

## **Media Release - Monday 24 September - Deafness Awareness Week**

### **NZ Men much more likely to suffer from Hearing Loss**

New research, released today at the beginning of Deafness Awareness week, about hearing-impaired people in New Zealand has revealed that men are much more likely than women to suffer from hearing loss. The research, conducted by Dr Anne Greville and sponsored by The Oticon Foundation, reveals that 90,400 more men than women report hearing loss and 31,500 more men than women report disability caused by hearing loss.

Dr Greville says the greatest public health problem related to hearing loss is occupational noise. "After comparing the New Zealand data with a large British study on hearing, it appears that the reason for the difference in hearing problems between men and woman is occupational noise exposure."

Men are more likely to be employed in the 'noisy sectors' such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and construction. Between 1981 and 1996 there was a decrease in the proportion of people employed in these sectors from 45% to 36%. Dr Greville says that despite this decline and Health and Safety legislation, many of the smaller "owner operator" industries which employ the greatest number of people are not putting hearing conservation practises in place.

"The difference in incidence of hearing problems between men and women is evident from the age of 25," says Dr Greville. "As women live longer than men, the number of men and women over the age of 75 with hearing loss is about the same. 10.3% of the population has a hearing loss of some degree with 6.6% having a disability caused by hearing loss."

Dr Greville's research, that collated all available data on the incidence of hearing impairment in this country, also identified the following:

- 8% of all children start school with hearing loss, which will significantly hinder their ability to learn. 15% of Pacific Island children and 13.5% of Maori start school with hearing loss, putting them at much higher risk of educational failure than their Pakeha peers.
- People over 65 years of age are three times more likely to have hearing loss than younger adults.

Audiologist and Oticon Foundation spokesperson, Karen Pullar says Dr Greville's research is invaluable. "For the first time in New Zealand we have full information about hearing impaired people in one document. This research is important to help remedy hearing loss among people and improve the quality of life for hearing impaired individuals and their families by identifying and addressing their needs," says Ms Pullar.

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