



Grand Challenges Canada®
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News Release

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Major New Funding will Help Canadian Organizations Help People with Hearing Loss in Developing World

Grand Challenges Canada catalyzes Canadian public-private investment in World Wide Hearing and Hearing Access World

Google.org simultaneously announces major grant to World Wide Hearing

Toronto, Canada – New investments from public and private sources in Canada and the United States of America, including Grand Challenges Canada and Google.org, will enable two Canadian organizations to contribute to a better life for people with hearing loss in developing countries.

Canadian not-for-profit World Wide Hearing Foundation International (World Wide Hearing) will develop a hearing loss diagnostic kit for use by rural healthcare workers, and a newly created Canadian company, Hearing Access World, will screen and quickly equip people in need with high-quality hearing aids at a fraction of the usual \$2,000 to \$3,000 cost.



Together, the organizations have secured a \$700,000 CAD donation from the Bussandri Family Foundation and the Blema and Arnold Steinberg Foundation, which will be complemented by a \$1 million CAD repayable grant from Grand Challenges Canada, funded by the Government of Canada.

Simultaneously, to help develop its diagnostic kit, World Wide Hearing has been granted \$500,000 US (\$635,000 CAD) as part of the recently announced Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities.

In total, grants and investments of more than \$2.3 million CAD will enable two Canadian organizations to help people with hearing loss in low-resource settings, where fewer than one in 100 people who need hearing aids obtain them.

Hearing Access World: The Sound of a Better Life

More than 360 million people, about 10% of them children, are unable to understand speech in most contexts due to hearing loss.

Most people disabled by hearing loss live in low- and middle-income countries, where audiologists are rare and help inaccessible due to distance and the cost of hearing aids.

Previously funded by Grand Challenges Canada, researchers conducting a proof-of-concept project in Jordan found children with hearing and speech impediments socially isolated and hidden by their parents in their home. They heard about people unwilling to marry into a family with hearing problems, in the belief that the condition may be contagious or have a genetic origin.

The project involves Audio-Techs, mostly women, who reach underserved rural areas to screen for problems with five basic questions (determining, for example, whether the patient experiences liquid or pain in an ear).

The Audio-Techs -- trained local hearing care entrepreneurs supervised by an in-country audiologist -- will refer some patients to an ear, nose and throat specialist or to an audiologist.

Other patients with mild or moderate hearing loss can be fitted with a hearing aid on-site by the Audio-Techs, who carry them with them and can fit hearing aids in under an hour -- shaving two weeks from the usual time required.



And, by eliminating middlemen, the cost of a hearing aid can be reduced by up to 90%.

The success of the pilot project will now be taken to scale in Latin America, where Hearing Access World will use the proven, innovative approach to further validate this viable business model.

Beginning in Guatemala, people in need will be equipped with high-quality hearing aids at a small fraction of the standard cost.

Beyond providing hearing aids and referrals, the Audio-Techs' role includes educating communities and breaking down the social stigma of hearing loss.



Establishing a long-term relationship with the hearing-impaired individual will serve the word-of-mouth marketing strategy, and create demand for follow up services (i.e., speech therapy).

World Wide Hearing: Diagnosing Hearing Loss

World Wide Hearing aims to produce a hearing loss screening kit used in public health campaigns conducted by rural healthcare workers worldwide.

Equipment typically used to diagnose auditory problems is expensive, bulky and hard to scale, particularly in developing countries.

Google.org's \$500,000 US grant to World Wide Hearing will help develop a prototype and test an extremely low-cost tool kit for diagnosing hearing loss using smartphone technology – affordable and widely available in the developing world.

The grant is part of a new initiative, [Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities](#) that commits \$20 million in grants to non-profits using emerging technologies to increase independence for people living with disabilities. World Wide Hearing is one of two anchor grantees – and is the only Canadian organization – to receive initial funding to mark the launch of this new campaign.

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The contribution of the Government of Canada to these organizations, through Grand Challenges Canada, comes from a special \$10 million strategic partnership fund provided by Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) to accelerate the scale-up of highly promising innovations to improve health in developing countries. Selected innovators also access technical, business support and other resources to accelerate their growth.

Said the Honourable Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie: "Hearing loss has an immense impact in developing countries because of the lack of services, equipment and trained specialists. It prevents people, young and old, to lead rewarding and productive lives. We can feel proud as Canadians that our support has helped two Canadian organizations to develop and implement innovative and affordable solutions to address this persistent development challenge."

Said Audra Renyi, Executive Director of World Wide Hearing / Hearing Access World: "This new funding will bring the first-ever sounds of help to many hearing-impaired people among Guatemala's population of 15.5 million. Effected through a social micro-franchise model, the system represents a health and business innovation that opens a door to affordable audiology help throughout low- and middle-income nations."

The funding, she adds, marks Better Hearing Month (May 2015) and responds to calls by the InterAcademy Medical Panel for governments to improve hearing-related healthcare, including novel screening and diagnostic techniques to identify hearing loss problems in children, and



fostering innovation to develop affordable, high-quality, low-cost hearing aids and low-cost batteries.

Said Claudio F. Bussandri, founding Chairman of World Wide Hearing Foundation International and of the Bussandri Family Foundation, whose support played an instrumental role in catalyzing today's success, "This is a cause that is close to my heart. At the age of six, I was diagnosed with profound hearing loss. Early intervention and hearing aids enabled me to overcome this disabling, invisible disability and to succeed in life. I am immensely gratified to be able to contribute to the health and well-being of untold numbers of hearing impaired in low-income countries."

Said Peter A. Singer, MD, Chief Executive Officer of Grand Challenges Canada: "Throughout the developing world, hearing problems and associated speech difficulties impose a life sentence of economic and social hardships unfathomable to people in western societies, where tremendous support is widely taken for granted. This Bold Idea has proven that with innovation and determination, we can create relatively simple and affordable ways to help people in low-resource settings cope with, and surmount, a limiting disability."

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About Grand Challenges Canada

Grand Challenges Canada is dedicated to supporting Bold Ideas with Big Impact® in global health. We are funded by the Government of Canada; we support innovators in low- and middle-income countries and Canada. The bold ideas we support integrate science and technology, social and business innovation to find sustainable solutions to health challenges – we call this Integrated Innovation®. Grand Challenges Canada focuses on innovator-defined challenges through its Stars in Global Health program and on targeted challenges in its Saving Lives at Birth, Saving Brains and Global Mental Health programs. Grand Challenges Canada works closely with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) to catalyze scale, sustainability and impact. We have a determined focus on results, and on saving and improving lives.

www.grandchallenges.ca

About Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada

The mandate of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD) is to manage Canada's diplomatic and consular relations, to encourage the country's international trade, and to lead Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance.

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FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Lode Roels



Grand Challenges Canada®
Grands Défis Canada

Press Officer
Grand Challenges Canada
T. 647.328.2021 / 416.673.6570
lode.roels@grandchallenges.ca

Terry Collins
T. 416.538.8712 / 416.878.8712
tc@tca.tc