



# AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO EUROPE'S HEARING HEALTH CHALLENGES

## KEY MESSAGES

# WHY HAVE WE CREATED THIS FORUM?

This forum has been created to **raise awareness** at an EU-level of the importance of hearing health as well as the cost of non-treatment for severe hearing loss. It aims to **promote access to cost-effective treatments** such as cochlear implants which could help improve the health of European citizens and the sustainability of Europe's health systems.

Hearing health is at the very heart of our ability to communicate and actively participate in all aspects of our life, from social to work.

Unfortunately, hearing loss remains **the most frequent sensory deficit** and affects children, adults and the elderly<sup>1</sup>.

An astonishing **10% of Europe's total population** live with a disabling hearing loss, equating to 52 million European citizens<sup>2</sup>. With Europe's population continuing to age, this number is predicted to nearly double globally by 2050<sup>3</sup>.

10% 

Hearing loss not only affects the **quality of life** of those who experience it, but also leads to an estimated cost of **€213 billion each year** to the European Union (EU), according to the World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>4</sup>.

**€213 BILLION**

Effective treatment for hearing loss, however, has been proven to reduce or even nullify these effects, leading to more **sustainable European healthcare systems** and a **healthier and more inclusive European society**.

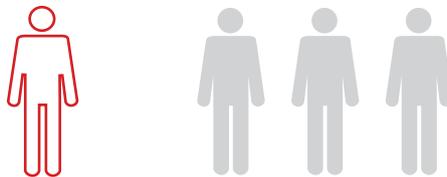
However, **less than 10%** of those who could benefit from treatment for severe hearing loss receive it<sup>5</sup>.

**<10%**

# PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

Hearing health is vital to **making Europe a truly inclusive society** made up of active and participating citizens.

## Social isolation

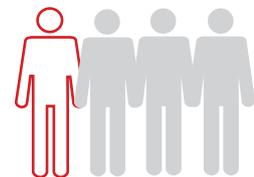


Patients who experience hearing loss report **fragmented communication**, the inability to participate in conversation and therefore diminishing circles of friends, which can lead to **social isolation and withdrawal**.

Hearing loss is associated with mental health conditions such as **depression**, which is more than twice as common among those experiencing hearing loss than those without the condition<sup>13</sup>.

As previously stated, hearing loss also has the potential to greatly reduce a person's independence and autonomy, particularly amongst the older population.

## Creating an inclusive society



The impact of hearing loss on a person's ability to actively participate in society is profound, overall having a significant impact on quality of life.

Effective treatment, such as Cochlear implantation, can make a profound difference, ensuring people can continue to communicate and stay connected to the people around them, both socially and at work<sup>14</sup>.

# THE ECONOMIC COST OF NON-TREATMENT OF HEARING LOSS



## Costly Comorbidities

Hearing loss is associated with a number of costly comorbidities leading to a lower **quality of life** for individuals experiencing the condition and imposing **significant financial costs** on Europe's healthcare systems.

Through depriving the brain of stimulation from communication, hearing loss can speed up **cognitive decline** and increase the risk of an individual developing **dementia** by 9%, making hearing loss the number one modifiable risk factor contributing to the condition<sup>6</sup>.

There is also a link between those who experience hearing loss and **type 2 diabetes** and **more frequent falls**<sup>7</sup>.



## Barrier to Active Ageing

Hearing loss is also associated with reduced **independence and autonomy** because of its association with more frequent falls and overall, making everyday tasks more challenging.

This effect is especially felt by **older persons** with hearing loss, who are 33% more likely to be dependent on others than those without the condition<sup>8</sup>.

Hearing loss is a cause of **increased hospitalisation rates and entry into facilitated living or social care**. This in turn increases the need for public spending on ageing, which already accounts for 50% of general government expenditure within the EU<sup>9</sup>.



## Depleting Europe's Workforce

Hearing loss not only reduces the number of healthy and active citizens, imposing a significant **financial burden** on Europe's already-stretched health and social systems, but also **depletes Europe's workforce**.



UNTREATED  
HEARING LOSS  
ARE UNEMPLOYED

As many as 60% of those who experience untreated hearing loss are **unemployed**<sup>10</sup>. Higher unemployment not only reduces tax revenues but also requires greater spending on state benefits and prevents those who experience hearing loss from actively contributing to the economy.

For the older generation, hearing loss has the potential to cut the working life span of an adult and is a major cause of **premature retirement**, therefore reducing the potential of Europe's silver economy.



## Spending to Save

**Effective treatment for hearing loss** has been proven to reduce or even nullify the associated health effects of hearing loss and can therefore **reduce the significant burden** placed on individual EU citizens as well as European health and social systems.

A study looking at nearly 100 cochlear implant users found that after 6 years of being implanted, **their employment rate had improved by 10%** while **31% saw their income increase enough to move income brackets**<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, on a national level, the United Kingdom's National Screening Programme for hearing loss in over 65s is estimated to produce **€2.34 billion worth of national savings** over the course of a decade<sup>12</sup>.

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€2.34 BILLION  
IN SAVINGS

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Promoting hearing health is a highly cost-effective method of improving not only the **sustainability of Europe's health and social care systems** but also the **functioning of Europe's silver economy**.

**Raising awareness of the importance of hearing health**, the impact of hearing loss and the benefits of hearing loss treatment among the public and healthcare professionals;

**Acknowledging access to professional hearing care as a right** and promote the need for **robust hearing health strategies as a national level, including diagnosis, rehabilitation, service and maintenance** and to promote access to effective treatments;

**Exploring and investing in effective methods of prevention and rehabilitation** for hearing loss and share best practices among Member States.

# THE HEARING HEALTH FORUM EU'S RECOMMENDATIONS

**To keep Europe's healthcare systems sustainable and contribute to the active ageing of society, we call on the EU to facilitate access to innovative hearing technology by:**

# REFERENCES

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Please visit our website [www.hearinghealth.eu](http://www.hearinghealth.eu) to find out how you can support us in improving the health of Europe's citizens and the sustainability of national health systems.

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