Impact Report 2018-19

Key Achievements in 2018-19
The impact of hearing loss

In the UK today, more than 11 million people are living with hearing loss, ranging from mild to a total inability to hear. There are many different causes of hearing loss, including exposure to loud noise, certain drugs used to treat serious illnesses, genetics and ear conditions. Most hearing loss occurs as part of the ageing process, affecting 42% of people over 50 and 71% of people over 70. Six million people in the UK have tinnitus – ‘hearing’ noises in the head and/or ear when there is no external source.

Deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss are invisible conditions, so their impact is often underestimated. However, they can have huge personal and social costs. Unaddressed hearing loss is associated with a greater risk of developing dementia, poorer physical and mental health, a higher likelihood of being unemployed, and withdrawal from family, friends and communities. Tinnitus can have a significant effect on daily life – including problems sleeping, feelings of isolation, and mental health problems.

For over 100 years, we’ve been at the forefront of work for people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus. We opened our first care home in 1929 and today we support thousands of deaf people with additional needs to live the life they choose. In 1948, we successfully lobbied the NHS to provide free hearing aids across the UK, helping millions of people connect with the hearing world. We were also instrumental in the development of the first cochlear implant in the 1980s – allowing profoundly deaf adults and children to ‘hear’ again, or for the very first time.

Despite all the progress over the last century, we still have much to do. We are working across the UK to transform the lives of people with deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss by: changing the way people think, feel and act; supporting more people across the UK; speeding up the development of new technology; and working harder to find treatments for all types of hearing loss and tinnitus.

We could not do this vital work without the generous support of our donors, like you. I am pleased to share with you just a few of our achievements last year.

Mark Atkinson
Chief Executive Officer
Since seeing Action on Hearing Loss it has prompted me to go to the GP, from which I got referred to audiology and I now have two hearing aids which have helped my hearing greatly. I now feel able to manage my hearing loss and am very satisfied with the service you have offered me. As a result of getting my hearing aids I find it easier to communicate with people and feel more confident in group and social activities. It really is making a great difference to my life.”

Hear to Inform and Connect beneficiary

Despite the importance of managing hearing loss well, people don’t always have access to the information and support they need to take action. This is where we come in – we tackle this lack of information, providing essential practical and emotional support, promoting well-being, and working to reduce the social isolation and loneliness that unaddressed hearing loss can bring. Our information provision across the UK acts as a catalyst for action. By raising awareness of hearing loss, and making the issues more visible, our projects also help to break down some of the barriers to taking action.

Last year, we provided information around hearing loss and support with hearing aids to people across the UK. In our most recent satisfaction survey, 76% of people reported feeling more confident after our help, 77% said they could join in conversations more, and 78% said socialising with family and friends was easier. Our befriending groups in England aim to improve wellbeing and social connectedness and to help people live more fulfilling, independent lives. In our last survey, 70% of people said they had made new friends, 68% felt less on their own because they could see and chat to people at the groups, 62% said they felt more independent, and 67% felt more confident.

We know that information provision is key to helping people address and manage their hearing loss. We’re pleased that our National Lottery-funded ‘Hear to Inform and Connect’ outreach information project is going from strength to strength. Evaluation of the project so far shows that 96% of people accessing the information outreach service feel that they are better informed about their hearing loss and/or tinnitus. The evaluation also found that our face-to-face information services are a direct catalyst for people to take action to address their hearing loss.

"We get such a wide variety of calls and we try and help each and every individual as much as we can. We can be on a single call for two minutes or 22; we never rush anyone who calls us – they get as much time as they need to share their concerns and for us to try and find a solution. We advise on everything from coping with isolation and communication difficulties, to assistive technology and support from the Sensory Impairment team. We provide information and support around the Equality Act and we signpost to employment support services in a local area. We offer support for tinnitus through our information resources and our Tinnitus Helpline.”

Rachel Cox, our Information Line Manager

Our work is supported by fantastic volunteers across the UK, the majority of whom have hearing loss themselves. Our volunteers often benefit from gaining new skills and knowledge and from the social interaction their role brings. In our latest volunteers’ survey, 84% said they’d learned new skills and 68% reported increased personal confidence as a result of volunteering.
Care and support

We work with people who are deaf, deafblind or have a hearing loss and additional needs, to help them achieve their goals. Support is tailored to the individual’s needs and ranges from long-term residential care to helping people adjust to independent living.

Last year, we provided almost 2.1 million hours of support in our Care and Support services across the UK.

Helping people achieve their goals

Policy and campaigns

Currently, one of the major things preventing people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus from achieving their potential is the attitudes and actions of others. We work to change public perception, influence policy around hearing loss issues, and challenge the major societal barriers people with hearing loss face.

Last year, we built on the work of our successful Subtitle It! and Working for Change campaigns. We worked with Ofcom to put together recommendations for what Government should include in subtitling legislation – helping to ensure that on-demand television is more accessible. We launched our Working for Change employers’ hub, with information and tools they need to be confident employing people who are deaf or have hearing loss.

We were also instrumental in a change to NICE guidelines for cochlear implant eligibility, so more people have access to this life-changing technology.

Currently, just 5% of adults who could benefit from cochlear implants receive one. This is partly because the assessment used doesn’t reflect how speech is understood or heard in real life. Adults in England also need to have near-profound deafness to qualify currently, which has meant that many people have actually had to wait for their hearing to get worse before they can have access to this transformative treatment. These changes will enable many more to enjoy the life-changing benefits of cochlear implants.”

Dr. Roger Wicks, Director of Policy and Campaigns

Search for a cure

We are the only charity in the UK dedicated to supporting hearing research. Our biomedical research programme has been running for over 20 years and is now one of the largest donor-funded hearing research programmes in the world. We support world-class research to improve today’s technology, understand how we can prevent hearing loss, and develop new treatments to restore hearing and silence tinnitus. We’re now seeing some incredible advances. Here are just a couple of recent examples of our progress:

Restoring hearing

Hearing relies on specialised cells located in the cochlea. Once these are damaged – through age or noise exposure, for example – they are not able to regenerate, causing hearing loss. Research we’ve supported has discovered a key gene needed for the ear to make working outer ear cells. As the loss of these cells underlies many types of hearing loss, including age-related hearing loss, this is an important discovery that could lead to ways of restoring hearing.

Protecting newborn babies’ hearing

Aminoglycosides are a type of life-saving antibiotic widely used to treat infections in babies. However, they can damage the hair cells in the ear and cause permanent hearing loss. We’ve previously funded research at the University of Manchester to develop a quick test for a specific genetic mutation that increases the risk of hearing loss if given aminoglycosides. The researchers successfully designed a ‘point of care’ test allowing doctors to quickly identify babies that are especially susceptible to losing their hearing, so that they can receive other medicines instead. The researchers have used the results of this project to obtain £900,000 from other funders to develop the test so that it can be used in clinics to protect the hearing of premature babies. A great example of how a small amount of funding from us can turn into a significant investment from other, larger research funders, giving projects the kick-start they need to bring real benefit to people.

Jennifer Stanley, NHS England, took part in our Working for Change campaign.
Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID) is the largest UK charity helping people who are confronting deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss.

We give support and care, develop technology and treatments, and campaign for equality. We rely on donations to continue our vital work.

To find out more, visit actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Contact our free, confidential Information Line:

Telephone 0808 808 0123
Textphone 0808 808 9000
SMS 0780 000 0360 (standard text message rates apply)
Email information@hearingloss.org.uk

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