# The Demographics of Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is more common than you might think. Interestingly, due to recreational and environmental noise, hearing loss is occurring at younger and younger ages. Consider the facts:

## Demographics:

Hearing loss is the fastest growing, and one of the most prevalent, chronic conditions facing Canadians today. While hearing loss has many causes, age-related (presbycusis) and noice-induced hearing loss (NIHL) are the two most common types. Here are some interesting statistics that drive our work at the Hearing Foundation of Canada:

- According to Statistics Canada, more than one million adults across the country reported having a hearing-related disability, a number more than 50% greater than the number of people reporting problems with their eyesight (StatsCan, 2002). Other studies indicate that the true number may reach three million or more Canadian adults, as those suffering from hearing problems often under-report their condition.

- Hearing loss is not just an age-related disability; it is affecting people at younger and younger ages. A study for WorkSafe BC found that 25% of young people entering the workforce had the early warning signs of hearing loss, with a further 4.6% showing “abnormal” results on hearing tests (WorkSafe BC, 2005).

- The cost of hearing loss to the Canadian economy could be in the tens of billions of dollars. A 2006 Australian study estimated that costs to that nation’s economy from hearing loss amounted to CAD$10.6 billion per year. On a per capita basis, this could mean a Canadian equivalent of almost $18-billion per year.

- A US National Health and Nutrition Survey revealed that noise is the number one cause of impaired hearing (CDC/NCHS, 2002).

- A major US study first published in the journal Paediatrics found that "approximately 12.5% of American children and young adults in the U.S. are suffering from a hearing disability known as noise-induced hearing threshold shifts (NITS). NITS is basically a change in hearing sensitivity that is experienced as temporary hearing dullness" (Niskar et al, 2001).

- Research shows that over the last 10 years, the percentage of second graders with hearing loss has increased by 280%, while hearing loss for eighth graders has increased over 400% (Montgomery and Fujikawa, 1992).

- A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that nearly 15% of school-aged children had hearing deficits at low and high frequencies (Niskar et al, 2004).

- "Studies have suggested that some population groups are at greater risk for harmful effects of noise. These groups include young children. To date there is sufficient scientific evidence that excessive noise exposure can induce hearing impairment, as well as psycho-social effects such as annoyance, stress-related health effects such as cardiovascular disorders, sleep disturbance and decreased school performance." (Health Effects of Noise, Dr. Sheela Basrur, Medical Officer of Health, Toronto, 2001).

- Educational programs can make a difference. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (UK) highlights a Norwegian study where within the space of 10 years, hearing loss among 18-year-olds increased from 15% to 35%. This was strongly linked to an increase in leisure noise exposure. Within seven years of mounting a full-scale public information campaign, these levels dropped by more than half to 15%. (Prasher, 1999).

## Hearing Loss Facts

- Hearing loss is second only to arthritis as the most common complaint of older adults
- Only about 10% of hearing losses are helped by surgery or other medical treatment
- 90% of hearing losses can be treated with the use of hearing instruments
- Only 16% of physicians routinely screen for hearing loss
- Noise above 80-90 decibels on average over an 8-hour workday is considered hazardous
- Firearms, music, airplanes, lawnmowers, power tools and many appliances are louder than 80 decibels and potentially hazardous to hearing with prolonged exposure
- A live rock concert produces sounds from 110 to 120 decibels—easily high enough to cause permanent damage to hearing over a 2- to 3-hour period