

# Deadly Kids | Deadly Futures



# 2020-2021 Action Plan

## Commitment

*Deadly Kids, Deadly Futures* is Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Ear and Hearing Health Framework 2016-2026. It was released in March 2016 by the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services and the Minister for Education. The 10 year framework is a collaborative health, early childhood development and education policy aimed to prevent and manage the impacts of conductive hearing loss due to middle ear disease for current and future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people across Queensland.

## A public health priority

Conductive hearing loss due to middle ear disease is a priority health condition because it can lead to long-term developmental problems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The condition can affect school readiness, communication skills, learning abilities and educational outcomes. The impacts can be lifelong, affecting the trajectory of children's lives into adolescence and adulthood.

## Collaboration

*Deadly Kids, Deadly Futures* is supported by a collaboration of government and non-government agencies across the health, early childhood and schooling sectors – represented by the logos at the bottom of this page. These agencies are committed to working together to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland have healthy ears and can listen, learn and reach their full potential.

## Implementation

Each year an action plan is released outlining what government and non-government service providers in Queensland will do to reduce the prevalence, severity and impacts of middle ear disease and associated hearing loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This *2020-2021 Action Plan* is the fifth such annual plan to be released.

## COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for all agencies involved in improving ear and hearing health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly in rural and remote communities. Travel restrictions and infection control procedures delayed progress on several *Deadly Kids | Deadly Futures* projects in the second half of FY2019-20. Delivery of the projects listed overleaf (which includes some of those delayed from last year) continues to be subject to emerging pandemic conditions and operational constraints.

## The action plan priorities:



### Service delivery improvements:

Enhance the services and support provided to children and families to manage the impacts of middle ear disease and associated hearing loss.



### Workforce development:

Enable healthcare professionals and educators to provide appropriate support and services to children.



### Prevention and health promotion:

Empower families, communities and local service providers to increase the protective factors and reduce the risk factors associated with middle ear disease.



### Data collection and research:

Build the evidence base to improve the planning, delivery and effectiveness of services.



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# 2020-2021 Actions



## Health projects

### Workforce development

**Increase the translation of ear health training into practice improvement.** TAFE NSW (which is funded by the Australian Government to deliver national training in Indigenous ear and hearing health) is developing a new training model that will focus on training primary health professionals to provide clinical services for 0 to 4 year old Indigenous children. It will include both face-to-face and online learning. The DKDF network of agencies will be working with TAFE NSW to ensure that this model meets the needs of Queensland's health services and that the training is aligned with services and support provided by – for example – the Deadly Ears program, Hearing Australia and QAIHC.

**Strengthening preventive health capacity in remote communities.** The Health Protection Branch is developing in-house capacity for training Indigenous environmental health workers. It is expected that a certificate III, and potentially Certificate IV, in Indigenous Environmental Health will be offered through the Cunningham Centre – Queensland Health's inhouse registered training organisation. This training is considered essential for delivery of existing environmental health programs as well as other proposed programs such as the Healthy Housing project.

### Service delivery improvements

**Improving screening for hearing health and speech development.** Hearing Australia and the National Acoustic Laboratories have developed two tools that can help identify children who may need assessment by an audiologist or a speech therapist. These tools – the *Parent-evaluated Listening and Understanding Measure* (PLUM) and the *Hearing and Talking Scale* (HATS) – have real potential to help children earlier and to improve both hearing and communication outcomes. Hearing Australia will be working with other DKDF agencies to validate and promote the use of these screening tools in primary health care clinics and, potentially, other settings such as early childhood centres.

**Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears.** To improve early detection and treatment of hearing loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the national *Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears* (HAP-EE) has been established by Hearing Australia to (1) provide diagnostic hearing assessment and follow-up treatment; (2) strengthen management of ear health in primary care; and (3) increase community awareness about the importance of ear and hearing health. This DKDF project will support implementation of the HAP-EE in Queensland: ensuring it is supported by other agencies and complementing services already available.

**Best practice guidelines for audiological management of conductive hearing loss.** This project is developing recommendations to guide audiological referral and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies identified on newborn screening as having conductive hearing loss. These will ensure that these children receive early referral for hearing amplification and associated early intervention services and improve the likelihood that their hearing needs will continue to be met once they and their mothers have left the maternity units.

### Prevention and health promotion

**Healthy housing.** Poor housing conditions contribute to the persistence, recurrence and severity of ear disease experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, creating the potential for a 'revolving door' of infection, treatment and re-infection. To reduce this risk, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Division is collaborating with the Department of Housing and Public Works and other agencies to explore the potential of 'healthy housing' projects in selected communities to improve the functionality of homes and support healthy living for families and children.

### Data collection and research

**National KPI for Indigenous ear health.** The ear and hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children tends to be checked intermittently and inconsistently in all jurisdictions, and there is no reliable collection of data on either the prevalence of ear disease or the actions taken by health services to address it. To encourage a more coordinated response, a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Hearing Health Advisory Panel has developed proposals for a National Key Performance Indicator. The proposals will be considered by the Health Services Principal Committee and, if endorsed, an implementation plan will be submitted to the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council for approval in 2020-21.

**The DrumBeat Project.** This research project is developing artificial intelligence (AI) to help clinicians screen children for ear disease using video otoscopy. The project is a partnership between universities, technology companies, government agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Deadly Ears Program is collaborating with the partnership to explore the potential for refining the AI algorithm and trialling its clinical application in rural and remote Queensland clinics.

## Education projects

### Service delivery improvements

**Allied health support in schools and early childhood centres.** *Be Well Learn Well (BWLW)* is an initiative that aims to identify and address behavioural and learning issues, to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from pre-prep to Year 12 across eight remote state schools. BWLW integrates early intervention and health methodologies in the school setting, supporting a workforce of education and health professionals to respond holistically in a timely way to the risk factors influencing child development and schooling outcomes. The Department of Education is currently exploring the potential for collaborating with the Deadly Ears Program and other health service providers to strengthen and expand the scope of support provided through BWLW.

### Data collection and research

**Measuring educational outcomes.** This project will explore the feasibility of measuring the impact of conductive hearing loss on the educational outcomes of Indigenous children. Like the development of the national KPI for the health sector, this work will help build the evidence base to improve the planning, delivery and effectiveness of services to manage the impacts of middle ear disease and associated hearing loss.

## Review of Deadly Kids | Deadly Futures Framework

When it was launched in 2016 the DKDF Framework included a commitment to conduct a mid-term review in 2020. That review will be undertaken this year by the Deadly Ears Program, working with Steering Committee agencies and other stakeholders as required.