

How does age of first hearing aid fitting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compare with non-Indigenous Australian children?

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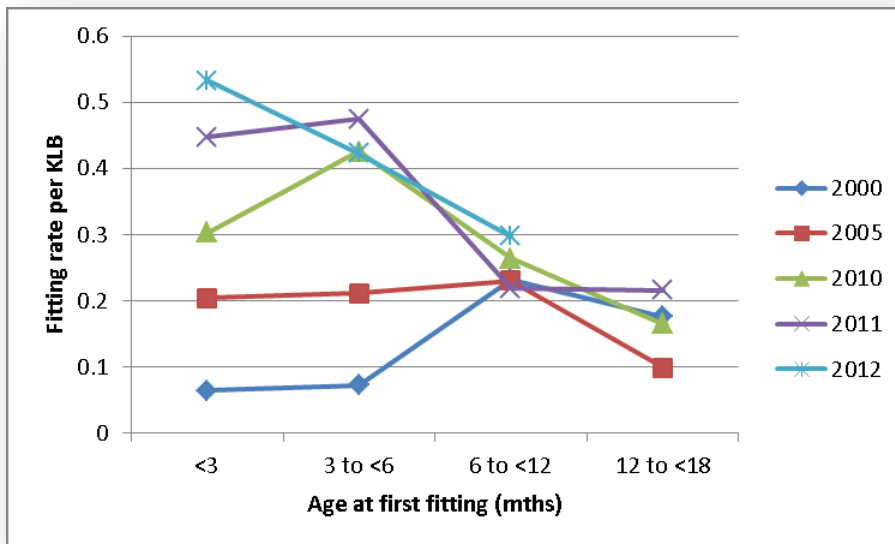


Australian Hearing

Australian Hearing is the sole provider of rehabilitative hearing services to children requiring hearing aids. These services are funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Health.

During 2013:

- **2,520** child and young adult clients were fitted with hearing aids for the first time.
- **295** of these were children born in 2013.



The relationship between implementation of UNHS across Australia and proportion of children aged under 3, 6 and 12 months fitted with hearing aids for the first time.

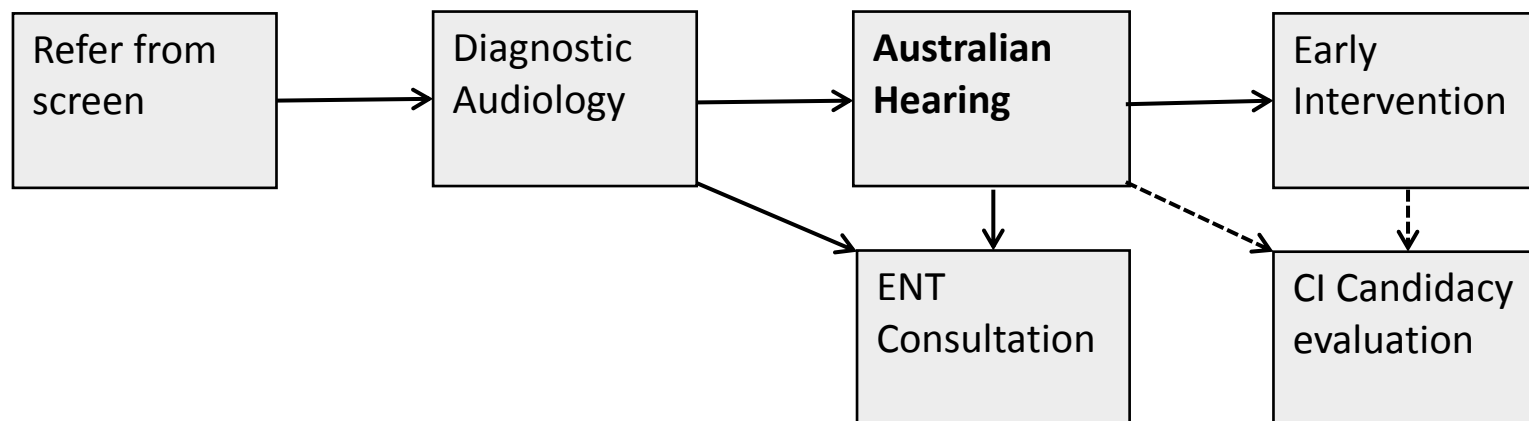


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Referral pathway



Annual Demographic Details report

Published annually www.hearing.com.au

Reports against all current, active aided and implanted clients younger than 26 years.

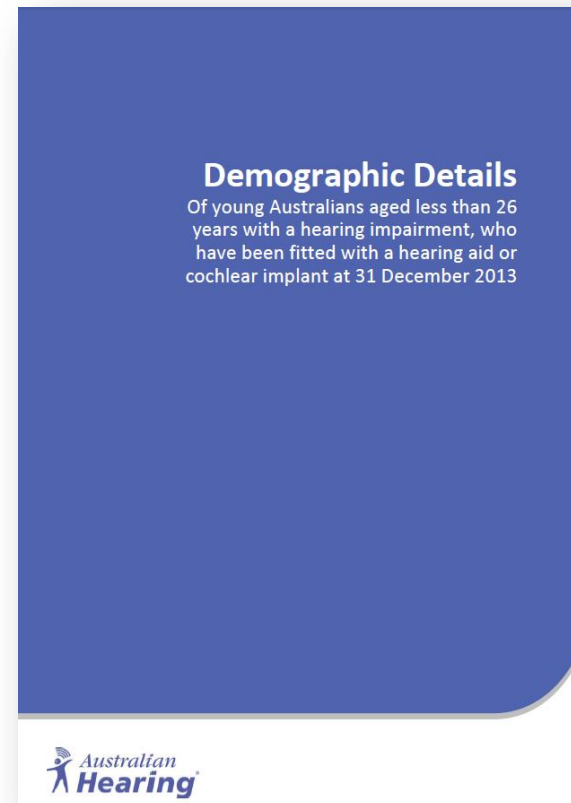
Reports at national and state/territory level.

Reports against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous Australian children.

Includes:

- Number of hearing impaired children
- Fitting rates of children and young adults
- Hearing loss distribution of aided/implanted children and young adults

Includes data on children who were first fitted with hearing aids in that year: **a useful indicator of how well referral pathways and processes are working.**



From the 2013 Demographic Details report

At 31 December 2013

20 819 Aided Young Australians <26 years.

Of these, **1757** were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children (**8.5%** of all aided children)

2508 children were first fitted in 2013

Of these, **269** were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children (**10.7%** of newly fitted children)

Note

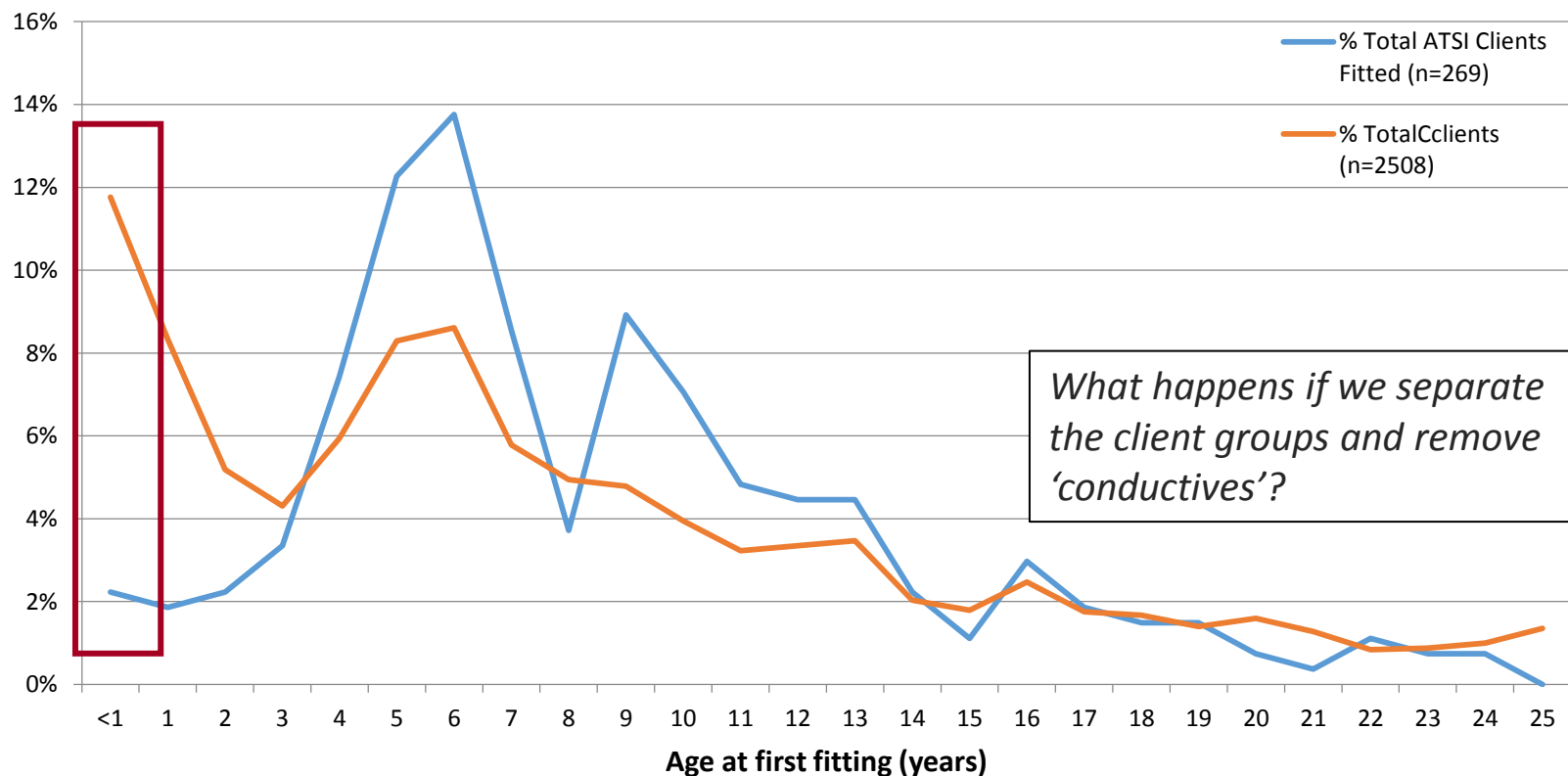
Approximately 4%* of the Australian child population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Closer to 9% of our aided child clients are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Over-representation is likely due to higher incidence of chronic middle ear disease and associated hearing loss.

*ABS Census 2006

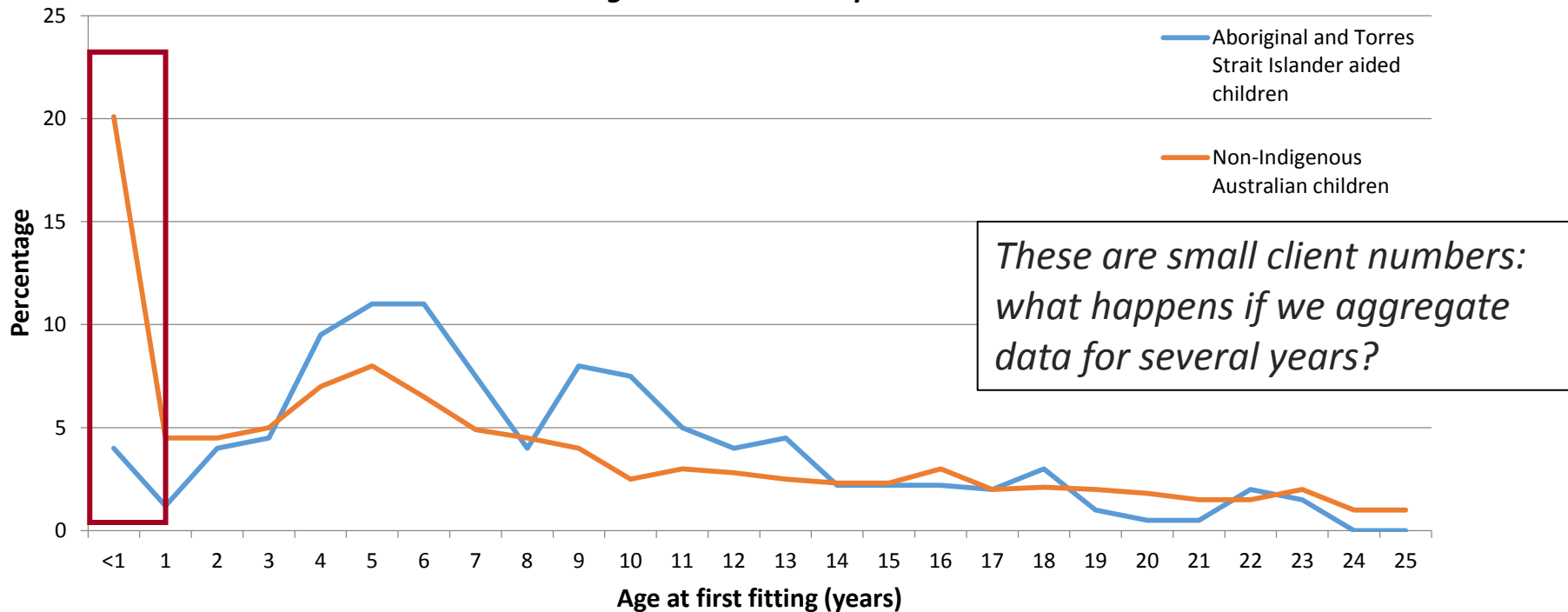
The data of concern

Comparison of first fitting age - Clients first fitted in 2013



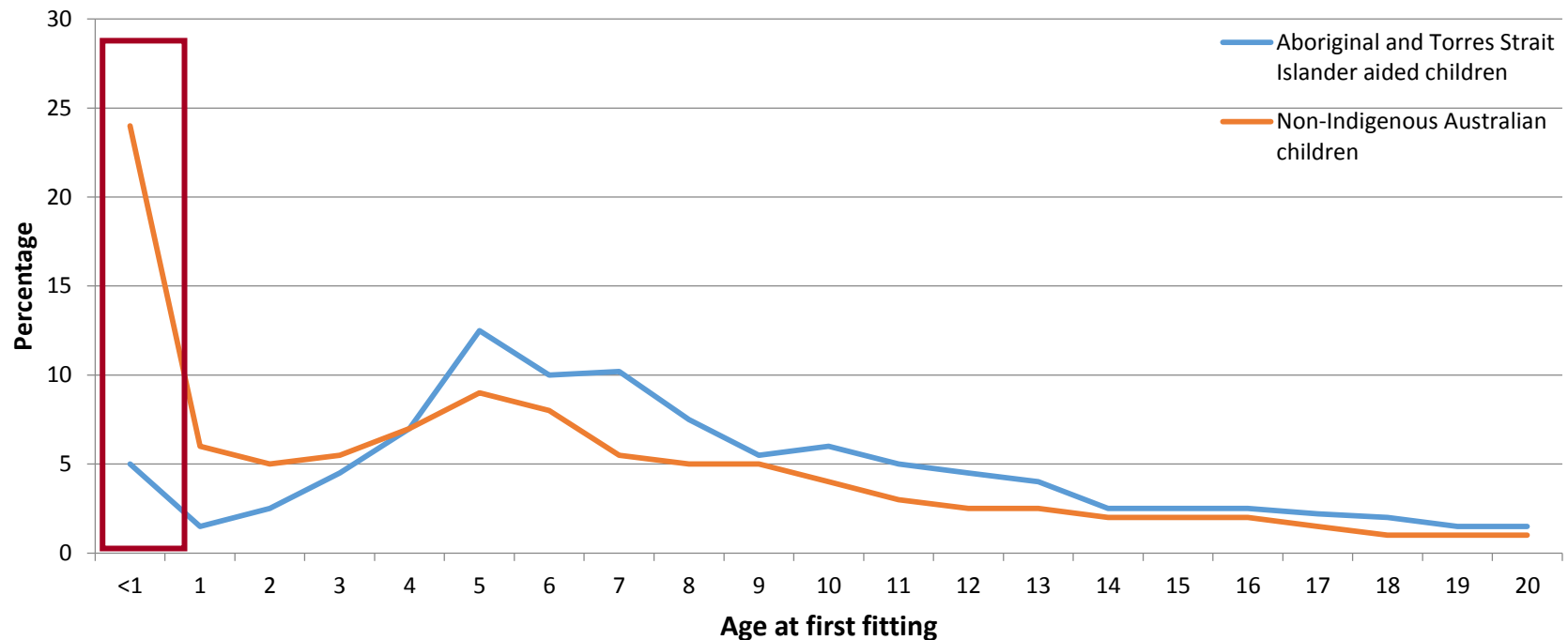
With as many 'conductives' removed as possible

Comparison of first fitting age - Clients first fitted in 2013
'Conductives' removed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children separated



Aggregating 5 years of data to offset small client numbers

Comparison of first fitting age - Clients first fitted 2008-2013
'Conductives' removed, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children separated

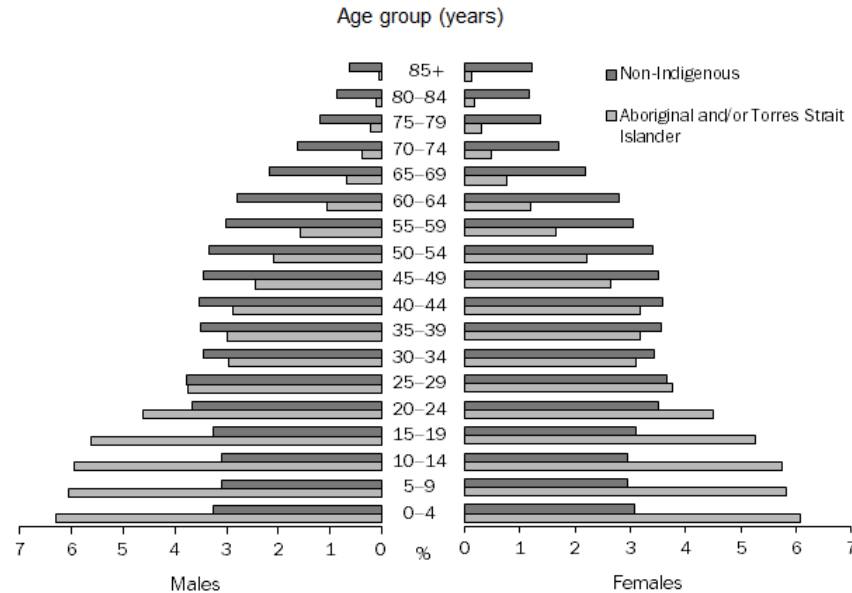


Can we control for differences in size and profiles of the populations?

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND NON-INDIGENOUS POPULATION - 30 JUNE 2011

Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander population = 669,000

Non-Indigenous Australian
population = 22,340,000



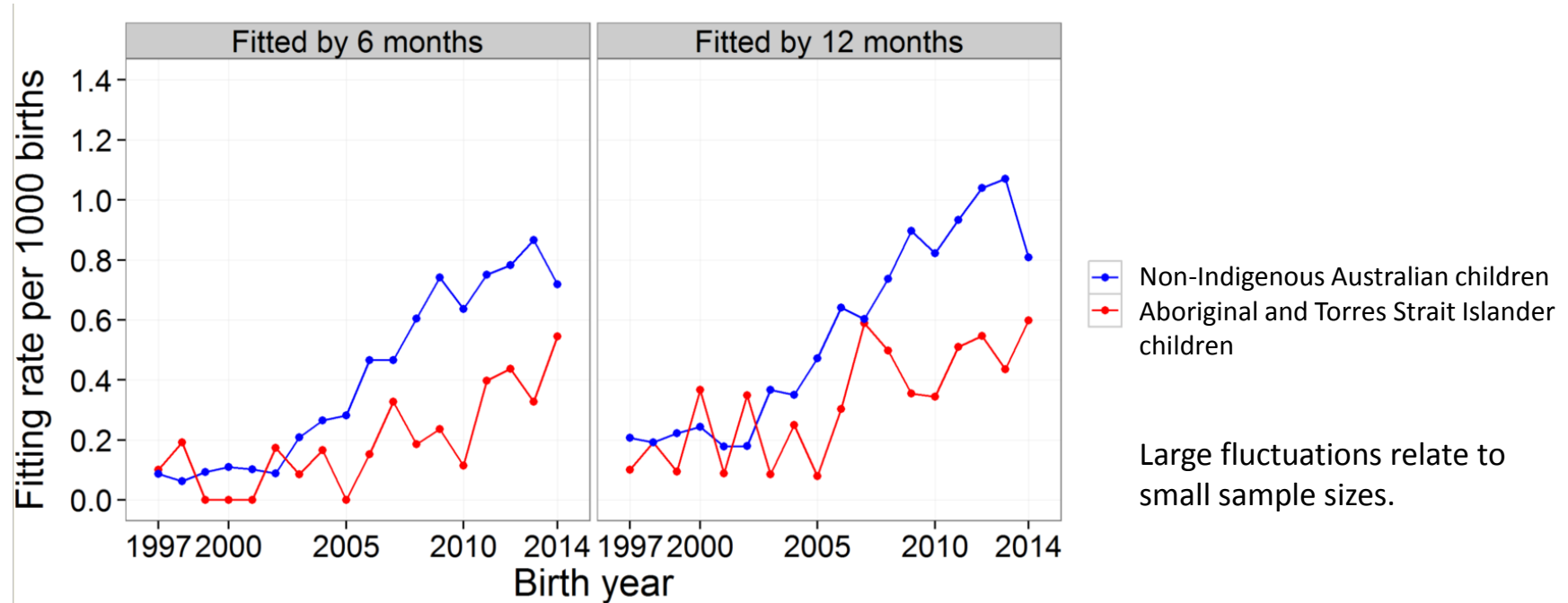
What happens if we relate first fitting data to the birth rate (the 'fitting rate') of each population? This allows comparisons to be made across populations.



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Change in fittings under 6 months and under 12 months by birth rate over time

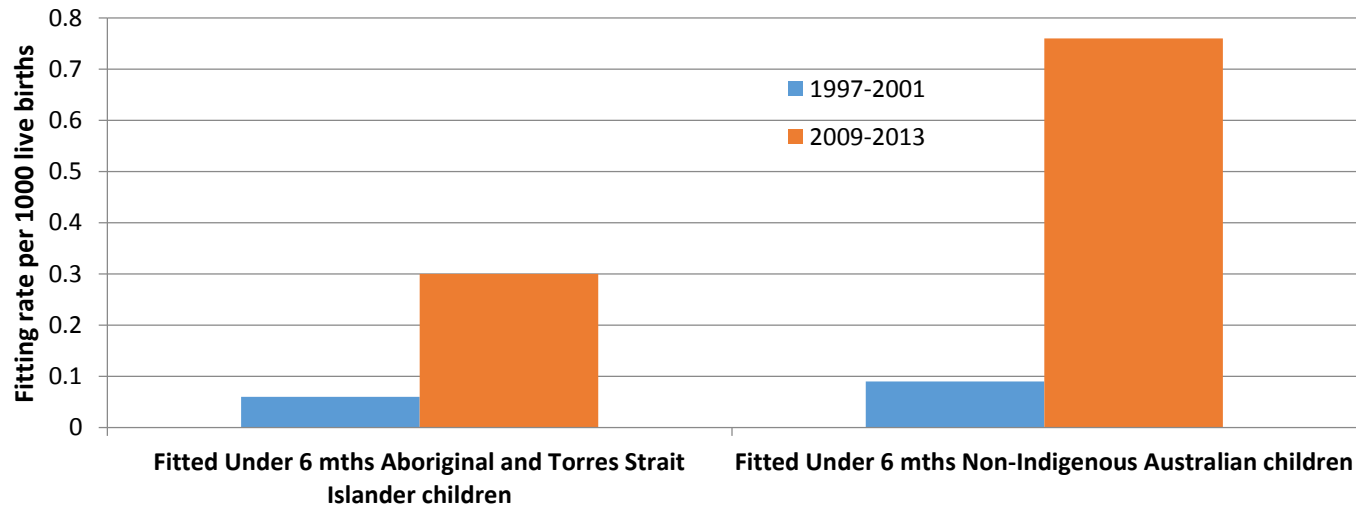


What can we see?

1. A steady increase in Under 6 month and Under 12 month fitting rates for both cohorts over the time period 1997 to 2014.
2. A persisting gap between proportion of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australian children fitted under the age of 12 mths.

Change in fittings pre- and post-introduction of NHS

Impact of UNHS on early fitting rates: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children vs non-Indigenous Australian children



Notes

UNHS coverage approximately 84% in December 2009, close to 100% by mid- 2010

ABS advise likely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth data likely to be an under-estimate in earlier years.

What can we see?

1. A statistically significant improvement in fittings under the age of 6 months for both cohorts
2. A statistically significant difference between Under 6 mth early fitting rates between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australian children.

What can we conclude?

That, after we adjust for:

1. Prevalence of conductive hearing loss
2. Small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client numbers
3. Differences in size and profile of populations

there remains a significant difference between the age of first fitting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous Australian children.

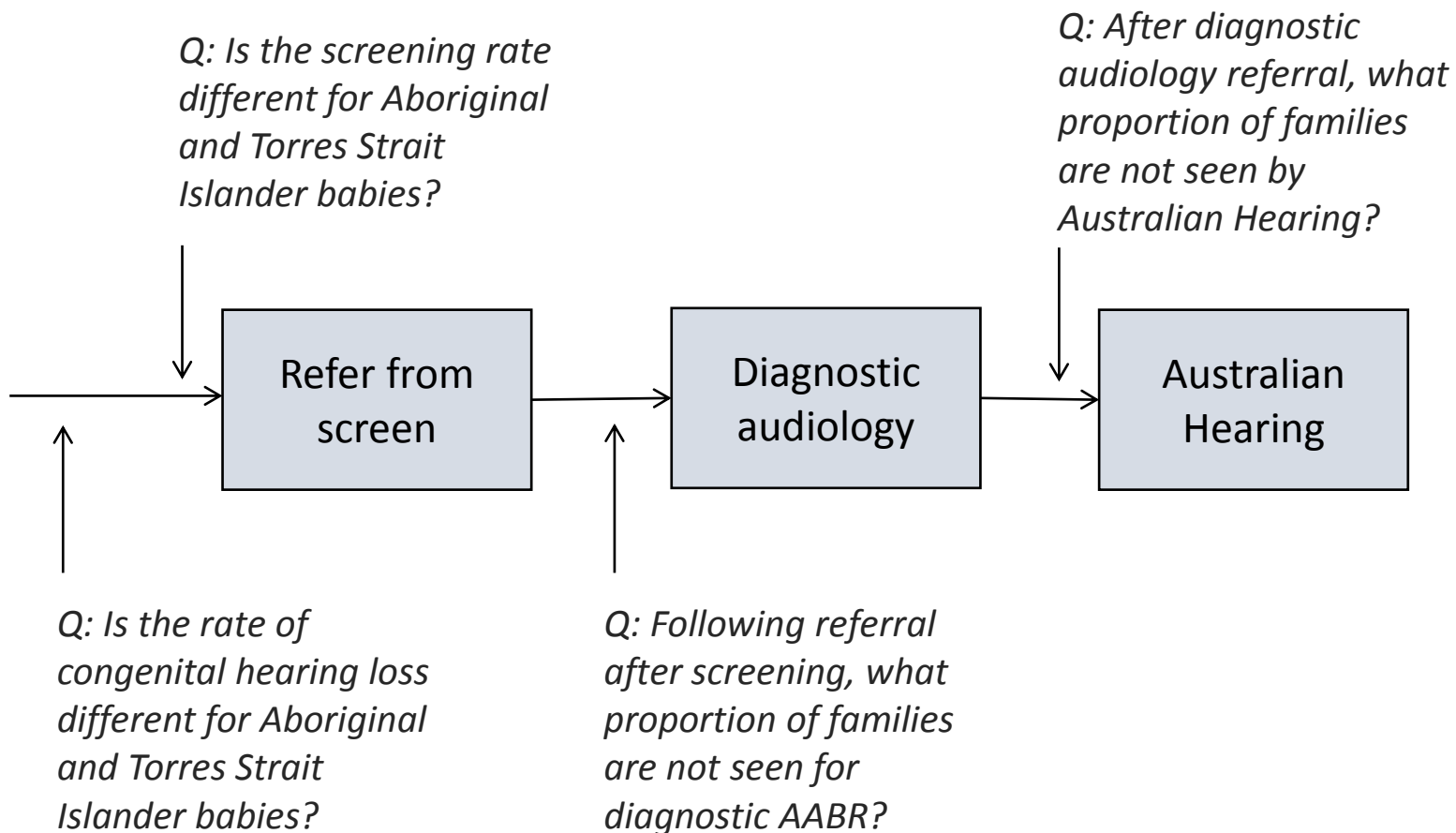
Why might this be? Where might the gaps be in referral pathways? What can we act on, and how?



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The referral pathway



Thoughts

1. How is **successful navigation** of the UNHS pathway measured? Is first appointment with Australian Hearing one possible indicator?
2. Is **review of program data** required in each state/territory to analyse where loss is happening?
3. Is there a need for state/territory UNHS programs to work in **partnership** with peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Community Controlled Health Organisations on appropriate strategies for promoting the importance of follow up.
4. Is it possible to track progress along the full referral pathway without a state/territory or **national NHS database**?



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