

Hearing Loss and Deafness Alliance

Hearing Services - key outcomes and quality principles

We are a coalition of charities and professional representative groups working together to prevent and reduce the impact of hearing loss and tinnitus, and to promote the inclusion and participation of people who are deaf and hard of hearing in society.

Together we have produced the following statement to focus decision makers on improving the access, quality and integration of hearing services and support.

People with hearing loss, deafness and tinnitus should have choice and control, and services designed around their needs. They should have knowledge and information to get what they need; support and rehabilitation to adjust to life with hearing loss; and communication support to access services and enable inclusion in all aspects of public life.

We want to tackle inequalities, for example by reducing the postcode lottery through making NICE standards mandatory. We want to ensure that people with hearing loss, deafness and tinnitus are at the heart of commissioning and service improvement, at all levels.

We believe that hearing services should lead in demonstrating awareness of the communication needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing and deliver the following outcomes:

- **Improve public health and prevent avoidable hearing loss**
- **Encourage early diagnosis and management**
- **Provide person-centred care, and respond to information and psychosocial needs**
- **Support communication needs, by providing timely access/signposting to lip reading classes and assistive technologies**
- **Promote inclusion and participation of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, by providing, for example, access/signposting to employment and educational support**

Improve public health and prevent avoidable hearing loss

- Hearing services should provide public health information and advice to encourage people to protect their hearing and to raise awareness of the impact of hearing loss.
- Hearing services should reach out to the community, including vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, offering hearing checks in a variety of locations, and home visits to those who need them.

Encourage early diagnosis and management

- Hearing services should be situated in convenient and accessible locations, and offer a range of appointment times to encourage people to attend and take early action.
- Different referral paths should be available; for instance, people should be able to self-refer or be referred by their GP.
- People should receive timely access to hearing services with waiting times well within the 18-week referral to treatment limit.
- People should be offered a choice of hearing aids and, where appropriate, two hearing aids rather than one. Provision of hearing aids should be based on clinical need, following nationally agreed guidance, and people should have the opportunity to change their hearing aids or upgrade according to their clinical need and the availability of new technology.
- Hearing services should provide systematic follow-up. It is essential that service users know that they can return, as often as they wish, to access different types of support when they need it.
- Hearing services should provide timely access to batteries and repairs for hearing aids, for example through drop in and postal services, or signposting to suitable local provision.
- Hearing services should provide appropriate and timely support or onward referral for people with tinnitus, balance problems and more complex needs.

Provide person-centred care and respond to information and psychosocial needs

- Hearing services should provide accessible and timely information in appropriate formats and signpost to other relevant services and support groups. Information should be culturally appropriate. It should also be accessible to people with physical, visual or learning disabilities, and to people who do not speak or read English, including those whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL). Service users should have access to an interpreter or advocate if needed.
- Hearing services should take account of people's personal circumstances, working with service users to determine and deliver what they need. This might include hearing therapy for those who need help in adapting to hearing loss, or access to emotional support and counselling services.

- Hearing services should data share across providers to ensure that the needs of individuals with hearing loss are identified and appropriately supported irrespective of the health or social care provider.
- Hearing services should recognise the role of family and other relationships in managing hearing loss.
- Staff in hearing services should be trained in deaf and deafblind awareness and should take steps to communicate effectively with service users, offering communication support where appropriate.
- Systems should be in place to work collaboratively with other health and social care professionals, to provide a coherent service to those people who have both hearing loss and an additional disability or long-term condition.
- People with hearing loss should be encouraged to share data on their personal health space (their own health record) so that different services, including urgent/emergency care and planned care have identified specific needs but also that the individual uses their health space to flag up specific communication support needs when accessing health & social care.

Support communication needs, by providing timely access/signposting to lip-reading classes and assistive technologies

- Hearing services should undertake regular demonstrations of community equipment/assistive technology and make these services available or signpost to relevant partner organisations.
- Services should provide timely access or signposting to sensory services and lipreading classes.

Promote inclusion and participation of people who are deaf or hard of hearing, by providing, for example, access/signposting to employment and educational support

- Hearing services should promote inclusion and participation by identifying and supporting wider needs such as employment and educational needs.
- Hearing services should work collaboratively with such services and ensure people are referred/signposted to these vital forms of support.