

Alberta's Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (EHDI) Program Overview

December 2021

What is the EHDI Program?

Alberta's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program is a population-based screening program administered through AHS in partnership with Alberta Health and other key stakeholders.

EHDI Program Standards (1-3-6):

- **Screen** infants for hearing loss *no later than 1 month* of age
- **Diagnose** permanent hearing loss *no later than 3 months* of age
- Ensure access to **intervention** *no later than 6 months* of age

Achieving these standards enables infants with permanent hearing loss and their families to access the supports needed to optimize developmental outcomes sooner.



Incidence of Permanent Congenital Hearing Loss

Permanent congenital hearing loss (PCHL) is one of the most common congenital conditions found in newborns. About two to three of every 1000 babies born will have PCHL. Over half of all infants identified with PCHL are healthy and have no family history.

Without screening, there are no obvious signs early on to tell if an infant has hearing loss. In these cases, the average age of diagnosis is 24 months, and mild to moderate losses often go undiagnosed until school age.

Who is Eligible?

All infants born in Alberta or born to parents living in Alberta are eligible for screening within 90 days of birth. Physician referral is not required for newborn hearing screening.

EHDI Program Access

Newborn hearing screening is offered free of charge and is available throughout the province. Standardized pediatric diagnostic ABR hearing assessments are also available in all five AHS zones.

Hearing screening is offered in all NICUs and many postpartum units before infants are discharged. Screening is also available at many community-based sites for babies who are:

- Discharged before screening can occur
- Born in a hospital that doesn't offer hearing screening, OR
- Not born in a hospital

Results are provided immediately following screening along with any next steps, if required. **Infants who do not pass their hearing screening** will be referred by the EHDI Hearing Screener for a diagnostic ABR assessment.

What happens in the EHDI Pathway?

Alberta’s EHDI Program Pathway is comprised of a series of fully integrated and coordinated services. Standardized protocols have been developed for the first three components. The program continues to work on the creation of standardized, evidence-informed approaches for Intervention Services and Transition of Care.



How can I support the EHDI Program?

Physicians, nurses and midwives have an important role in the EHDI Program pathway. You can support the program by:

- Sharing information with parents before and after the birth of their infant about the importance of hearing screening and follow-up appointments
- Reassuring parents that hearing screening and diagnostic assessments are safe, effective, and will not hurt their newborn
- Partnering with your primary care team and other medical specialists, to facilitate coordinated care for the infant and family, timely completion of referrals, and consistent messaging to families
- If necessary, initiating referrals for further investigation of hearing loss etiology and/or associated medical conditions, if necessary

Where can I find more information?

For the most up-to-date information on the EHDI Program and newborn hearing screening, visit [AHS.ca/ehdi](https://ahs.ca/ehdi) and click on “information for health professionals”. Information and resources are also available for expectant and new parents, including a newborn hearing screening overview video.



Who should I contact if I have questions?

If you have questions or would like to provide feedback on EHDI resources, contact us at EHDI@ahs.ca.

© 2021, Alberta Health Services, Screening Programs

