

Chime Advocacy Newsletter

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Hearing Loss – the need for a national plan

Chime is working hard to shine a light on the high level of unaddressed hearing loss amongst Irish adults and long HSE audiology waiting lists. Ireland has a very low uptake of hearing aids compared to other countries in Europe. The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)¹ found that only one in five older people with hearing loss in Ireland have the hearing aids they need, while we prescribe hearing aids at approximately half the rate per head of population compared to the UK, Germany, France, Norway, Spain and the Netherlands (EHIMA, 2016–2020)².

Chime is the National Charity for deafness and hearing loss. 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.

FEATURED IN THIS EDITION:

- Advocating for a national hearing care plan Pg 1
 - Specialist service for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children is on the way Pg 3
 - Education: the need to publish outcomes Pg 4
 - Updates in brief Pg 5
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Want to know more
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Chime

The National Charity for
Deafness and Hearing Loss

(Continued from Page 1)

In our previous newsletter we reported on the ever-present long HSE audiology waiting lists and the recommendation of the World Health Organisation that governments should develop national hearing care plans for their populations. The WHO state out that addressing hearing loss in a timely fashion represents excellent value for money, pointing out that for every €1 invested a return of almost €17 can be expected over the following 10 years. We also outlined how the current approach to managing hearing loss in the population is ad hoc, inefficient and wasteful. Furthermore, the consequences of unaddressed hearing loss are considerable, including increased risk of depression, cognitive decline and dementia.

Chime's call for action

In 2022 Chime has called on the Minister for Health to take action on audiology waiting lists and to establish a working group to develop a population based national hearing care plan.

Chime is asking the Minister for Health to:

- 1 Set up a working group to develop a national hearing care plan.
- 2 Take immediate action to address the HSE audiology waiting lists.

As part of this campaign Chime organised a hearing screening event in Leinster House in October 2022. Almost 20 TDs and Senators had their hearing tested, and all stated that they were in favour of Chime's proposals for action on waiting lists and the establishment of a working group to develop a national plan.

Willie O'Dea, T.D. supported our event by taking part in a photoshoot and speaking to reporters. We are very grateful to him for his support and commitment to the issue. Willie also raised the matter with the

Taoiseach Micheál Martin on the floor of the Dáil on October 25th. He asked the Taoiseach if the Government intends to accept the recommendation of the WHO and what steps it intends to take to reduce audiology waiting lists.

300,000 Irish adults with significant hearing loss – only one in five have had support to address it



Willie O'Dea T.D. has his hearing screened by Chime audiologist Sarah O'Sullivan

Taoiseach's comments

The Taoiseach's response was very positive. He commented that it was an important issue and that he would 'ask the Minister to pursue that' (the development of a national hearing care plan). He added that 'audiology services need attention', and that discussion should take place 'in respect of audiology to get the list down as quickly as possible'.

Chime will be contacting relevant stakeholders with respect to progressing these commitments in the coming weeks.

WHO focus on hearing loss

In 2021 the World Health Organisation (WHO) highlighted the health and financial burden caused by unaddressed hearing loss in the

world today and recommended that governments develop national hearing health strategies for their populations. The WHO said that Governments could expect a return of almost €17 for every €1 invested in hearing care over the following 10 years.

"Hearing loss if unaddressed, can impact negatively many aspects of life: communication; the development of language and speech in children; cognition; education; employment; mental health; and interpersonal relationships." (WHO, 2021)³.



World Health Organization

- ¹ Health and Wellbeing: Active Ageing for Older Adults in Ireland (TILDA, 2017).
- ² European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association. Market Statistics Reports (2016–2020).
- ³ WHO World Report on Ear and Hearing Care (WHO, 2021).

Good news! Specialist service for Deaf children is on the way

PDS to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing children with complex needs, and this had been recognised by the HSE in a report in 2017.

The 2022 HSE Service Plan included a commitment "to develop specialised services and supports" for Deaf children in line with the recommendations of the National Advisory Group report in 2017.⁴

As we go to press Chime has advertised a number of positions for the new Specialist MDT and it is hoped that the new service will commence in early 2023.



A new national specialist service for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children with complex needs is being established. Progressing Disabilities Services for Children and Young People (PDS) is changing the way disability support services are being provided across the country, with the aim of making access to services more equitable and fairer to all. Chime has long argued that a specialist multi-disciplinary team is needed within

In November 2021 a report commissioned by Chime and published by Dr Elizabeth Mathews from Dublin City University found that 42% of a large sample of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children had clinically significant scores on a social and emotional scale that was more than three times the rate of hearing peers.⁵

- ⁴ PDS Report of National Advisory Group on Specialist Supports for Deaf Children (HSE, 2017).
- ⁵ Mathews, E. Psychosocial Development in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children (DCU, 2021).

Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students: outcomes unknown

The education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children is a perennial issue for all concerned, including children, parents, teachers and the Department of Education. Currently there are over 5,000 D/HH children in Ireland, and there is a dearth of information on how these children are getting on in the education system. In 2011, the National Council Special Education (NCSE) published a policy advice paper: The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland. The report contained 60 main recommendations, and while some have been implemented or partially implemented, many have not.

One point made in the report was that the Council believes that there needs to be a sustained emphasis on measuring the outcomes for children with special educational needs, including outcomes for those children who are D/HH.

"The Council believes that there needs to be a sustained emphasis on measuring the outcomes for children with special educational needs, including outcomes for those children who are Deaf and hard of hearing."⁶

Positive vision

The report was welcome in that it had a positive vision for the education of Deaf children: the NCSE's view was that **'Deaf and hard of hearing children graduate from school with levels of educational attainment that are on a par with their hearing peers of similar ability'**. However, in 2022 we are none the wiser as to whether this goal is being attained – while there is much anecdotal evidence to indicate that it is far from being realised.

No data on educational outcomes

While there is significant investment in the education of D/HH children, there is currently no analysis conducted by either the NCSE or the Department to ascertain if these resources are delivering results. There is a complete absence of any focus on outcomes. At present the State has no idea if the supports and services they currently have in place are effective, are delivering value for money, or if they are achieving the vision of the NCSE. This is in contrast to the UK where authorities collate information on an annual basis.

Chime and a number of parent representatives met the Minister for Special Education, Josepha Madigan in late November. The publication of educational outcomes was the number one item on the agenda. The Minister was in agreement that we needed information on outcomes for D/HH children and said that further discussion and consideration would be required, and urged us to raise this with the NCSE as a next step.

The meeting was a very positive one and next steps were identified for most of the agenda items at the meeting. The new school allocation model was discussed in detail in terms of how it impacts on supports provided to D/HH children, and we welcomed the recently announced 40 new posts for enhanced ISL supports for children whose first language is ISL.

Chime will be engaging in the near future with the NCSE, the Minister for Children and the Minister for Disability as next steps to progress specific issues discussed at this meeting.

Chime is calling on the Minister for Special Education to publish annual reports on the educational outcomes of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

⁶ The Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Ireland Ireland (NCSE, 2011).

Updates in brief

Chime is currently advocating on a range of issues to reduce barriers and improve the lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. These include mental health and the ISL Act.

Mental Health Service for the Deaf community

For over 10 years Chime operated a mental health service for the Deaf community on a pilot basis. It is well recognised that a specialist service is required to ensure that Deaf people with mental health problems get a safe and equitable service. Diagnosis, presentation of symptoms, pharmacology and communication issues are just some of the challenges that local community health services cannot address fully without specialist knowledge and expertise being available. In 2016 the HSE committed to taking responsibility for the mental health service

for the Deaf community and to developing it further with significant increases in personnel.

The new mental health strategy Sharing the Vision commits to 'building on service improvements already in place' and states that 'individuals who are deaf should have access to the full suite of mental health services available to the wider population'⁷. However, in the intervening period a number of posts remain unfilled, and while the new service is accessible to the Deaf community who live in the Dublin area, it remains unclear how people outside the capital are able to access the service. It would also seem that the number of people currently accessing the service is low.

Chime has sought a meeting with the HSE to get an update on the current plans for the service.

⁷ Sharing the Vision. (HSE, 2020).

Report on the Implementation of the ISL Act

As we go to press the Deaf community are still awaiting publication of the National Disability Authority report on the Implementation of the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Act. A provision of the ISL Act, a report is to be published every three years detailing the Act is being implemented. A report has been completed by the NDA over a year ago, but it is awaiting publication.

The Act covers a wide spectrum of activity, including education, the courts, interpreters and



duties of public bodies. It is understood that the report will highlight that many public bodies are still not fulfilling their obligations under the ISL Act, and shockingly, that many of them are not even aware of their obligations.

As the fifth anniversary of the Act approaches, Chime is calling for the immediate publication of this important report.