

The economic burden of hearing loss

Severe to profound hearing loss is estimated to cost society on average \$300,000 over the lifetime per individual.

According to a study carried out in 1999 by B.B. Blanchfield and colleagues from the HOPE Center for Health Affairs, between 500,000 and 750,000 Americans are suffering from severe to profound hearing loss. If these people are to live as normal a life as possible they often require different kinds of treatment, specialised education and social services. In many cases hearing loss results in reduced work productivity. So, apart from consequences to the individual person, hearing loss also leads to costs to society.

An in-depth study "The societal costs of severe to profound hearing loss in the United States", which was published in the International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care 2000, vol. 16, estimates the societal costs of severe to profound hearing loss in the US to be \$297,000 per person during that person's life. A number of American researchers from different consulting services and institutions carried out the study.

According to the study, the largest part of societal costs are a consequence of lost work productivity which is estimated to represent 67 per cent of total costs. Special education for children and young people amount to 21 per cent of societal costs in connection with hearing loss.

Compared to many other diseases hearing loss more often involves the social welfare system rather than the medical care system. Therefore, medical costs, e.g. hearing aids, only account for 11 per cent of societal costs in connection with hearing loss.

Cost per person is closely related to the age of the individual hearing-impaired person. The earlier a person is diagnosed with hearing loss the more expensive it will be for society. Thus, children and young people with hearing loss represent very large societal costs with an expected cost of nearly \$920,000 over the lifetime per individual. Where hearing loss is found in young children before they start speaking, costs are estimated to amount to around \$1,000,000, and this age group is thus the most expensive to society.

People who incur hearing loss in a late age after retirement are expected to cost society an average of \$43,000.

The very high costs associated with children with prelingual onset may speak for economic benefits of an early identification and an early aggressive intervention. If the hearing loss is identified early it is possible to significantly improve the child's language development and other developmental factors, and in this way reduce future costs for extra educational resources. Therefore, hearing screenings could be extremely rewarding

due to the reduced future societal costs.

The study "The Societal Costs of Severe to Profound Hearing Loss in the United States" was published in the *International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care* 2000 vol. 16