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## **Auditor General calls on state entities to effectively partner with Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal children's ear health**

Western Australia's Auditor General, Ms Caroline Spencer, has presented a report in Parliament that details the burden of ear disease for Aboriginal children in Western Australia.

The [\*Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health\*](#) report assessed whether state government entities involved in monitoring and treating ear health have reduced the incidence and severity of otitis media (a common middle ear infection) in Aboriginal children, and if they are partnering effectively to ensure strategies work for Aboriginal families.

Australian Aboriginal children have some of the highest rates of chronic middle ear infection in the world - which indicates a significant public health problem in need of urgent attention. In contrast, the rate for non-Aboriginal children in Australia was one of the lowest worldwide.

Late detection and frequent or severe episodes of otitis media can lead to permanent ear damage and hearing loss. This can negatively affect Aboriginal children's development, education and learning opportunities, connection to culture, and life outcomes.

While the audit identified some good practice examples in preventing, detecting and treating otitis media in Aboriginal children, there are still a number of barriers to reducing rates of the disease and its impact in WA. The audit found:

- WA Health's data does not give a clear picture of Aboriginal children's ear health
- programs to identify otitis media don't reach most Aboriginal children early enough
- services have not been co-designed, making them hard for Aboriginal families to use and limiting their effectiveness
- there is a *WA Child Ear Health Strategy*, but many of the conditions for its successful implementation are not yet in place.

Ms Spencer said improving Aboriginal children's ear health is a very complex area with many contributing factors, and that identifying and treating the problem involves many state entities.

'State-funded health services must work alongside educators and housing entities, as well as Commonwealth-funded primary health care and non-government Aboriginal health services'.

'For state entities to be effective partners and providers they need good information, clarity on roles and responsibilities, and a clear approach to working together with Aboriginal people to design and deliver the services they will use', she said.

The report outlines a number of recommendations for WA Health to better partner with Aboriginal communities.

You can read today's *Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health* report at [www.audit.wa.gov.au](http://www.audit.wa.gov.au).

The Office of the Auditor General has also produced a community version of the report for Aboriginal communities and ear health service providers in WA. You can download the community version of the report below.



ENDS

### **Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health resources**

- [Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health](#) – PDF version
- [Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health](#) – community version
- [Improving Aboriginal Children's Ear Health](#) – summary video