

# EUROPEAN CONSENSUS STATEMENT ON HEARING, VISION, AND SPEECH SCREENING IN PRE-SCHOOL AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

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## Abstract

A European Consensus Statement on Hearing, Vision, and Speech Screening in Pre-School and School-Age Children was endorsed during the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the European Federation of Audiology Societies (EFAS) held in Warsaw, Poland, on 22 June 2011. The consensus was the result of scientific discussions and is signed by experts in the fields of audiology, otolaryngology, phoniatics, ophthalmology, and speech language pathology from across Europe<sup>1</sup>.

**Key words:** screening • hearing loss • vision impairment • school-age children • consensus statement

Development of hearing, vision, and speech are crucial for communication in today's society. At the same time, dysfunction of the corresponding anatomical structures represent one of the most common health problems in children.

Hearing, vision, and speech disorders in children, when untreated, can have a negative impact on their speech, language, and cognitive development, and therefore on their academic achievement. Identification of the underlying problem is important so that effective treatment can be implemented before significant damage is done. Early detection, diagnosis, and treatment – in conjunction with health promotion, prevention, and education – create equal educational opportunities for all children.

Recalling the above, the undersigned representatives of European societies of audiologists and phoniaticians, ENT physicians,



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ophthalmologists, psychologists, and speech therapists endorse the following European Consensus Statement on Hearing, Vision, and Speech Screening in Pre-school and School-Age Children. We present the opinion that:

1. Screening programmes have great potential to enable effective identification and treatment of hearing, vision and speech/language disorders in at-risk children and to remediate detrimental effects for both the individual and society.
2. The primary target population for pre-school and school-age screening of hearing, vision, and speech is all children of age 4–7 years. In addition, students in higher grades can be screened.
3. There is a need to increase awareness among policy makers, health care professionals, and the general public of the

consequences of communication disorders, as well as the crucial role of early detection and intervention in cases of impairment of hearing, vision and speech in children.

4. A system of quality control is an essential part of all components of a pre-school and school screening programme. It is necessary that all personnel who are involved in screening have adequate training and instruction in order to acquire and maintain the appropriate skills.
5. To provide a high level of public health services, there should be cooperation among European countries by means of the exchange of knowledge and good practice, continuous improvement of methods and procedures, introduction of e-Health tools, and creation of national and European databases.



European Consensus Statement on Hearing, Vision and Speech Screening in Pre-School and School-Age Children has become a strong support for the realization of a Health Priority selected for the Polish Presidency in the European Union Council (July-December 2011), within the topic of “Equal opportunities for children with communication disorders”. The photo: Prof. Henryk Skarzynski (on the right) presents the Consensus document to the Polish Minister of Health, Dr. Ewa Kopacz (in the middle).

