

## Paediatric Competency Standards project

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### *Are you an Audiologist providing services to paediatric clients?*

If yes, we are very keen to invite your contributions to the project to develop paediatric competency standards. The first step in the project is online focus groups later this year at which we would welcome your participation. Please keep reading for more information.

Audiologists working with any client group and anyone with an interest in the field of paediatric audiology will be invited to comment on the draft paediatric competency standards in the 2021 consultation process.

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### Hearing Health Sector Alliance Paediatric Competency Standards project

Through the Hearing Health Sector Alliance, Audiology Australia has received funding from the Federal Department of Health to develop paediatric audiology competency standards on behalf of the Alliance. These competency standards will aim to benefit the hearing health sector as a whole by providing further clarification and guidance for both the profession and public about the minimum requirements expected of audiologists providing paediatric services to clients. The paediatric competency standards will describe the minimum expected competencies (the knowledge, skills and attributes) of the audiologist providing services to paediatric clients.

The competency standards will set out the competencies that audiologists who work in paediatric audiology have, that differ from or are additional to those that audiologists working with adult clients have.

### Paediatric Competency Standards Working Group

The Hearing Health Sector Alliance has established a Paediatric Competency Standards Working Group to undertake the project. Members of the Working Group are drawn from diverse settings within paediatric audiology such as government agencies, hospitals, community health, private practice, researchers and not-for profit entities. Members represent different aspects of the hearing health sector, including representatives of professional bodies, consumers, businesses and providers of hearing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

### What is paediatric audiology?

The Paediatric Competency Standards Working Group has defined paediatric audiology as an area of professional practice in audiology that focuses on infants and children under the age of 18.

### What are competency standards?

The concept of competency, according to the [National Alliance of Self Regulating Health Professions](#), focuses on what is expected of a practitioner in the workplace, rather than the learning process. Competence relates to the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and

environments whilst integrating components such as values and attitudes. A competency is an observable quality which can be measured and assessed to ensure acquisition by a professional.

Competency Standards describe the combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective performance in a professional or occupational area.

### Paediatric Certification Project

Audiology Australia, in a separate but related project, will be developing a system for Audiologists wanting to be certified in paediatric audiology. This system will set out the process for Audiologists to apply for certification, as well as the ongoing professional development requirements in order to maintain certification. Audiologists' applications for certification in paediatric audiology will be assessed against the paediatric competency standards. The manner in which this will be done will be determined as part of the paediatric certification project, and this will be the subject of a separate consultation at a later date.

### Why are we developing paediatric competency standards?

The reasons for developing the competency standards include the following:

- **Mitigate risk** - Expert and rapid intervention for paediatric hearing loss is essential to help children achieve the best possible outcomes. Given this factor, and the specialised skills involved, the practice of paediatric audiology can present some clinical risks to the child with significant and lifelong impacts if it is not undertaken by a competent clinician.

Developing a consistent set of competency standards will help ensure that any audiologist accredited against those competency standards has the particular skill set and clinical experience required to safely carry out paediatric audiology work unsupervised. The development of a common set of competency standards for paediatric audiology within a certification system, including protocols such as audits to ensure compliance, will help address these clinical risks.

- **Increase consumer recognition of paediatric audiology services** - In recent years, there has been increased demand for greater recognition of paediatric audiology services. Part of this is due to:
  - increased consumer awareness of the importance of early intervention services to address the speech and language development of children with hearing loss and the need to ensure children in this cohort have access to these services to support lifelong educational, social and employment success
  - the establishment of newborn hearing screen programs in all Australian states and territories and new government initiatives that provide support and services to children with hearing loss such as the NDIS.

It is expected that the development of a set of paediatric competency standards will help to achieve greater recognition and visibility of paediatric audiology services among consumers.

- **Respond to increased provider demand for recognition of paediatric audiology services** – There is also growing demand from within the audiology profession to have a scheme that recognises the credentials of or formally accredits audiologists for the particular skills needed to provide hearing services to the paediatric cohort.

- **Provide consumer safeguards and increase consumer confidence** - Having a recognised minimum set of paediatric competency standards with which to certify Audiologists providing services to paediatric clients, will also help assure clients, their families and other health professionals that a particular audiologist is recognised as competent to deliver these services.

Additionally, it will help address consumer groups' concerns that there are few safeguards in place to ensure that children and young people receive services from appropriately trained audiologists with paediatric experience, or to penalise providers who do not comply with these safeguards.

- **Improve quality and consistency of service provision** – The creation of one common set of competency standards for paediatric audiology in Australia, building on existing competency standards for paediatric audiology and supported by a current evidence base, is expected to improve consistency of service provision for this client group and help to ensure high quality outcomes.

### Paediatric audiology competencies in other jurisdictions

The Paediatric Competency Standards Working Group is currently examining sets of competencies within paediatric audiology that are in existence within particular workplace settings or focus areas in Australia.

Research has also been undertaken into which overseas jurisdictions work with paediatric audiology as an area of practice, as distinct from the generic practice of audiology. Four jurisdictions (Britain, New Zealand, Ontario, and the United States) have developed paediatric audiology, or an aspect of it, as an area of practice. Each jurisdiction structures their paediatric audiology competencies differently, focusing on the requirements in one or more distinct areas of paediatric audiology, or grouping all competencies within the field together.

### Reference to other documents, including the National Competency Standards

We will refer to the existing Australian and overseas sets of competencies for paediatric audiology when drafting the Paediatric Competency Standards. Our work may also be informed by other documents such as the [Scope of Practice for Audiologists and Audiometrists](#), the [Roadmap for Hearing Health](#), and the in-development [National Competency Standards \(NCS\)](#).

The NCS are being designed to fully articulate the minimum skills, knowledge and behaviours required for 'entry level' practice for audiologists in Australia. 'Entry level' refers to the expected minimum standard of audiologists considered to be qualified and competent to undertake independent clinical decision making without supervision once they have completed their Clinical Internship. Thus, while the NCS will apply to every Audiology Australia Accredited Audiologist, for those audiologists providing services to paediatric clients and certified as such under the Paediatric Certification system, the Paediatric Competency Standards will also apply.

### Paediatric audiology focus areas

In Australia, the practice of paediatric audiology is commonly spoken of in the following areas of practice: hearing screening, diagnostic assessment, and (re)habilitation. Auditory Processing Disorders (APD) is another distinct area. These areas will be reflected in the focus groups described below.

## **Hearing screening**

Hearing screening tests a person's ability to hear sounds of different pitch and loudness, and to determine whether there is evidence of hearing loss. It is not sufficient to determine the type or degree of hearing loss.

## **Diagnostic assessment**

Diagnostic assessment involves the assessment and diagnosis of hearing loss, ear disease and balance disorders. It includes assessment of hearing and auditory function, vestibular (balance) function, tinnitus, auditory processing function, and neural function. Diagnostic tests are performed, including advanced tests using electrophysiological methods.

## **(Re)habilitation**

(Re)habilitation may include aural, vestibular (balance) and tinnitus (re)habilitation as well as communication training. Services may include counselling, prescription, fitting and evaluation of devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants, earplugs, assistive listening devices (classroom Remote Microphone Systems), referral pathways for speech therapy intervention for development of speech and language, and possible Auslan training. (Re)habilitation may also include collaboration with other professionals including medical professionals, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, mainstream and specialist teachers.

**Auditory Processing Disorders (APD)** also known as Central Auditory Processing Disorders (CAPD)

Auditory Processing Disorders (APD) is a term that describes a variety of hearing disorders which result from a breakdown in the brain's hearing and listening processing abilities. The brains of people with APD cannot fully understand the information contained in sound.

APD does not impact on the ability to hear; it causes difficulty in understanding speech and working out what direction certain sounds are coming from.

## **Online focus groups**

We will be holding online focus groups of 1.5 hours duration in the first half of December 2020 for Audiologists who work in, or who have previously worked in, paediatric audiology. Each focus group will examine one or more of the areas of practice and one or more of the particular client groups within paediatric audiology. In a practice analysis exercise led by a facilitator, each group will develop a list of tasks that apply to the area/s, age group/s and client group/s covered. This list will describe the tasks an Audiologist working with paediatric clients and their families performs.

We are keen to hold these focus groups rather than seeking your input individually in writing, so that the project benefits from the collaboration and discussion of ideas that working in a group generates, especially at this early stage in the project.

Each focus group will be a self-contained exercise requiring no preparation or 'homework'.

Audiology Australia Accredited Audiologists will be eligible for 1 CPD point under category 3.7 for attendance at each group.

From the collection of tasks gathered at the focus groups, the competencies that are essential in undertaking the tasks and working in paediatric audiology will later be drafted. It is not expected that

one task will equate to one competency standard; an individual competency might describe the knowledge, skills and ability required in undertaking a number of tasks across a number of areas of practice and client groups.

The goal is to ensure that the Paediatric Competency Standards encompass all competencies required for all tasks, all age groups and all client groups, and that no one area of paediatric audiology is omitted.

There will be four online focus groups:

### Focus group 1

<i>Area/s</i>	<i>Developmental age</i>	<i>Including</i>
Diagnostic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neonates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally and Linguistically Diverse children</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children</li> <li>• Children with other disabilities, developmental delays</li> </ul>

### Focus group 2

<i>Area/s</i>	<i>Developmental age</i>	<i>Including</i>
Diagnostic & Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infants and young children</li> <li>• Pre-school</li> <li>• Primary school</li> <li>• Adolescents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally and Linguistically Diverse children</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children</li> <li>• Children with other disabilities, developmental delays, and behavioural problems</li> </ul>

### Focus group 3

<i>Area/s</i>	<i>Developmental age</i>	<i>Including</i>
(Re)habilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neonates</li> <li>• Infants and young children</li> <li>• Pre-school</li> <li>• Primary school</li> <li>• Adolescents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children with implants</li> <li>• Culturally and Linguistically Diverse children</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children</li> <li>• Children with other disabilities, developmental delays, and behavioural problems</li> </ul>

### Focus group 4

<i>Area/s</i>	<i>Including</i>
Auditory Processing Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally and Linguistically Diverse children</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children</li> <li>• Children with other disabilities, developmental delays, and behavioural problems</li> </ul>

## After the focus groups

### Drafting the Paediatric Competency Standards

Working from the lists of tasks gathered in the December 2020 focus groups, we will develop the first draft of the Paediatric Competency Standards. This work will take place in the first half of 2021.

### Consultation

When the draft set of competency standards has been developed, the draft will go out to a wide range of stakeholders for consultation in 2021. Audiologists working within paediatric audiology, Audiologists working with other client groups and all interested parties in the wider hearing sector will be invited to comment on the draft.

### Finalisation of the draft

Once the feedback from the consultation is processed, the aim is for the document to be revised and approved by the end of 2021. The Paediatric Competency Standards will then feed into the Paediatric Certification project, and we expect both will come into effect in mid-2022.

## What we are asking you to do now

We invite Audiologists who work in, or who have previously worked in, paediatric audiology to complete the survey to express your interest in participating in one or more of the four online focus groups in December this year, depending on your experience and interest. You will also be invited to nominate your preferred time for the focus groups.

We will then review the responses and schedule the focus groups at dates and times that suit the majority. We will contact you again to advise once registrations are open.

We are very keen to gather as much input as possible from you, the people who are the experts in the field, to ensure the competency standards are fit for purpose and describe the minimum requirements expected of Audiologists providing paediatric services to clients.

**Please click on this [link](#) to complete the survey.**

**The survey closes at midnight on Monday 9 November 2020.**

## Further information and questions

For further information on the project, please refer to:

[https://audiology.asn.au/Advocacy/Paediatric\\_Competency\\_Standards](https://audiology.asn.au/Advocacy/Paediatric_Competency_Standards)

For any questions or comments on the project, please contact Georgie Bodman at [georgie.bodman@audiology.asn.au](mailto:georgie.bodman@audiology.asn.au)