

#EUHPP Live Webinar

Beyond Ageing: A European Hearing Health Agenda for Inclusion and Economic Participation

November 27, 2025
10:30 – 11:30 CET

Hearing Loss Awareness: Campaigns to Change Minds and Policies

Member of Hearing Health Forum EU

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HEARING HEALTH FORUM EU



MED9EL

Hearing Implant
Manufacturer



European CI User
Organisation



hearing

Network of Hearing
Implant Experts

Hearing Health Forum EU

Our **Mission** is to raise awareness of hearing health and the human and economic cost of untreated hearing loss in Europe.

Our network is **committed** to:

- Ensuring equal access to ear and hearing care.
- Supporting sustainable healthcare through universal design.
- Advocating for policies that improve lives and reduce costs.
- Driving awareness, collaboration, and research.

Hearing Health Forum EU

Policy Manifesto: Launching a European Hearing Health Strategy 2025

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A European Health Union Fit For Persons With Hearing Loss: Calling the European Commission To Launch a European Hearing Health Strategy

The Impact of Hearing Loss in Europe

In the European Union (EU), a staggering 34.4 million adults live with a disabling hearing loss and two out of three do not have access to hearing care, treatment, or rehabilitation.¹ These figures will only rise as our population ages. However, hearing loss affects all ages; currently 2 – 4 in every 1000 children are born with sensorineural deafness or develop hearing loss in childhood.²

Currently hearing health policies are rare across Member States, creating inequality for persons living with hearing loss and a detrimental wider social and economic impact.

Difficulties in communication, lack of reasonable accommodations in educational systems and employment, and limited awareness of the specific needs of persons affected by hearing loss all contribute to a growing challenge. Such barriers to participation in society, combined with limited access to hearing interventions and services, are also linked to other conditions such as mental ill-health and depression, neurological disorders such as dementia, cognitive decline, Parkinson's disease, and Huntington's disease, as well as more frequent falls.^{3,4} Studies also show high rates of unemployment, underemployment and early retirement among Europeans with untreated hearing loss.^{5,6,7}

Common barriers faced by persons living with hearing loss include:

-  **Lack of access to integrated care**, including the consideration of other coexistent health conditions such as dementia, cognitive decline and mental ill-health.^{1,5}
-  **Lack of preventive measures** to protect hearing health, especially at work.¹⁰
-  **Lack of access to hearing care services** including routine hearing screening, hearing aids and implants, and lack of financial support for their reimbursement.^{8,9}
-  **Lack of accessibility in public settings** or measures to accommodate the needs of people living with hearing loss leads to reduced participation in daily life (work, education, community life).¹¹
-  **High discrimination rates and persisting stigma linked to disability.**¹²

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Now Is the Time to Act

People living with hearing loss need support from European institutions and national governments to be equally included in society, the labour market, and healthcare services. **The effective management of hearing health through prevention strategies, screening, diagnosis, interventions and treatment options, rehabilitation, and support is vital.** Prioritising hearing loss in health policy agendas will allow children and adults to reach their potential, Europe's elderly to actively age and ensure the long-term sustainability of our healthcare systems and society at large.

Hearing Loss in Numbers



Hearing loss and its comorbidities lead to **€213 billion direct costs** (medical expenses) and indirect costs (impact on economy) for European governments.¹



190 million people in the WHO European Region live with some degree of hearing loss.¹³



Hearing loss is the **4th leading cause of disability** globally.¹⁴



Hearing loss is the **number one modifiable risk factor** of dementia.¹⁵



30.3% of people living with hearing loss experience psychological distress.¹⁶



1 in 4 people are projected to experience hearing loss in their lives by 2050.⁵



53.4% of people over 65 years self-report some form of hearing loss.¹⁶



Everyone will be impacted by hearing loss during their lifetime, either personally, as a career, or family and friends.

What Can Policymakers Do?

We call on the European Commission, supported by EU policy stakeholders, to ensure that persons living with hearing loss have equal access to care, and mitigate the wider impact on Europe's economy and societies.

Alongside associations active in the hearing health community (including ageing, brain health and mental health), we specifically call on the European Commission's units specialised in health, employment, and social policies, to launch a European Hearing Health Strategy. Reflecting the policy framework already developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) for hearing will achieve political alignment and guide Member States in the cost-effective development and implementation of policies to tackle the impact of untreated hearing loss.

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The HEAR Strategy

Hearing Loss Awareness

Early Detection & Prevention

Access & Care

Research & Data Collection

The HEAR Strategy

Hearing Loss Awareness



+55 organizations

Early Detection & Prevention



+45 countries

Access & Care

Research & Data Collection



+320 individuals

The HEAR Strategy

Endorse our Policy
Manifesto on Hearing Loss!



Hearing Loss Awareness



+55 organizations

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+45 countries

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+320 individuals

Hearing Loss in Numbers

- Disabling hearing loss affects 57 million people across Europe (WHO, 2021)
- It is the 4th leading cause of disability worldwide and the #1 modifiable risk factor for dementia (Livingston, 2020)
- 2 out of 3 people do not receive care (WHO, 2021)

Why Hearing Health Matters

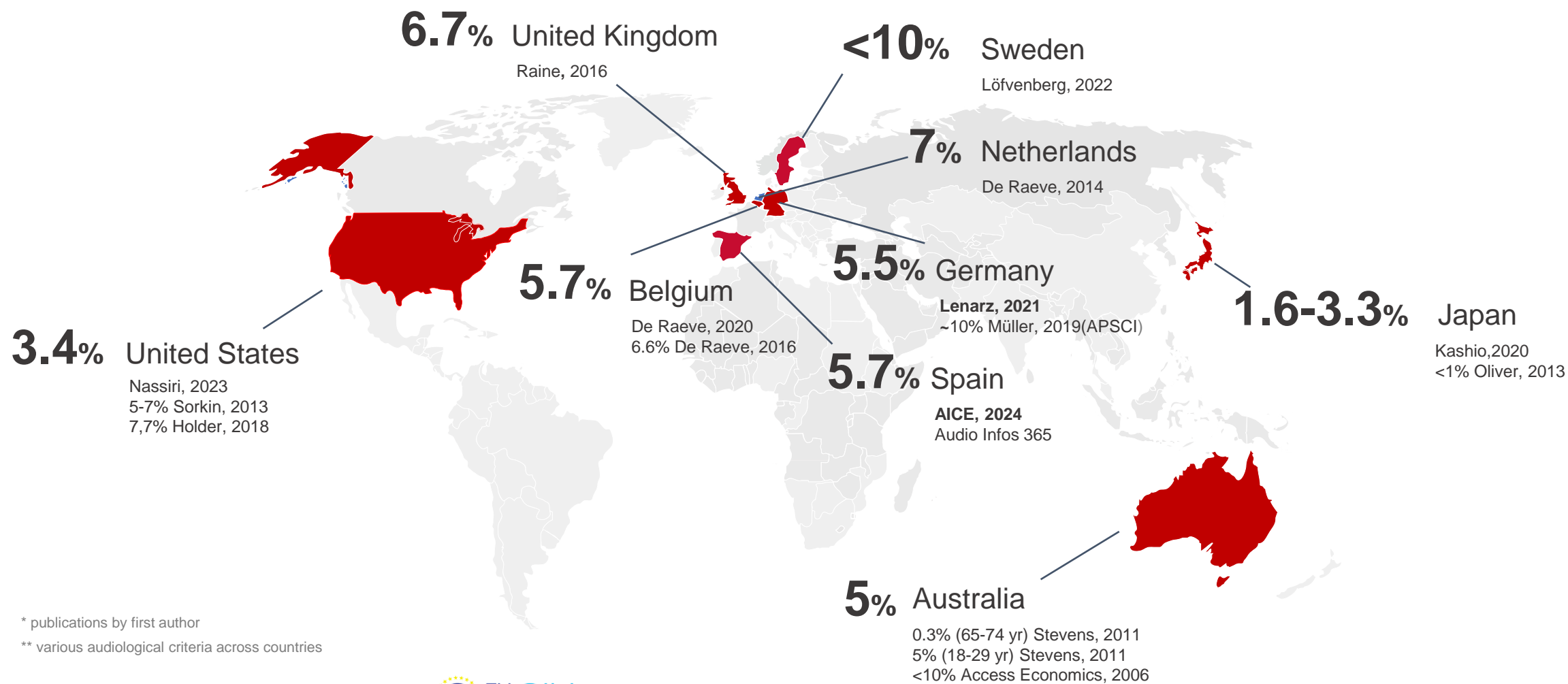
Hearing Loss

- ... leads to social isolation, mental health challenges, and exclusion.
- ... reduces employment rates and increases early retirement.
- ... if untreated it costs Europe €213 billion annually.
- ... is often seen as a normal part of ageing.
- ... is treatable and preventable.

(WHO, 2021)

→ Hearing loss is a silent epidemic we must confront.

Uptake Rate of Cochlear Implants in Adults



* publications by first author

** various audiological criteria across countries

Why is the Uptake Rate so Low?

- Lack of awareness amongst referring professionals about cochlear implants, indications, outcomes and hearing journey
- Lack of awareness amongst candidates/population eligible for a cochlear implant
- Stigma
- Fear of surgery
- Lack of adequate funding
- Lack of access
- Lack of resources

How to Raise Awareness?

Different target groups require different initiatives.

Referring
Professionals

Policymakers

Candidates

Population

Adult Hearing Screening Programme in Malta

Pilot Project: Hearing Care for All

- Supported by MEP Agius Saliba and the Ministry for Inclusion.
- Hearing screening of 700 adults across Malta.
- Delivered by licensed audiologists in local centers, using WHO standards.
- 41% of participants had hearing loss needing intervention.
- Results showed need for national screening and informed future policy.

(Sciberras et al, 2025)

Digital Awareness Campaign for Adults

„Reconnect With Life” Campaign

- Global initiative by Hearing Health Forum EU together with MED-EL
- Goal: raise hearing health awareness among adults aged 55+
- How: campaign video presenting person with hearing loss dome → representing isolation
- Who: referring professionals, policymakers, candidates
- Where: online channels, offline outlets
- When: Started in 2025, continued until 2026



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Early Detection and Prevention: Active Ageing and Employment

Social and Economic Policies and
European Parliament Liaison
AGE Platform Europe



Access and Care: Patient Perspective on Hearing Barriers

EURO-CIU



The CI User Journey

- Journey begins long before implantation.
- Emotional, informational, and practical barriers influence decisions.
- CI users stress the need for clear guidance and continuous support.

“No one prepares you for how many decisions you must make before even getting the implant.”

Before Implantation: Patient Experiences

- Confusion about candidacy and expected outcomes.
- Fear of surgery and permanent change.
- Feeling unheard or dismissed by professionals.
- Lack of relatable success stories or user communities.

*“I kept hearing ‘you’re not a candidate yet’ but no one explained why.
I felt lost.”*

Access Barriers: CI User Perspective

- Long waiting times create stress and uncertainty.
- Poor coordination between audiologists, ENTs, therapists.
- Geographic distance to CI centers disrupts work and family life.

“It took me 14 months from referral to surgery.

It felt like my life was on hold.”

Financial Perspective of CI Users

- Costs extend beyond the implant:
 - Travel, accommodation, lost workday income.
 - Maintenance (coils, cables, batteries).
 - Streaming accessories.
- Uncertainty about long-term coverage.

“The implant was covered, but everything around it wasn’t.”

Emotional & Psychosocial Realities

- Overwhelm during activation.
- Anxiety about device failure.
- Visible-device stigma.
- Need for ongoing emotional support.

“The first sounds were magical and terrifying at the same time.”

Post-Activation Challenges

- Many feel unprepared for the rehabilitation workload.
- Mapping sessions may feel rushed.
- Access to therapy varies widely.
- Need for individualized auditory training.

“They told me it would take work, but I didn’t realize how much daily commitment was needed.”

CI Users on Communication Barriers

- Noise remains a challenge.
- Need for assistive tech compatibility.
- Lack of accessibility features (subtitles, loops).

*“In restaurants, I still struggle.
People think the implant is a cure, but it’s not that simple.”*

The Role of Peer Support

- CI users value hearing real experiences.
- Peer mentors reduce fear.
- Community support is often informal or hard to find.

“Talking to another CI user was the moment I finally felt confident in my choice.”

What CI Users Want in Future Systems

- Better counseling.
- Transparent expectations.
- Easy access to therapy.
- Lifelong device support.
- Inclusion of CI user voices in policy.

“We are the experts of our own experience—ask us.”

Conclusion

- CI users face emotional, financial, and practical barriers.
- Lived experience must shape access and care models.
- HHFEU principles support equitable CI pathways.

Access and Care: Patient Perspective on Hearing Barriers

EURO-CIU



Research and Data: Why the EU Needs to Act

Awareness, MED-EL

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Facts

- Over 100 million Europeans live with hearing loss
- Hearing loss is not just a ‘stand-alone disability’
 - Dementia, mental health, stigma, employment, education, isolation, social participation
- Hearing health is a social, economic and human rights issue
- Untreated hearing loss in the EU costs more than 200 billion Euro annually
- Early intervention reduces long-term costs (1 USD → 32 USD ROI (WHO))

→ Yet, it is missing from EU strategies

Research & Data Gaps

- Fragmented data across Member States
- No standardized indicators in EU health monitoring
- Hearing loss is underrepresented in Horizon Europe funding

Consequences of Data Gaps

- Invisible in policy-making
- Economic blind spot
- Missed opportunity for early intervention

Why Data Matters

- Evidence drives policy inclusion
- Enables cost-benefit analysis for screening, treatment and rehabilitation
- Supports innovation in assistive technologies

EU Strategies Overview

- European Pillar of Social Rights
- EU Disability Strategy
- EU Mental Health Strategy
- European Health Data Space

European Pillar of Social Rights

Principle 16 – Health care

- Access to timely, affordable and quality hearing care is a fundamental right
- (Adult) Hearing screening and rehabilitation should be part of universal health coverage

Principle 17 – Inclusion of people with disabilities

- Hearing loss is one of the most common sensory disabilities in the EU
- Without recognition and support, millions face barriers in education, employment and social participation

Why

- Hearing health enables equal opportunities, social inclusion and economic participation
- Aligning with EU goals for fair working conditions and inclusive growth

EU Disability Strategy

Accessibility

- Hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices must be recognized as **essential accessibility tools**, not luxury items.
- Public procurement and reimbursement policies should ensure affordability and availability across Member States.

Participation

- Data-driven policies are key to inclusion. Without robust data on hearing loss prevalence and impact, people with hearing loss remain invisible in disability programs.
- Promote workplace accommodations and inclusive education through EU guidelines.

EU Disability Strategy

Why

- Hearing loss is one of the most common disabilities in Europe, yet underrepresented in disability frameworks.
- Inclusion requires **technology access, policy support, and awareness campaigns**

European Health Data Space

Why EHDS Matters for Hearing Health

- Enables **secure sharing of health data** across Member States for research and innovation.
- Hearing health data is currently **missing**, making policy and research fragmented.

What Needs to Be Included

- Standardized indicators for **hearing loss prevalence, screening rates, and rehabilitation outcomes.**
- Integration of **audiological data** into electronic health records for interoperability.

Why

- Supports **cross-border research** on hearing health and its impact on mental health and employment.
- Drives **innovation in hearing technologies** and personalized care.
- Facilitates **evidence-based policy-making** at EU level.

Why Inclusion is Critical

- Social Rights: Equal opportunities
- Economic Competitiveness: Reduce productivity loss
- Public Health: Lower long-term costs

Recommendations

- Integrate hearing health into EU health and social strategies
- Fund EU-wide research and data collection
- Launch awareness campaigns and adult screening programs

Concluding Remarks

- Hearing loss affects many EU citizens and the number is growing
- Hearing loss is an invisible disability with several comorbidities such as dementia, mental health problems, stigma and social isolation
- Hearing health is not optional—it's essential for inclusion, mental health, and economic sustainability
- EU leadership can and should make hearing health visible and actionable
- Opportunities for innovation and inclusion

Endorse the Policy Manifesto on a European Hearing Health Strategy to make a difference!

Research and Data: Why the EU Needs to Act

Awareness, MED-EL

The MED-EL logo, with 'MED' and 'EL' in a bold, red, sans-serif font, separated by a stylized red ear symbol.

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Endorse our Policy
Manifesto on Hearing Loss!



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