

Early intervention for children with hearing loss slashes long-term costs and social barriers

Monday, 2 March 2020 – Sydney, Australia – New research has confirmed a long-term cost benefit of up to \$500,000 per child with hearing loss, when supported by early intervention services.

First Voice's latest **Sound Outcomes Report** reveals that First Voice Early Intervention programs provided an average benefit of \$497,000 for each child with bilateral hearing loss in the 2018 financial year. These benefits include long and short-term wellbeing, education, economic gains and financial benefits.

The study also revealed that children supported by early intervention develop listening and speaking skills on par with or above that of their hearing peers. It showed that **86% of First Voice graduates with hearing loss alone had speech and language skills within or above the normal range**, just above the 84% of typically hearing children who fall within the same level.¹

The research is one of the largest datasets globally for children with hearing loss, which involved 1,433 children and their families supported by First Voice organisations in 2018 across Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

Out of all the children involved in the study (including those with additional disabilities affecting their communication, those who spoke a language other than English, or who were late diagnosed or treated), 53% had language in the normal range or better.

An economic analysis conducted by Deloitte that showed a \$3.94* return on investment for every dollar invested in a First Voice Early Intervention program in 2019^{1,2}.

Mr Mark Fitzpatrick, Chair of First Voice, said that the Sound Outcomes Report affirms the significant benefits of early intervention – not only for the children and their families, but also for the community more broadly.

"These results reinforce the importance of early intervention services as they ensure all children are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. The report highlights that for children who received early intervention services, hearing loss proves to be no great barrier," said Mr Fitzpatrick.

"Our research also shows these children mature into productive members of society with high levels of education, social participation and full time employment, despite their hearing loss. It is absolutely crucial to ensure that children with hearing loss are set up for lifelong success with access to early intervention support services."

Key results from the Sound Outcomes Report:

- Graduates from First Voice Early Intervention programs have the same quality of spoken language as children with normal hearing.
 - 86% of the graduates who only had **hearing loss only** are within or above the normal range
 - 84% of **typically-hearing children** are within or above the normal range
 - 53% of **First Voice graduates** are within or above the normal range (including those with additional disabilities affecting their communication, those who spoke a language other than English, or who were late diagnosed or treated)
- First Voice centres supported 1,433 children in 2018. Of these:
 - 79% of the children had hearing loss in both ears, and 21% unilateral hearing loss
 - 32% required cochlear implants, with the majority of the rest using hearing aids 18% had already been diagnosed with an additional disability that impacts their communication
 - 32% of the children spoke a language other than English as their primary language

Deafness is the most common disability among children in the western world. In Australia, the incidence rate rises from one in every 1,000 babies at birth to one in 300 children by school age (due to acquired and developing hearing loss³).

It costs almost \$22,000 per year per child to provide these essential services to help just one deaf child learn to listen and speak, and to reach their full potential.

First Voice organisations rely heavily on public donations to fund over half of this cost. To help First Voice member organisations continue life-changing programs for children and young people with hearing loss, visit www.firstvoice.org.au.

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About First Voice – www.firstvoice.org.au

First Voice is an international alliance of member organisations that provide listening and spoken language early intervention services for children who are deaf or hearing impaired. Established in 2010, First Voice plays a leadership role within the early childhood hearing loss sector, advocating for world-class early intervention services for children who are deaf or hearing impaired. First Voice works with government and other organisations to influence public policy and clinical practice related to service for children who are deaf or hearing impaired. First Voice members and affiliated organisations maintain an active research agenda and work with leading research institutions to conduct hearing research relevant to young people with hearing loss. First Voice is committed to providing evidence-based research to inform and influence public health policy in the sector.

Reference

1. First Voice Sound Outcomes: First Voice 2018 Spoken Language data. Available here: <https://www.firstvoice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FV-Sound-Outcomes-2018-Report-Final.pdf>
2. Deloitte Cost-benefit analysis of First Voice's early intervention program 2017. Available here: <https://www.firstvoice.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/First-Voice-Deloitte-Access-Economics-Cost-Benefit-Analysis.pdf>
3. The Shepherd Centre Impact Report 2017. Available here: <https://shepherdcentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2017-IMPACT-REPORT-FINAL-for-web.pdf>

* The 2019 values have been calculated by adjusting for inflation.