

PLUM and HATS: identifying listening and communication problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-5 years

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Overview:

This learning lab aims to empower clinicians to use the Parent-evaluated Listening and Understanding Measure (PLUM) and the Hearing And Talking Scale (HATS) in hearing healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 0-5 years of age. Firstly, the rationale and development of the tools will be described. Secondly, practical training on administration and scoring of the tools will be provided. Finally, case studies will be used in the interpretation of the scores and recommendations for further action. Implications on how the tools can be incorporated in hearing healthcare for young children will be discussed.

About one in two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children below 12 months of age experiences ear and hearing problems. Ear problems that remain undetected and untreated during the first few years of life have a negative impact on children's development of listening and communication skills, which will have flow-on effects for their educational achievement and life opportunities. A commonly used way to find out if a child has listening problems is to ask parents whether they have any concerns. This can be a tricky question to answer as there can be uncertainties about what 'not hearing well' looks like.

By using a co-design approach with Aboriginal primary health workers and early childhood teachers, we have developed the PLUM listening skills and HATS talking skills checklists. These tools were designed to provide a systematic framework for exploring a parent's observations of their child's listening and talking behavior in everyday situations to identify presence of hearing and communication problems. The tools have been validated with data collected from 90 children and families in urban and remote settings. By providing a reliable and valid framework to enable primary health staff, clinicians and early educators to tap into parents' observations, young children with listening and talking problems can be identified earlier and intervention can be provided faster than current practice for improving child outcomes. When incorporated into existing assessment batteries, the results assist clinicians in making decisions about referrals for treatment and rehabilitation needs for each individual. The tools are now implemented as an integral part of the hearing healthcare pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children below 5 years of age within Hearing Australia.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion, each participant will be able to

- Describe the empirical basis of the PLUM and HATS tools;
- Administer the PLUM and HATS; and
- Interpret the scores and recommend required actions.