

PRACTICE BASED TEMPLATE

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Improving Ear Health Assessments in NSW Youth Justice Centres

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Background/Purpose:

The 2015 Young People in Custody Health Survey identified that Aboriginal young people represented approximately 60% of 10- to 17-year-olds in detention in NSW. Of all young people surveyed, 28.5% reported a family history of hearing problems, 18.7% reported hearing difficulties and 34.8% reported past ear infections, with a higher prevalence of concerns in Aboriginal youth. Subsequent to this survey, audiology screening was rolled out across the six youth justice centre clinics, however there was no formal nursing competency process, no guidelines in place and no formal training for nurses in how to conduct ear health and hearing screening.

Approach:

With the identification of gaps in ear health training, a collaboration with the EarTrain team at TAFE NSW was developed which included an Ear Health and Hearing Pathway for nurses to gain accreditation in otoscopy, audiology screen and tympanometry. The Justice Health NSW Virtual Care Team was involved to increase the use to digital care to improve access and treatment for young people, and to aid in removing barriers to treatment. The Ear Health and Hearing Pathway was embedded within the reception assessment for young people on admission to custody.

Outcomes/Impact:

In the 12 months prior to the implementation of the training, guidelines and Ear Health and Hearing Pathway, 1438 young people underwent a reception assessment. Of these, 65 (4.5%) young people were referred for ear and /or hearing issues to the clinic GP, 45 (69%) young people attended their GP appointment with 5 (7.7%) being referred to specialist services. In the 2 years since implementation of the Pathway, 2874 young people had reception assessments, 382 (13.3%) young people were referred to the clinic GP, 281 (73.6%) young people attended their GP appointment, which resulted in 42 (15.0%) specialist referrals – 20 for diagnostic audiology and 22 for appointments with an ENT surgeon.

Innovation and Significance:

The collaboration with EarTrain and development of pathways, guidelines and a competency for nursing staff increased staff skill and confidence. This resulted in a three fold increase in the number of referrals to GP and specialist services.

