

AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH  
TO **EUROPE'S HEARING**  
**HEALTH** CHALLENGES

HEARING **HEALTH FORUM** EU

## PROMOTING INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO EAR AND HEARING CARE FOR ALL EUROPEAN CITIZENS

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<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, hearing loss remains **the most frequent sensory deficit** that affects children, adults and older people<sup>2</sup>.

An astonishing 11% of Europe's population live with a disabling hearing loss (>35 dB), equating to 57 million Europeans. The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts this number to double globally by 2050 as the population ages<sup>1</sup>.

**11%** 

Research shows that adults regularly wait up to ten years before seeking treatment for their hearing loss<sup>3</sup>.

**10 YEARS** WITHOUT TREATMENT

Furthermore, two out of three of those with a disabling hearing loss are not treated and less than 10% of those who could benefit from treatment for severe hearing loss receive it<sup>1,4</sup>.

Hearing loss not only affects the quality of life of those who experience it, but also leads to an estimated cost of more than €185 billion each year to the European Union<sup>5</sup>.

**€185 BILLION**  
COSTS FOR THE EU

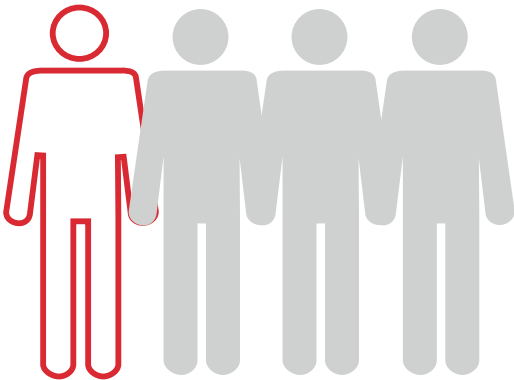
The Hearing Health Forum EU has been created to raise awareness of the importance of hearing health as well as the human and economic cost of untreated hearing loss.

It aims to promote access to cost-effective hearing screenings and treatments such as cochlear implants, leading to a healthier and more inclusive European society and more sustainable European healthcare systems.

# PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

Hearing health across the life course is vital to healthy ageing and **making Europe a truly inclusive society** made up of active and participating citizens.

## From Social Isolation to Inclusive Societies

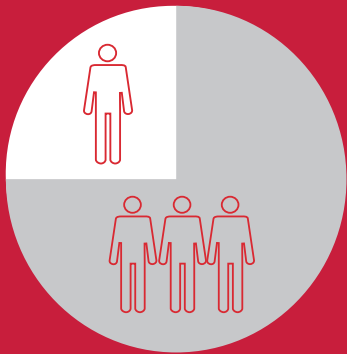


The impact of hearing loss on a person's ability to actively participate in society is profound. Fragmented communication due to hearing loss, the inability to fully participate in conversation, and social withdrawal are cited as factors that lead to **increased social isolation**<sup>6</sup>.

The odds of experiencing social loneliness are 2.2 times higher among older hard of hearing adults compared to their normal hearing peers<sup>6</sup>.

Effective treatment can make a difference, ensuring people are able to communicate and stay connected to their peers, both socially and at work<sup>7</sup>. Studies have shown that cochlear implants are associated with **improved quality of life** and **mental health** as well as **increased employment rates** and **educational attainment**<sup>8,9</sup>.

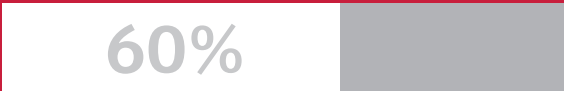
## Facts About Hearing in Europe



By 2050, 1 in 4 people are projected to have some kind of hearing loss<sup>1</sup>.



The WHO estimates, that around 20% of women and 30% of men in Europe will live with hearing loss at the age of 70<sup>1</sup>.



In children, almost 60% of hearing loss is due to causes that can be prevented<sup>1</sup>.

## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF UNTREATED HEARING LOSS



### Costly Comorbidities

Hearing loss is associated with a number of costly comorbidities that impose **significant financial costs** on Europe's healthcare systems.

By depriving the brain of stimulation from communication, hearing loss can speed up **cognitive decline** and **dementia**. Evidence recognises the elimination of 12 potentially modifiable risk factors, which could prevent up to 40% of dementia cases. Hearing loss is the number one modifiable risk factor – if treated it can reduce the risk of an individual developing dementia by 8%<sup>10</sup>.

Hearing loss is also connected with **mental health** conditions such as **depression**, which is 1.5 times as common among those experiencing hearing loss than those without<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, there is a link between hearing loss and **type 2 diabetes, more frequent falls, and heart disease**<sup>12</sup>.



### Barrier to Active Ageing

Hearing loss is related to **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<sup>13</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>14</sup>.

The European Commission states in the Green Report on Ageing, that public policies can play a significant supporting role in active ageing by providing proactive measures, such as **hearing screenings** for older adults, to detect illness<sup>15</sup>.

## PROMOTING HEARING HEALTH IS COST-EFFECTIVE



The promotion of hearing health improves the **sustainability of Europe's health and social care systems** as well as the **functioning of Europe's silver economy**.



### 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**<sup>1</sup>.

**47%** of deaf people are unemployed or not in the labour force<sup>16</sup>.

A study looking at nearly 100 cochlear implant users found that after being implanted, their **employment rate had improved by 11% while 31% saw their income increase**<sup>17</sup>.

Higher unemployment reduces tax revenues, 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<sup>1,15</sup>.



### Spend to Save

**Early detection and intervention for hearing loss** have 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<sup>18</sup>.

However, hearing loss is invisible and commonly remains undetected. For this reason, the WHO recommends national hearing screening programs at different stages across the life course<sup>1</sup>.

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>16</sup>.

**€2.34 BILLION  
IN SAVINGS**

According to the WHO, such integrated hearing care measures can deliver a return of **\$16 international dollars for \$1 invested**<sup>1</sup>.

**Raise 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.

Promote the need for robust **national hearing health strategies** including diagnosis, rehabilitation, service and maintenance.

Introduce a national **Newborn Hearing Screening Programme** and **Over 55 Hearing Screening Programme**.

## THE HEARING HEALTH FORUM'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:

**Share best practices** among EU Member States.

Acknowledge access to **professional hearing care** as a right.

Explore and invest in effective methods of **prevention and rehabilitation** for hearing loss.

Promote **access to effective treatments** including hearing aids, bone conduction devices, and cochlear implants.

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citizens and the sustainability of national health systems.

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