

Chime Advocacy Newsletter

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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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**Want to know more
about Chime advocacy?**

Get in touch!

Email us at
advocacy@chime.ie

Budget 2026 puts people with disabilities at risk

Chime made a joint Budget 2026 submission with the National Disability Services Association (NDSA) for key priorities on fully resourcing the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People, further investment and expansion of programmes to remove barriers to employment for disabled people, funding a Cost of Disability Payment of a minimum of €55 weekly, and using Ireland's €22 billion public procurement budget to increase the number of people with disabilities in employment.

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Despite positive announcements to increase funding for disability services, unemployed disabled people have been put at risk by the quiet removal of the once-off payments for electricity and heating. The Disability Sector is very disappointed that the Cost of Disability Payment was not included in the budget despite government commitment to introduce one. Instead, a Strategic Focus

Network will be set up to develop a plan on how a Cost of Disability payment will be implemented. It will take a cross-departmental approach and Chime has made a written submission in December to outline key issues to consider for Deaf and hard of hearing people with additional costs of disability.

Campaign for Irish Sign Language as a Leaving Cert exam

Chime has been campaigning for the State Examinations Commission to provide a Leaving Certificate subject exam in Irish Sign Language (ISL) since summer 2024. There is already a provision for foreign national students from Europe and other countries to sit a Leaving Cert exam in their first language. 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.¹ Irish Sign Language is an official language of Ireland since the ISL Act was passed in 2017, and Chime has been supporting Deaf students with campaigning for their right to a Leaving Cert exam in ISL in line with the SEC's policy.

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.

One Leaving Certificate student took a complaint to the Workplace Relations Commission against the Department of Education in early 2025, however, the complaint was subsequently withdrawn in September.

We still do not have an answer on when an ISL Leaving Certificate exam will be introduced.



The students' case was highlighted on RTÉ News:

CLICK HERE

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

¹ State Examinations Commission website: <https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc=ex&sc=eu>

National Hearing Care Plan

Chime has been lobbying the Department of Health for the urgent development of a National Hearing Care Plan. A Working Group was set up in late 2024 to develop a National Hearing Care Plan and was due to furnish the Minister for Health with a report by end of Q2 2025. However, the Minister confirmed that the working group has expanded its remit and will be making its report by the end of Q1 2026. This is disappointingly slow progression on the urgent need of 27,000 people on the HSE audiology waiting list, 14,000 of whom are children.

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 loss,¹ but only one in five have hearing aids.² Ireland prescribes hearing aids at a much lower rate than other developed countries – in 2022 the hearing aid adoption rate was 1 in 2 hard of hearing adults.³

Unmanaged hearing loss leads to significantly increased health risks such as dementia and depression, and other challenges such as social isolation and withdrawal.^{4,5} 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.⁶

Ireland currently does not have a national policy and there is 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 to over 27,557 people waiting on a first appointment, 14,201 of whom are children.⁷ This is a national

scandal, and a waiting list initiative must be a priority for the Government.

Approximately 70% of hearing aids are provided through private providers, and although the State invested approximately €21m between 2024 and 2025 through Hearing Aid Grants (approximately 21,000) provided by the Department of Social Protection⁸, 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 27,500

13,356 Adults (4,496 waiting over 1 year)

14,201 Children (6,694 waiting over 1 year)

Facts about Hearing Loss in Ireland

- 8% of adults – 300,000 people in Ireland – need hearing aids.⁵
- Only one in five of these people have the hearing aids they need.²
- Ireland prescribes hearing aids at approximately half the rate of other European countries.³
- 8% of dementia is preventable through early treatment of hearing loss.^{4,5}
- Based on recent research into hearing loss and depression, Chime estimates that 50,000 people in Ireland have depression due to unmanaged hearing loss.⁸

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:

- 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.

€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

Next steps

Chime were consulted by the Working Group in March 2025 and has been seeking updates on its progression and planned report. Chime hosted a hearing screening and campaign awareness day in Leinster House on 15th October, and spoke with many TDs and Senators on the day seeking support to progress the National Hearing Care Plan, several of whom sent in PQs to the Minister for Health. The Minister confirmed the Working Group would be issuing a report in Q1 2026 and a public consultation would be conducted to inform the Working Group. We also issued

national and regional press releases on the event garnering wide media coverage. 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.



Siobhan Cole, Sorca Clarke T.D, and Danielle McLaughlin in Leinster House 15th October.

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

[CLICK HERE](#)

- ¹ HSE Audiology Review (2011)
- ² Health and Wellbeing: Active Ageing for Older Adults in Ireland (TILDA, 2017)
- ³ European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association. Market Statistics Reports (UK 2022)
- ⁴ Dementia prevention, intervention, and care (Lancet Commission, 2020)
- ⁵ Blake et al. Hearing Loss and Depression in Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis (2020)
- ⁶ WHO World Report on Ear and Hearing Care (WHO, 2021)
- ⁷ HSE Audiology waiting list figures March 2025
- ⁸ Information supplied to Chime by the Department of Social Protection.

Campaign for improved access to Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students

Some parents are reporting that their Deaf or hard of hearing children are receiving reduced support since the latest changes to the Special Education Teaching hours model by the Department of Education.

Hearing loss and deafness are not barriers 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.

/// *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



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*

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

Why do we need educational outcomes to be published?

Chime has called on the Department of Education to publish information on the educational outcomes of Deaf and hard of hearing students. Chime believes this is an important first step in ensuring that Deaf and hard of hearing children receive equitable support based on their educational needs in our schools. The UK

Government publish data on outcomes for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in the UK, and in general, these students are one grade per subject behind their hearing peers.¹¹

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 2025, and he discussed the plans for a new working group 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.

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



⁹ The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland (NCSE 2011)

¹⁰ Parent statement on recent RTE documentary **DEAF – not dumb**, broadcast on RTÉ One on 23rd Nov 2023

¹¹ 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 Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpretation to members of the Deaf community for social and civic activities and was established on a permanent footing in 2025.

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. Several organisations working with Deaf people 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 December.

Work and Access

The new Work and Access scheme aims to support improved access to employment and career progression for people with disabilities, including 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, however, both uptake and provision of the scheme is still low. Chime has



been advocating for improved application processes and public promotion of the scheme with both the Deaf community and employers. The Department of Social Protection confirmed there is allocated funding in 2026 for a public campaign to promote the scheme.

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 was completed in March 2025 and Chime received a copy in May as one of the consultative stakeholders.¹² Chime raised an area of concern on the level of access to the service for people living outside the Dublin region. The recommendations of the evaluation include a national assessment of need, and measures to ensure the sustainability of the service. In November 2025, Chime made a submission to the HSE with insight on the experiences of Deaf people accessing mental health services and recommendations for the sustainability of the service through national training with community mental health teams.

To support the mental wellbeing of Irish Sign Language users, Chime has developed a series of mental wellbeing videos with information on managing mental wellbeing. These do not bridge the gap for mental health services but offer informal and accessible support.

<https://www.chime.ie/Get-Support/Deaf-Community/Mental-Health-Advice>

¹² 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 participated in a new User Consultative Panel for accessibility for Deaf and hard of hearing people set up by Coimisiún na Meán in 2025. The Panel met several times during the year with representative groups to discuss the access rule, the new EU Accessibility Act, broadcasting and online accessibility regulations and monitoring mechanisms. This work will continue in 2026.

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 have been working with some of our members to advocate for quality assistive listening systems and support at these and other public venues. Chime also participated in a new Technical Advisory Group hosted 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. Chime is also working with Age Friendly Ireland and Meath County Council on the development of audits on local theatres and venues to encourage good quality assistive listening systems.

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