

Chime Advocacy Newsletter

No. 7 | Summer 2025

Chime is the National Charity for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Since 1964 we have championed the rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) people in Ireland. Chime's Advocacy Newsletter aims to inform key stakeholders including public representatives, of the priority issues affecting D/HH people that Chime is currently advocating on. The newsletter provides an overview of why the priority issues are important, what progress has been made to date, and the next steps in our campaigning efforts.

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about Chime advocacy?**

Get in touch!

Email us at
advocacy@chime.ie

Budget 2026 Priorities

Chime is making a joint Budget 2026 submission with the National Disability Services Association (NDSA) which includes key priorities for the Government to consider:

- Fully resource the forthcoming National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People across all government departments and support its implementation with concrete targets and reporting structures.
- Further investment and expansion of programmes that seek to remove barriers to employing disabled people through the provision of supports, training and education

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For any queries about
deafness or hearing loss:

Chime Information Line

Call 1800 256 257
Email advocacy@chime.ie
Text 087 922 1046

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of both employers and potential employees, including the Wage Subsidy Scheme, Workability, Employability, and the Work and Access Programme.

- Fund a Cost of Disability Payment of a minimum of €55 weekly. The Programme for Government commits to such a payment and to develop a mechanism to incrementally increase the payment. Indecon estimates the annual additional

cost of disability for a Deaf or hard of hearing person is €10,119 – €12,523.¹

- Use Ireland's €22 billion public procurement budget to increase the number of people with disabilities in employment by availing of existing instruments, such as Article 20 of the EU Procurement Directive, which provides for reserved contracts for social enterprises employing people with disabilities/disadvantage, as recommended by the OECD.

Deaf students seek ISL Leaving Cert exam takes case to the WRC

In June 2024 two Deaf students asked the State Examinations Commission if they could do a Leaving Certificate subject exam in Irish Sign Language. The students were aware that many foreign national students from Europe and other countries are able to do a Leaving Cert exam in their first language, and they wanted to have the same opportunity. Irish Sign Language is an official language of Ireland since the ISL Act was passed in 2017. Chime is fully supportive of the students' request.

To date the Department has failed to grant the students' request, saying that it takes several years to develop a curriculum.

However, the students are not asking for a curriculum to be developed and delivered in schools – they simply want to do an exam. The Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College where ISL interpreters are trained have developed a Leaving Cert Honours equivalent ISL exam in 2019, which they administered to several Deaf students.

Chime provided the Department with the contact details of the Centre for Deaf Studies but understands the Department has not made contact with the Centre.



Policy

The students' request has been refused despite the fact that the State Examinations Commission (SEC) say it is their policy to grant such requests providing the language is an official EU language and the student is taking a full Leaving Cert programme. The SEC state that this policy is in line with the commitment made by member states under Article 149 of the Treaty of Nice.²

The students' case was highlighted on RTÉ News:

CLICK HERE

Discrimination

Following making a complaint to the Department, one student has now taken a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission on the basis

that she is being discriminated against under the Equal Status Act. She believes that the Department is discriminating against her because she is Deaf. The hearing will take place over the summer, after the student has already completed her Leaving Cert in June. Whilst it will be too late for her to take a Leaving Cert subject in ISL, she is advocating on behalf of future Leaving Cert students who are Deaf to have the opportunity to do complete a Leaving Cert ISL exam.

Chime believes that the students' request is reasonable and that the Department can easily grant the students' request given that the framework for the examination already exists.

Chime is seeking the support of all political parties for access to an ISL leaving cert exam for all Deaf students.

¹ The Cost of Disability in Ireland, Indecon (2021)
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/the-cost-of-disability-in-ireland-research-report.pdf>

² State Examinations Commission website:
<https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc=ex&sc=eu>

National Hearing Care Plan

Report from Working Group due end of June.

Chime has been campaigning for some time to convince the Department of Health to develop a national hearing care plan. In August 2024 the Minister for Health announced the establishment of a Working Group to develop a National Hearing Care Plan and a report is expected by end of Q2 2025. A national plan would reduce the high level of unmanaged hearing loss across the population, reduce the overall health burden and improve quality of life for tens of thousands.

Why does Ireland need a national hearing care plan?

300,000 adults in Ireland have a significant hearing loss³, but only one in five have hearing aids.⁴

Ireland prescribes hearing aids at a much lower rate than other developed countries – in 2022 the hearing aid adoption rate was 1 in 2 of hearing adults.⁵

Unmanaged hearing loss leads to significantly increased health risks such as dementia and depression, and other challenges such as social isolation and withdrawal.^{6,7} The impact is so significant that the WHO estimate that for every €1 invested in hearing care, governments can expect a return of €16 over the following ten years.⁸

There is currently no national policy and a lack of oversight in the provision of hearing care in Ireland.

The HSE provide audiology services to medical card holders and children. While there are high clinical standards and protocols in place, there are record waiting lists. Waiting lists have grown by to over 25,000 people waiting on a first appointment.⁹ One third of adults on the waiting list are waiting over one year for an appointment, while there are more children on the waiting list (over 13,000) with almost half waiting over one year. This is a national scandal and a waiting list initiative must be a priority for the new Government.

Approximately 70% of hearing aids are provided through private providers, and although the State invested approximately €28m in 2024 through Hearing Aid Grants (approximately 28,000) provided by the Department of Social Protection,¹⁰ there is no oversight or standards in place in relation to this investment. The Hearing Aid Grant itself is set as a single standard payment which means that where cost is a factor people may not get hearing aids that are suited to their needs.

HSE Audiology Waiting Lists now over 25,000

11,991 Adults

(3,888 waiting over 1 year)

13,122 Children

(5,567 waiting over 1 year)

What should a national Hearing care plan deliver?

A National Hearing Care Plan would ensure that people with hearing loss could access quality audiology services in a timely manner, irrespective of whether they accessed hearing care via the HSE or private providers. Improved outcomes would include:

Facts about Hearing Loss in Ireland

- 8% of adults – 300,000 people in Ireland – need hearing aids.⁷
- Only one in five of these people have the hearing aids they need.⁴
- Ireland prescribes hearing aids at approximately half the rate of other European countries.⁵
- 8% of dementia is preventable through early treatment of hearing loss.^{6,7}
- Based on recent research into hearing loss and depression, Chime estimates that 50,000 people in Ireland have depression due to unmanaged hearing loss.¹⁰

€28 million

The amount the Department of Social Protection spent on the Treatment Benefit hearing aid grant in 2024.

France

Operate a two tiered hearing aid grant (value: €950 and €1,700) to ensure people get the right hearing aids for their needs.

UK

Although almost everyone qualifies for free hearing aids in the UK, approximately 30% of provision is via private providers.

- Eradication of long waiting times for HSE audiology services
- Increased oversight of private provision
- Reduced health burden in the population, including less incidence of depression, cognitive decline and dementia.

Next steps

Chime made a submission to the Working Group and were contacted for further consultation in March. A report with initial recommendations is due by the end of Q2 2025 for consideration in Budget 2026. Chime is seeking the support of members of the 34th Dáil, especially members of the Oireachtas Health Committee, to ensure the Working Group fulfils its terms of reference.

Chime is seeking support from Oireachtas members to demand immediate action to address the shocking HSE audiology waiting lists.

- ³ HSE Audiology Review (2011)
- ⁴ Health and Wellbeing: Active Ageing for Older Adults in Ireland (TILDA, 2017)
- ⁵ European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association. Market Statistics Reports (UK 2022)
- ⁶ Dementia prevention, intervention, and care (Lancet Commission, 2020)
- ⁷ Blake et al. Hearing Loss and Depression in Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (2020)
- ⁸ WHO World Report on Ear and Hearing Care (WHO, 2021)
- ⁹ HSE Audiology waiting list figures March 2025
- ¹⁰ Information supplied to Chime by the Department of Social Protection.

Read the Minister's announcement establishing the National Hearing Care Plan Working Group here:

[CLICK HERE](#)

Reduced access to Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students

Changes to the Special Education Teaching hours model by the Department of Education in recent years has resulted in reduced hours of support for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) students. Many parents are reporting that their D/HH children are receiving reduced support as the Department focus on increasing support for children with the lowest STen (Standardised Tests) scores.

Hearing loss and deafness are not a barrier to learning, and the National Council for Special Education state that D/HH students should achieve educational outcomes on a par with their hearing peers of similar ability. However, without support to overcome the communication challenges in the classroom, D/HH children cannot achieve their potential.

Parents say their children are struggling and falling further behind their hearing peers due to reduced support.



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council for Special Education

NCSE Objective

"Deaf and Hard of Hearing children graduate from school with levels of attainment that are on a par with their hearing peers of similar ability".¹¹

ZERO - information available on levels of attainment for D/HH students

Why should educational outcomes be published?

Given the reduced supports available to D/HH children, Chime has called on the Department of Education to publish information on the educational outcomes of D/HH students. Chime believes this is an important first step in ensuring that D/HH children receive equitable support based on their educational needs in our schools. The UK Government publish data on outcomes for these children, and in general, D/HH students are one grade per subject behind their hearing peers.¹³

Whilst there was some agreement with former Ministers for Special Education that data on outcomes is needed, the Department is still refusing to do so. Chime met with Minister Michael Moynihan in May and he discussed the plans for a new working group under the Department to develop a programme of outcomes across a range of areas including student engagement, attainment, attendance, happiness, independence and progress for all students. However, whilst educational outcomes data will be made available to the Department, there is no commitment to publish these. New research is pending from the NCSE on the further education, training and employment outcomes of post-leaving cert **Deaf and Hard of Hearing** students, which will inform the working group. This research is welcome and is the first step to developing an evidence base and mechanism to ensure equity of access to education for D/HH students.

Chime is calling on all political parties to support the publication of STen results for D/HH children in 2025.

“Because she had a hearing problem, she was entitled to a certain amount of one-to-one learning support, and that has been cut hugely. She had a half hour each day with a teacher on her own. And that has been cut to half an hour a week.”

Mother of Niamh ¹²

There are over 5,000 Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in Ireland

¹¹ The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland (NCSE 2011)

¹² Parent statement on recent RTE documentary *DEAF – not dumb*, broadcast on RTÉ One on 23rd Nov 2023

¹³ Note on Department for Education figures on attainment for Deaf children in 2021 (England) (NDCS, 2020)

Access for the Deaf community

Positive developments for the Deaf and hard of hearing community have been made since the establishment of the Voucher Scheme in 2023 on a permanent basis and the introduction of the new Work and Access scheme in 2024. However there continues to be concerns around access to the Mental Health Service for the Deaf community for people living outside the Dublin region.

Voucher scheme

The Voucher scheme covers the cost of some ISL interpretation to members of the Deaf community for social and civic activities was established on a permanent footing.

However, the scheme currently has significant limitations. These include a low number of

vouchers per year, the exclusion of teenagers from the scheme, and limited uptake due to a low availability of ISL interpreters. A number of organisations have raised these matters with the Minister for Social Protection and Chime raised the matter with the Minister again at the Department's Disability Consultative Forum in May.

Work and Access

The new Work and Access scheme to support people with disabilities to access employment contained some welcome provision for access to ISL interpretation in the workplace. For the first time Deaf workers can now access support in the workplace in their first language on an ongoing basis – although the current proposed level of provision is low. It is hoped that this will in time enable Deaf people to progress their careers in the workplace – something that has been extremely difficult to achieve in the past.

No regional CNS posts have been filled to date in the Mental Health Service for the Deaf community.

Mental Health service for the Deaf community

The evaluation of the Mental Health Service for the Deaf community required under the 'Sharing the Vision' mental health policy before the end of 2022 has just been completed in early 2025 and is long overdue.¹⁵ Chime has been consulted as part of the evaluation and a report was submitted to the Social Inclusion Workstream of Sharing the Vision in April 2025. Chime looks forward to working with the HSE on progressing the implementation of the recommendations, which includes a comprehensive national needs assessment to be undertaken to identify the true demand for Deaf mental health services nationally. An area of concern is the level of access to the service for people living outside the Dublin region. Chime has developed a series of mental wellbeing videos to support ISL users to access regular information on managing mental wellbeing. These videos do not bridge the gap for mental health services, but offers informal and accessible support.

¹⁵ Sharing the Vision, Recommendation 62. (HSE, 2020)

Updates in brief

Chime is currently advocating on a range of issues to reduce barriers and enhance the lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

Accessibility in broadcasting

Chime welcomes changes in the updated Access Rules by Comisiún na Meán, including scheduling of ISL programmes, but disappointed that other provisions were not included, such as improving access to news bulletins for the Deaf community. Comisiún na Meán set up a new

User Consultative Panel for accessibility for Deaf and hard of hearing people and Chime attended the first meeting in May where representative groups were given broad information on access rule and the new EU Accessibility Act. The next meeting will be held in September.

Accessibility in Public Spaces

Chime is very dissatisfied with the quality of assistive listening systems provided in many of our public venues and auditoria. This has included prominent national venues such as the National Concert Hall and the Abbey Theatre. We are currently working with some of our members to advocate for quality assistive listening systems and support at these and other public venues.

Chime recently attended the first Technical Advisory Group meeting held by the National Disability Authority to consult on the new Universal Design Guidance on Sound Quality in public service and public design. It is hoped that this guidance will be implemented for all public service buildings and will be shared with the private sector to promote quality sound and accessibility in all spaces.

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