

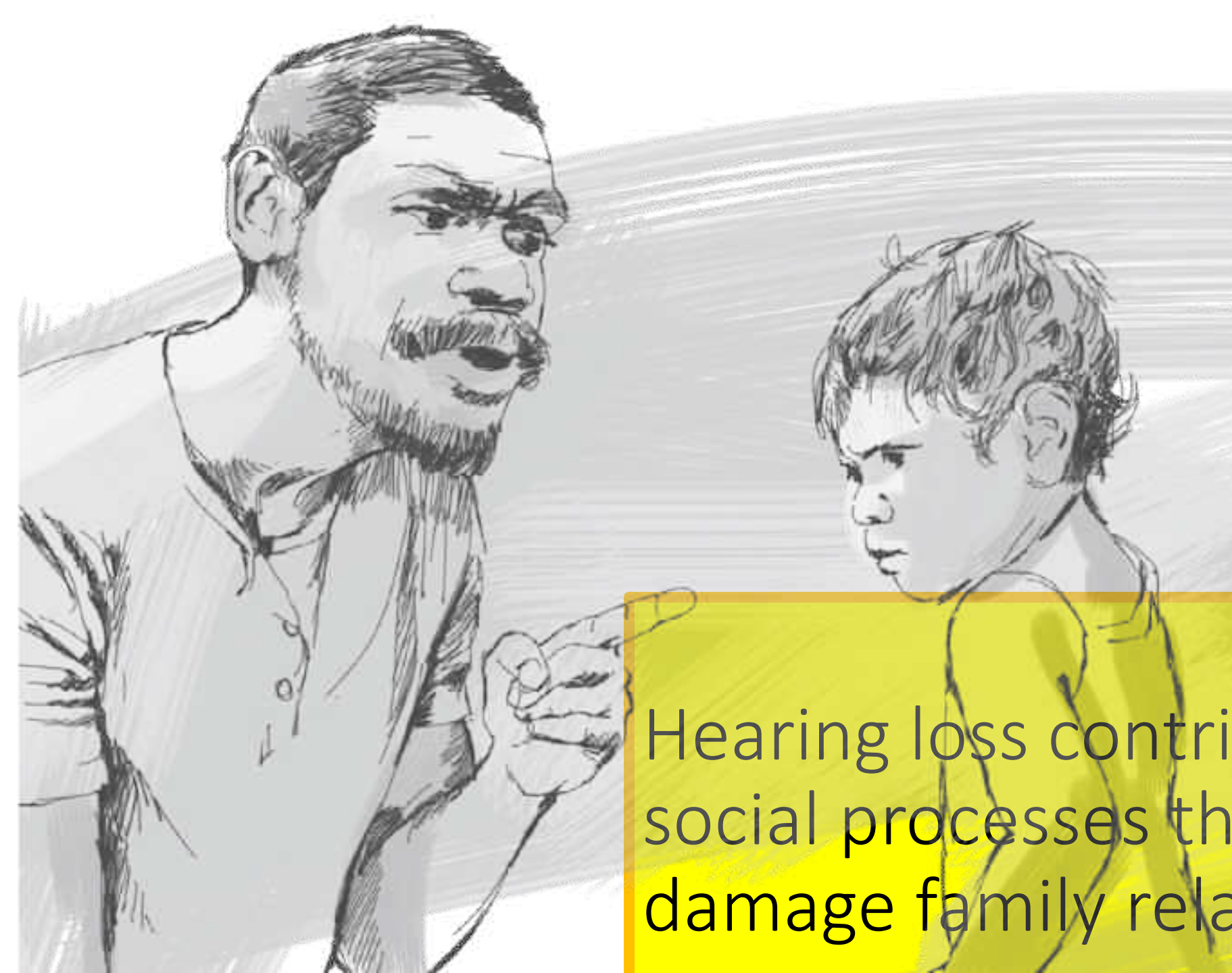
# Hearing Loss and Indigenous Families

*Hearing Loss and Indigenous child  
protection*

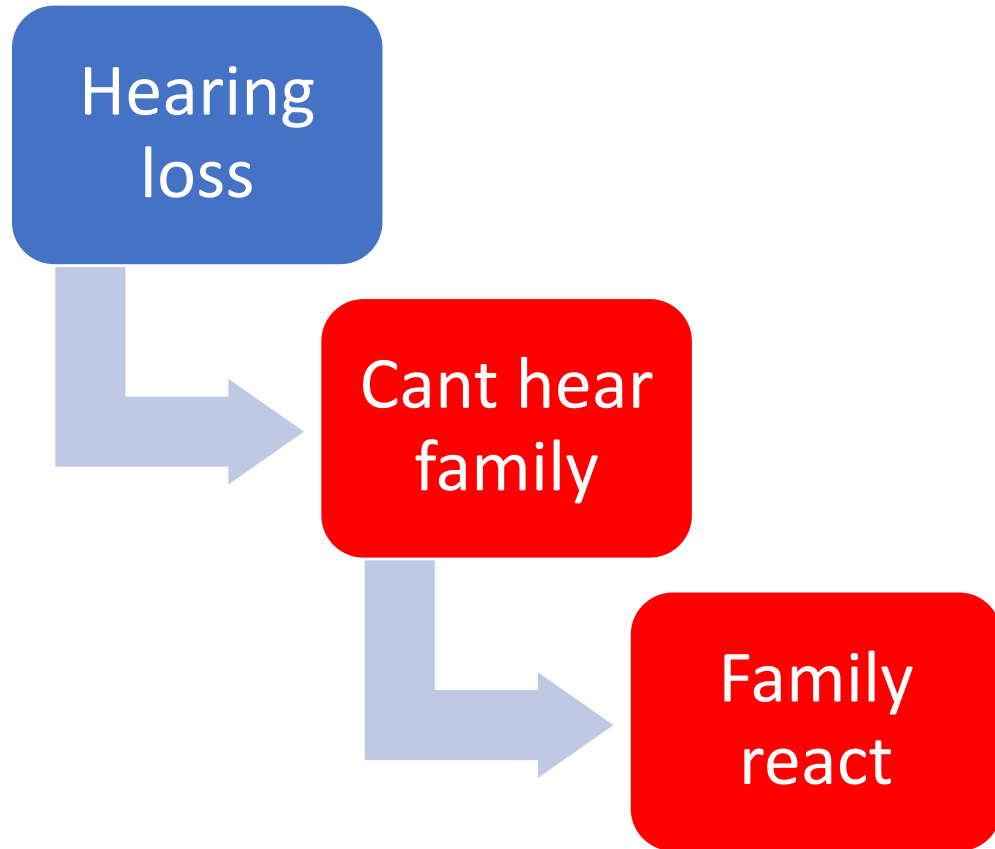
By Dr Damien Howard

Feb 2019

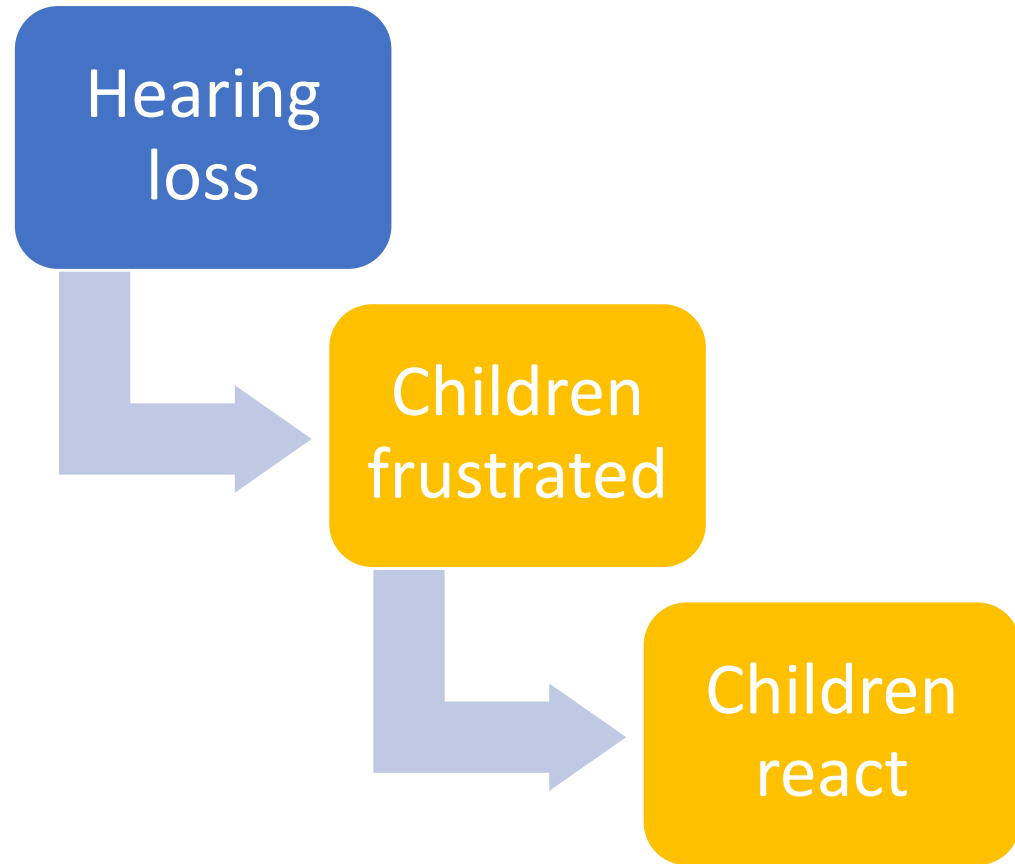




Hearing loss contributes to social processes that damage family relationships



- ‘Half the kids get floggings because they (the parents) think they’re (the children) ignoring them. I see parents giving kids with hearing loss a flogging when they (the children) have not understood; I see that all the time, everywhere ... I think half the kids (with hearing loss) get hidings sometimes.’ (Aboriginal Health Worker)
- ‘Sometimes it is they (the children) don’t show any respect to old people and they get really upset with them and they get hidings from old people.’ (Aboriginal Health Worker)



- “They are cheeky ... you see a kid (who has middle ear disease) throwing rocks at Mum and swearing and demanding something, and usually most times they will give it to them to shut them up.’ (Aboriginal Health Worker)
- ‘I have noticed that it is the kids with chronic ear problems who are the ones you sometimes see hitting their family when they are in the waiting room.’ (Remote Area Nurse)

# Observations of impacts on families supported by current research

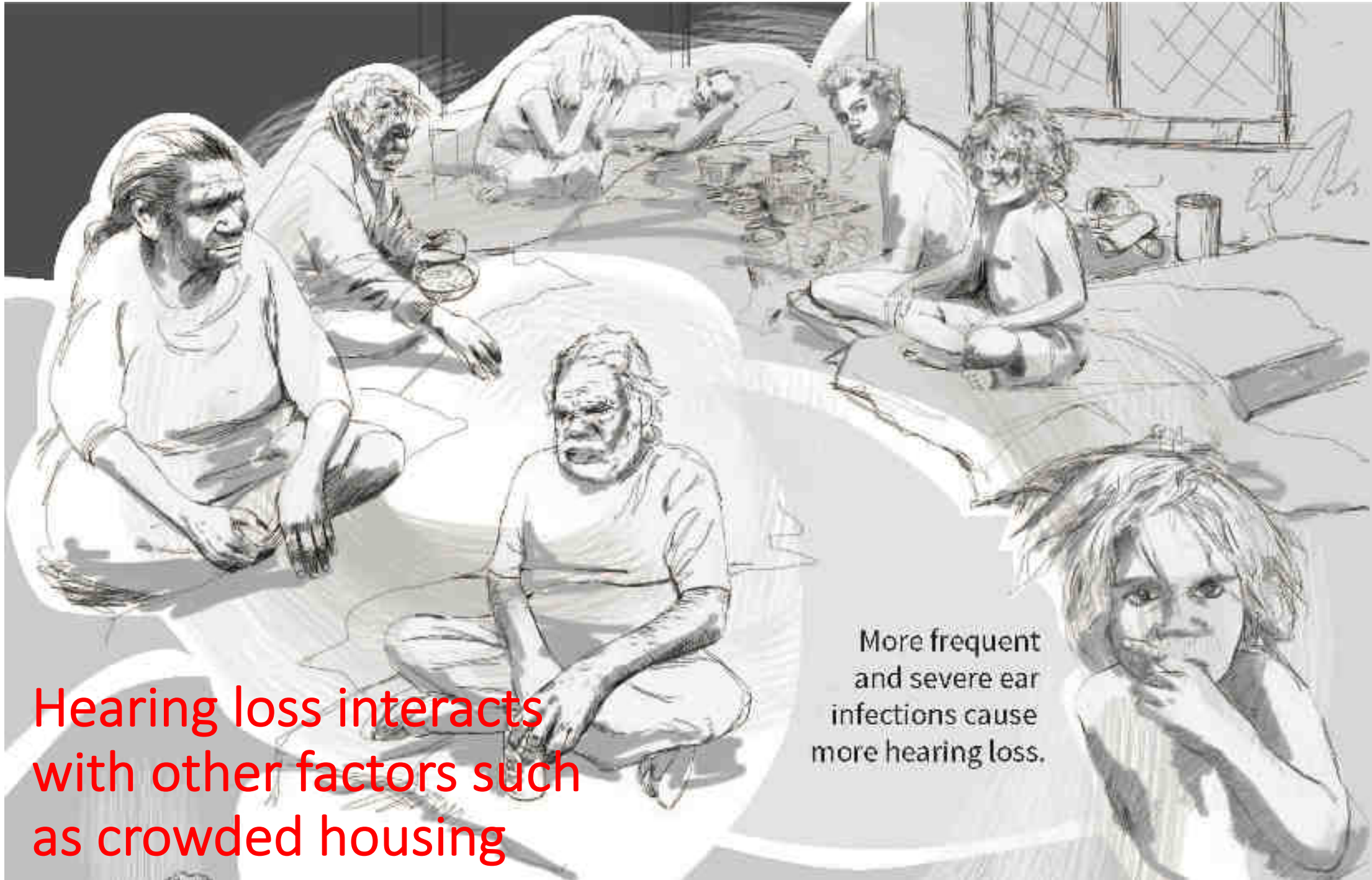
- Children with hearing loss more likely to have child protection reports made about them (2019)





Children are likely to be seen as willfully ignoring carers when they have an unidentified hearing loss.





Hearing loss interacts  
with other factors such  
as crowded housing

More frequent  
and severe ear  
infections cause  
more hearing loss.

Noisy and visually busy environments make it harder to converse.

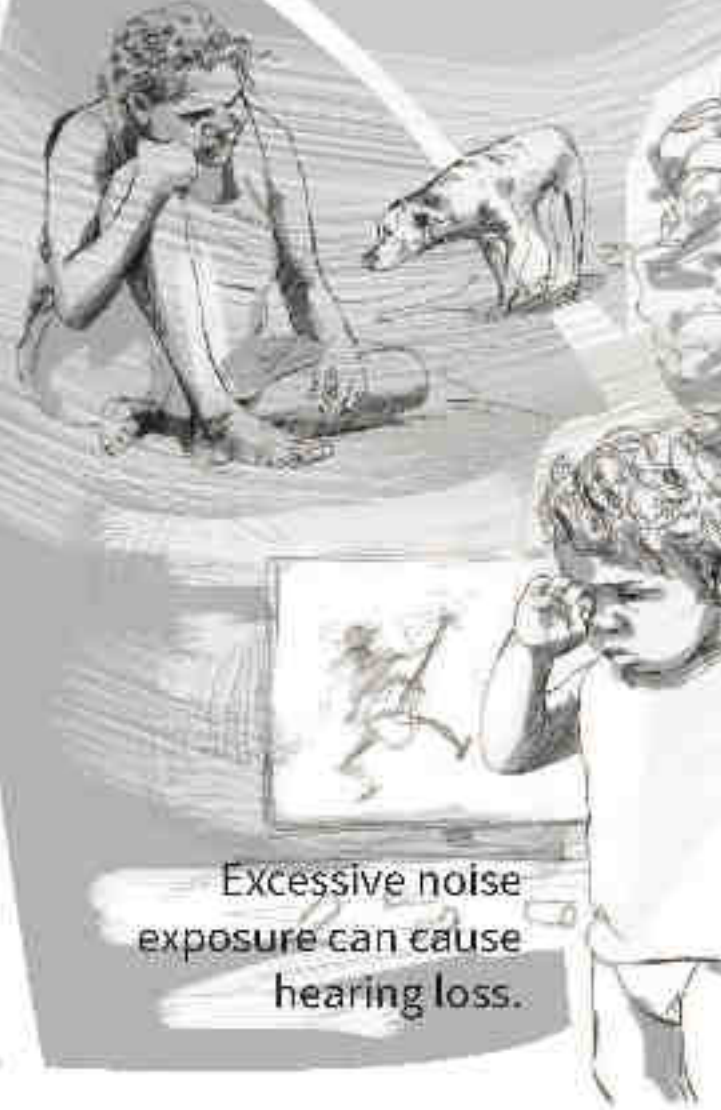


- High levels of background noise created by **crowded houses**
- especially because many residents have hearing loss and create **noisy environments**





Many residents having hearing loss limits the availability of support for children.



Excessive noise exposure can cause hearing loss.

- Excessive Noise in crowded housing can cause more **noise induced** hearing loss
- **Limited support** for children with hearing loss because many adults also have hearing loss that creates their own communication problems

In these contexts  
Both **hearing loss**  
and **high levels of noise** create  
compounded  
problems



Carers may reprimand or punish children for being defiant or disobedient.

**When they have not heard what was said to them**

Children are **frustrated**  
and **act out** because  
they are not able to  
communicate



Currently health practitioners do not inform families of communication and social outcomes of hearing loss

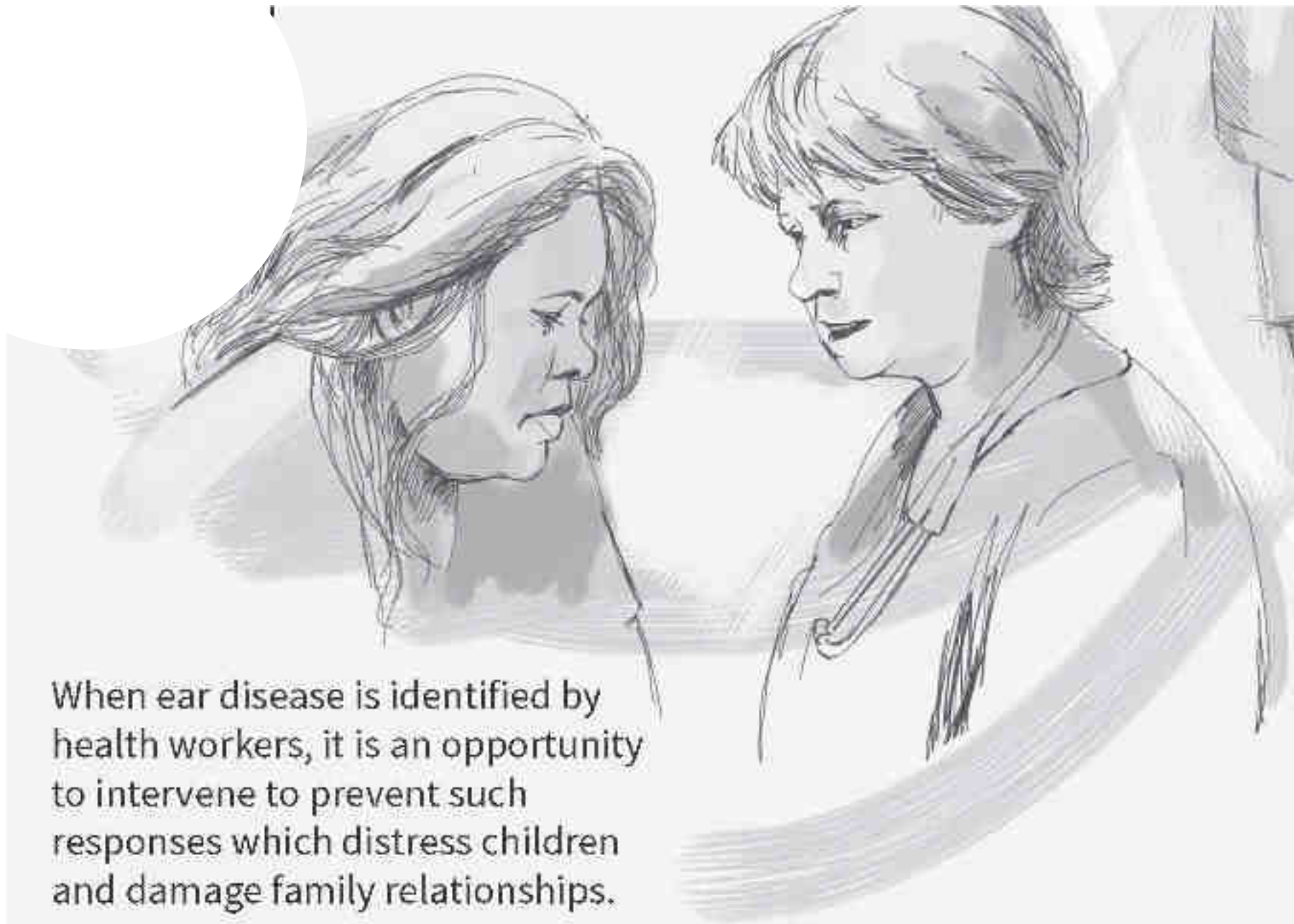


*"Doctors and health workers I have seen over the years told me about ear disease but have never mentioned the kinds of communication and social problems that kids with ear disease can have... I found information about this on the ear troubles website... we just did not get it from the health professionals we had contact with again and again."*  
(Indigenous parent)

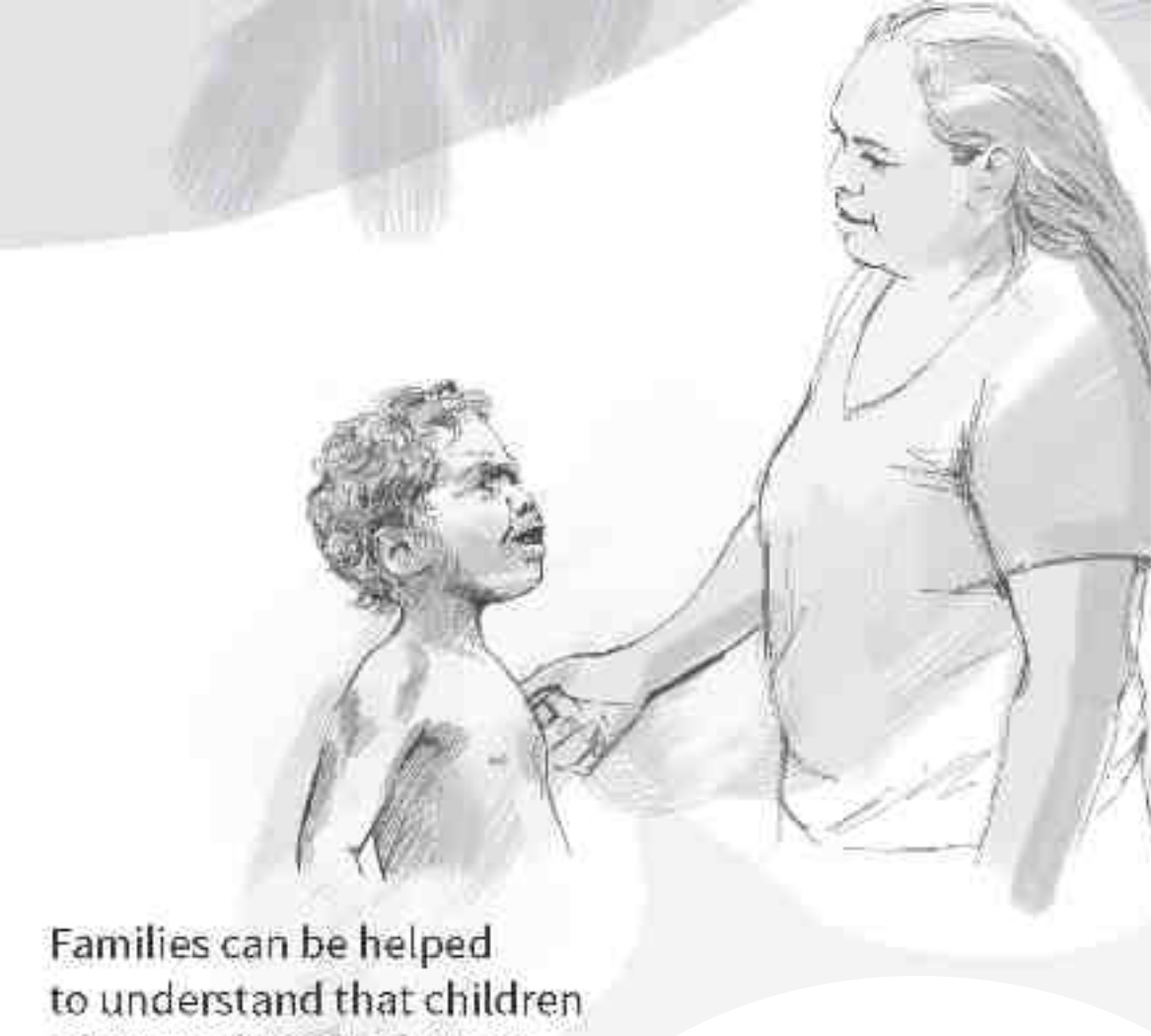




- Identification of hearing loss by health practitioners provides an **opportunity** to **prevent** these damaging family processes.



When ear disease is identified by health workers, it is an opportunity to intervene to prevent such responses which distress children and damage family relationships.



Families can be helped to understand that children often can't hear. They can be shown how they can communicate more effectively with children and improve family relationships.





It is not only the wellbeing of children that is influenced by hearing loss.

The **whole family** can be affected







## Impact on carers

---

- *“I (earlier) felt depressed and frustrated because I didn’t know what was going on. I was blaming myself. I thought it was my fault and I was a bad mother. I felt like I was letting her down. I was trying to figure out what to do. The behaviour problem (related to hearing loss) came at school. They never suggested anything and it was depressing not knowing what to do ... but it was getting me down and it was the stress levels. I was growling at her and yelling. I was pushing her away because I didn’t know how to deal with it. It made us grow apart. I did not want to be around her.”* Indigenous mother (Howard and Hampton 2006)[

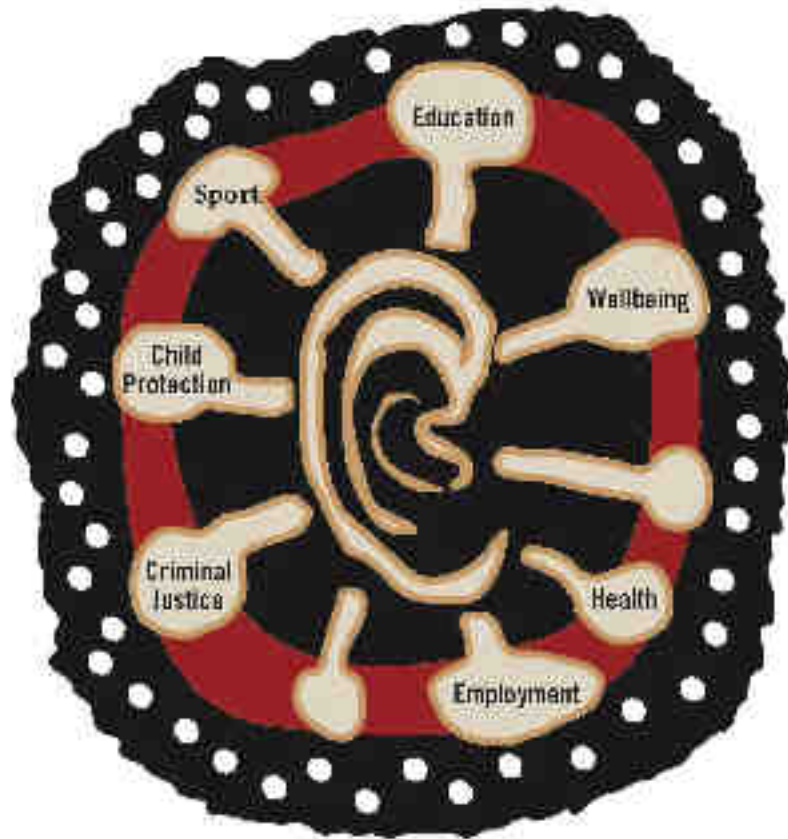


## Impact on siblings

- Siblings can resent time and **attention** that goes to those **with hearing loss**.
- Or resent the **aggression** towards them, or the **demands** made on them to help communication
- They can feel put upon, left out and neglected.

# HEARING LOSS Responsive Communications Training

Sector specific training



At present training of welfare workers, social workers and psychologists does not include this kind of information.

There is a need to update pre-service and post service training for these professions

# For more information

---

- Dr Damien Howard
- Email  
[damien@phoenixconsulting.com.au](mailto:damien@phoenixconsulting.com.au)
- [www.phoenixtraining.online](http://www.phoenixtraining.online)

