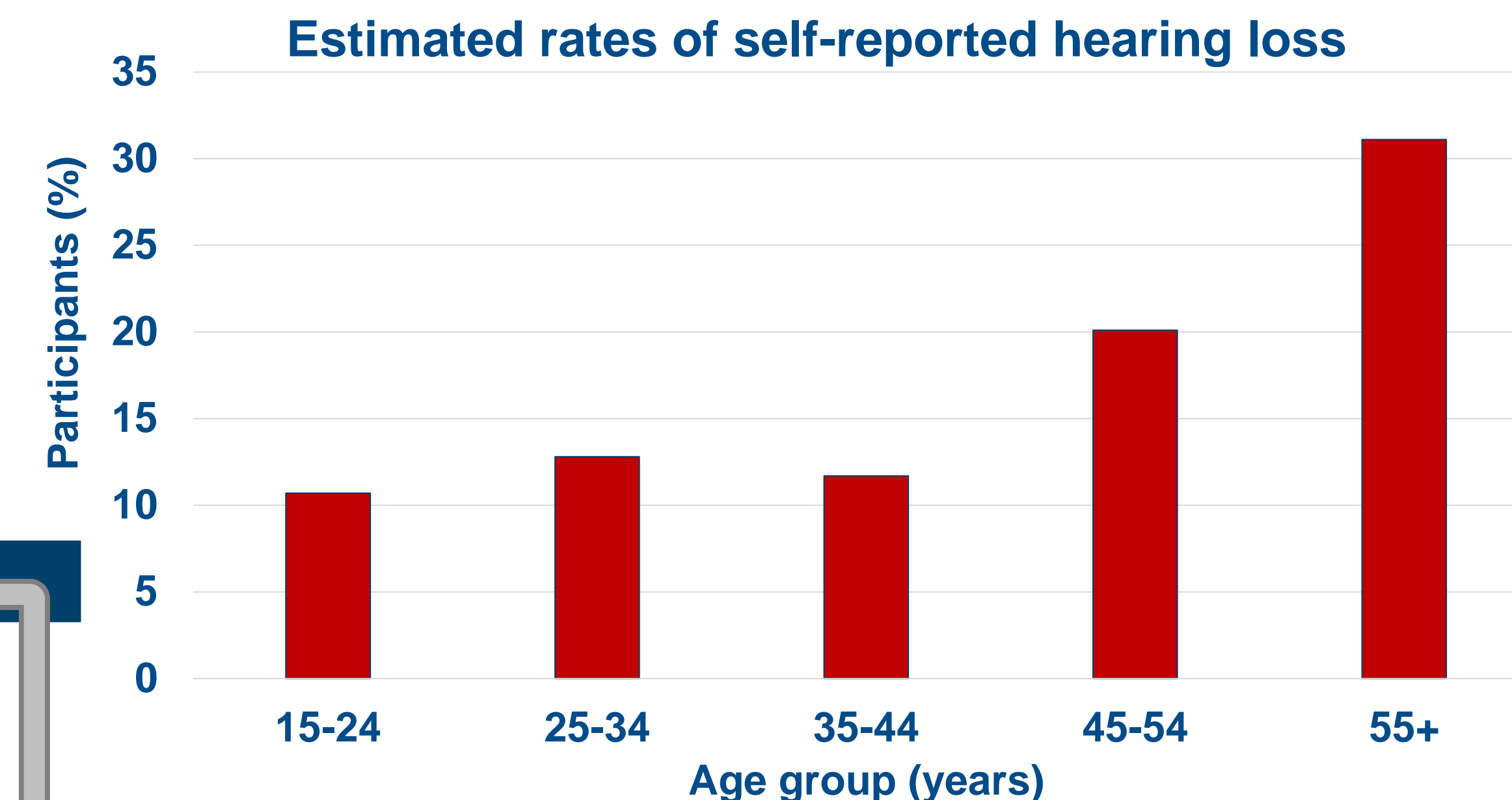
Medical Record Audit

The electronic medical records (EMR) of all individuals who self-reported hearing loss in an annual health check from January to June 2021 were audited.

Results

1,735 patients (52%♀; 48%♂) aged 15-88 years (mean 41 years) completed 3,090 health checks during the study period.

- **18.8% self-reported hearing loss**
- Rates increased with age from 10.7% for 15-24 years to 38.7% for ≥65 years
- Rates similar for ♀ and ♂



Only 40% of patients who reported hearing loss to doctor were referred to ENT / Audiology or received other management.

Conclusions

- Hearing loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults is under managed in primary health care.
- Significant changes are required to improve clinical management & government-funded referral options for hearing services for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander adults in Australia.

Reference

Pender AM, Schluter PJ, Bainbridge RG, Spurling GK, Wilson WJ, Tyson C'S, & Askew DA. (2024) Self-reported hearing loss in urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults: unmeasured, unknown and unmanaged. *Australian Journal of Primary Health* 30.

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We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First People and Traditional Custodians of Australia. We also acknowledge that this research was conducted on the unceded lands of the Yuggera people.

