

Increasing Cross-Sectoral Collaboration in Advocacy Efforts for Ear and Hearing Care Services

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Phase 1 Map: United Kingdom





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United kingdom

Currently, the United Kingdom has an approximate population of 67 million people.¹ Aligned with global trends, the United Kingdom's population continues to age with the median age forecasted to rise from 40.4 years in 2024 to 44.9 years in 2050.² As of 2023, the United Kingdom's older adult population, aged 65 years and older, reached over 13 million people, representing over 19% of the total population.³ Based on projections by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the older adult population aged 65 years and older will reach up to 22.1 million by 2072, accounting for 27% of the total population.⁴

As the population rises, there are concurrent trends of cognitive decline and hearing loss. These trends perpetuate ageist beliefs that diminishing hearing and cognitive abilities are inevitable aspects of ageing.

Consequently, in the United Kingdom the prevalence of varying degrees of hearing loss is on the rise and currently 18 million individuals are affected by hearing loss. In the United Kingdom, hearing loss is greatly attributable to age-related hearing loss (ARHL). As of 2024, over half the population aged 55 years and older experience hearing loss, and 80% of older adults aged 70 years and older are projected to have hearing loss.⁵ Furthermore, hearing loss is linked to an increased risk of dementia and is found to be a modifiable risk factor of cognitive decline in older adults. According to a May 2024 report by the House of Commons Library on Inequalities in Dementia Services, over 400 million individuals aged 65 years and older were living with dementia, with a population diagnosis rate of 64.8%.⁶

As of 2021, The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) does not recommend screening for hearing loss in adults.⁷ Newborn hearing screening, for early detection and prevention for varying degrees of hearing loss, is highly recommended and is completed in the first 4-5 weeks after birth.^{8,9}

National Aged Care Plan

National Service Framework for Older People

Published in 2001, the National Service Framework is the first ever comprehensive strategy in the United Kingdom to ensure fair, high quality, integrated health and social care services for older adults. It is a 10-year plan aimed at linking services to support independence and promote healthy ageing, specialized services for key conditions, and culture change so that all older adults are treated with respect, dignity and fairness. The National Service Framework is designed to enhance care for older adults by improving care standards, expanding service access, ensuring fair funding, promoting independence, and supporting health maintenance. The framework will increase the availability of specialized consultants, nurses, and therapists, and enhance access to advanced surgical and community equipment. New national standards will modernize the National Health Service (NHS) and social services and encourage innovative practices. Developed through extensive consultation with older adults, their caregivers, and leading professionals, the framework reflects a commitment to delivering higher-quality, equitable care across the nation.¹⁰

To achieve this goal, the framework aims to enhance eight key standards: 1. Age discrimination, 2. Person-centred care, 3. Intermediate care, 4. General hospital care, 5. Stroke management, 6. Fall prevention, 7. Mental health for older adults, and 8. Healthy aging. Specialized hospital care will address the specific needs of older adults. To reduce stroke incidence, diagnostic services and specialist stroke care is made available. Fall prevention and treatment will be supported by effective rehabilitation and specialist advice. Integrated mental health services will offer diagnosis, treatment, and support for mental health issues. Lastly, coordinated programs will promote health and extend life expectancy for older adults. This framework advocates for the provision of hearing aids and associated equipment such as visual doorbells as part of their initiative to integrate community equipment services. Additionally, research to modernise hearing aid services and technology is highlighted as part of their immediate research priorities for older adult's services.¹⁰

National Dementia Care Strategies

In May 2022, Health Secretary, Sajid Javid, confirmed that a new 10-year plan to tackle dementia focusing on new medicines and emerging science and technology would be published that year. Although the Government has already began work, as of 2024, the 10-year plan is yet to be published or made publicly available. In July of 2023, thousands of campaigners petitioned for the delivery of the 10-year plan on dementia, demanding urgent action.¹¹

Living Well with Dementia: A National Dementia Strategy

The *Living Well with Dementia: National Dementia Strategy* was published 2009 with the aim of providing a strategic framework within which local services can deliver quality improvements to dementia services and address health inequalities relating to dementia. In addition, they aim to provide advice, guidance, and support for health and social care commissioners and providers in the planning, developing, and monitoring of services for dementia. The Strategy aims to ensure that significant improvements are made to dementia services across three key areas: improved awareness, earlier diagnosis, and intervention, and a higher quality of care.¹²

The Strategy identifies 17 key objectives to be implemented largely at a local level within each NHS and local authority area. To deliver these objectives, the Strategy plans to launch a public information campaign emphasizing the link between heart and brain health and create targeted local and group-specific campaigns (i.e. utilities, public-facing service employees, schools, and cultural and religious organisations). They will commission high-quality early diagnosis services, develop and distribute comprehensive dementia information, and establish local dementia adviser services. New strategies will focus on improving dementia care in hospitals and care homes, supporting third-sector services, and integrating end-of-life care. Additionally, they will enhance staff training, support research, and provide regional support to ensure effective implementation of these initiatives.¹² There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.

Major Conditions Strategy: Case for Change and Our Strategy Framework

In January 2023, Health Secretary, Steve Barclay, announced a Major Conditions Strategy. (11) The Strategy took effect in August 2023 and focuses on 6 groups of major non-communicable diseases (NCDs) affecting the health of citizens, including dementia. The aim is to enhance healthy life expectancy and reduce absenteeism in the workforce due to health conditions. The strategy emphasizes prevention, early diagnosis, early intervention, and comprehensive management of these conditions, supported by innovations in digital technologies, research and leadership, and integrated care systems (ICSs). It aims to improve outcomes, address health disparities, and involve collective efforts from the government, NHS, social care, and other partners. The Strategy has set out a 5-year timeframe to achieve these objectives.¹³

Specific dementia-related objectives are to restore the dementia diagnosis rate to 66.7% following disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. To improve the diagnosis rate, they have provided £17 million in government funding to address dementia waitlists and increase the number of diagnoses, piloted the Diagnosing Advanced Dementia Mandate tool to improve diagnosis in care home, and are working with general practice (GP) IT system providers to improve identification of people who may have dementia. The Strategy emphasizes the importance of social care reforms, support for unpaid carers, and equipping the workforce to provide high-quality dementia care which was implemented through their Next Steps to Put People at the Heart of Care report. The NHS England has tasked Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) with developing resources to investigate variations in dementia diagnosis rates and assess factors affecting these rates, such as rurality and ethnicity. Additionally, NHS England will map Alzheimer's treatments and consider forming a steering group for new therapies, all while focusing on incorporating the experiences of people with dementia and their carers into the planning process.¹³ There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies, however, it does mention that hearing loss is a risk factor for dementia and encourages the prevention of these risk factors across the life course.

National Hearing Care Strategies

The United Kingdom does not have national hearing care strategies, however the distinct regions of the United Kingdom – England, Scotland, and Wales – have independent, national hearing care strategies except for Northern Ireland.

Commissioning Services for People with Hearing Loss

Published in 2016 by NHS England, The Commissioning Services for People with Hearing Loss Framework is a guide to help organisations responsible for planning and commissioning local hearing services for individuals who are deaf and those with hearing loss in England, including older adults. The framework includes recommendations from NHS England's Action Plan on Hearing Loss which was published in 2015. The framework has been produced with input from patient groups, service users, hearing loss charities, and healthcare providers. The framework includes a guide for what effective commissioning look like for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), such as: ensuring CCGs are supported in selecting cost-effective services for their local populations, ensuring the needs of local people are met by high quality integrated care, addressing access and outcome inequalities, improving patient choice when it comes to selecting services, and contracting and monitoring outcomes and referrals from all providers to ensure consistency.¹⁴

Scottish Sensory Impairment Strategy: See Hear

The Scottish Government published a strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with sensory impairments, including varying degrees of hearing loss, titled Scottish Sensory Impairment Strategy: See Hear. The strategy also covers people at risk of sensory loss and those who may be living with untreated hearing loss which may be present in people with conditions such as dementia. The government has worked with partners including local authorities, and health boards to develop See Hear. See Hear is a strategy for children, adults, and older adults, acknowledging the rising incidence of disabilities and illnesses with increasing age. The Strategy will be implemented through local partnerships, with £1m funding each year from the Government in 2013/14 and 2014/15 to support this process.¹⁵

See Hear sets out a model care pathway, and seven care recommendations, which aim to ensure that individuals and service providers clearly understand available services and post-diagnosis support for sensory loss. These recommendations include a range of areas, including early intervention in sensory loss, integrate and increase awareness of sensory loss, increase data collection and tracking for individuals with sensory impairments.¹⁵

Framework of Action for Wales, 2017-2020

The Framework of Action for Wales was published in 2017 by NHS Wales and is an integrated framework of care and support for people who are deaf or living with hearing loss. The framework aims to offer consistent, equitable services for individuals with hearing loss across the life span, including older adults, ensuring integrated health and social care to support independent living. People will have access to local care, be involved in their care decisions, and benefit from timely, high-quality services and support. Audiology services for newborns, children, adults and older adults will be available and prompt support, including for those in care homes. The framework focuses on creating integrated pathways through collaboration with third-sector organizations and service users, emphasizing training and accessibility to streamline care. It outlines a detailed action plan for NHS Wales, local authorities, and stakeholders, prioritizing patient outcomes, and local support. Implementation and monitoring will be overseen by a National Project Board, with performance reported annually to ensure services are effectively delivered across all stages of life.¹⁶

Key actions targeted towards older adults include improving support in care homes, creating direct referral pathways to audiology services, and ensuring timely hearing aid maintenance. Additionally, social services will develop tailored care pathways for older adults with hearing loss, while the Welsh Government will oversee the implementation and improve tracking and outcome measures to address community needs effectively.¹⁶

Ear Wax and Management Primary and Community Care Pathway

In line with the Hearing Framework of Action for Wales, in 2020, the Welsh Government launched the Ear Wax and Management Primary and Community Care Pathway framework following recent concerns regarding procedures used to treat ear wax impairments, patient safety, and the alarming number of referrals hospitals or secondary care audiology departments. In this strategy, The Wax Management Task and Finish Group recommend that ear wax management be provided in primary and community care settings by trained healthcare professionals and Advanced Audiology Practitioners.

Following national standards, the Audiology Heads of Service Group oversee the rollout of a national wax management patient pathway, including a training program for micro suction and manual removal techniques, integration with primary care audiology services including national advice for self-management, health boards to implement and review the pathway, promote awareness among health professionals, and centralize the procurement of equipment under one health board.¹⁷

Civil Society Organization Engagement

Age Care-Related CSOs

Age UK

Age UK was formed in 2009 and visions a world where everyone can enjoy later life. They are a strong voice advocating for the rights and needs of older adults in the UK, with over 120 local branches of Age UK. Their strategy is to strengthen local community support and actively seek help and collaboration. Age Their six objectives centre around campaigning and research, information and advice, health and care, wellbeing, securing a strong network, and working internationally through Age International. Age UK provides various services for older adults including exercise classes, repair services, IT training, transport, and help with shopping. Age UK also provides dementia support through community-base services including one-to-one home visits, befriending services, group activities like Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (MCST), and specialized day centres. They also provide resources and advice for caregivers.^{18,19} There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.

Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is leading efforts to improve ageing for everyone through its 2022-25 strategy, which focuses on reducing age-related inequalities and achieving good health, equity, and financial security for older adults. Their approach includes advocating for policy reforms, promoting age-inclusive practices, and campaigning against ageism. Key initiatives involve addressing poor-quality housing, enhancing job opportunities for those 50 years of age and older, and ensuring equitable access to essential services. By collaborating with partners, providing practical housing guidance, and tackling employment barriers, they strive to create safe, healthy, and dignified living conditions for all older adults, while amplifying the voices of marginalized groups and addressing systemic inequalities.²⁰ There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.

British Geriatrics Society

Founded in 1947, the British Geriatrics Society (BGS) are the only organization in the United Kingdom offering specialist expertise in the wide range of healthcare needs of older adults. Their membership is diverse and includes geriatric consultants, nurses, general practitioners (GPs), psychiatrists, allied healthcare professionals (HCPs), and researchers. The BGS Strategic Plan for 2023-26, developed with input from members and stakeholders, focuses on enhancing healthcare for older people. Approved by members in November 2022, the plan emphasizes promoting clinical quality, supporting workforce development, advancing education, influencing policy, and fostering research. Key goals include improving care standards, addressing workforce challenges, expanding professional development, advocating for impactful policies, and strengthening research.

The BGS aims to leverage its expertise and community support to drive meaningful change, adapt to evolving challenges, and maximize social value in older people's healthcare. The plan will be implemented through member engagement, diverse funding, and continuous adaptation to meet healthcare needs. There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.^{21,22}

Dementia-Related CSOs

Alzheimer's Research UK

Founded in 1992, The Alzheimer's Research UK (ARUK) is the UK's leading dementia research charity determined to defeat dementia through research. They now have a network of 15 centres of research across the UK supporting hundreds of scientists. ARUK aims to achieve this mission through awareness campaigns such as Talk Dementia, face-to-face fundraising, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) commitments, and larger initiatives like the Early Detection of Neurodegenerative diseases (EDoN) technology. They also have a strategy in place until 2033 to achieve life-changing treatments for diseases that cause dementia, early-diagnosis and more accurate diagnosis of the diseases that can factor into the development of dementia, as well as improved access to research and treatments. ARUK acknowledges that hearing loss is a risk factor for dementia and are working towards understanding this relationship. On World Hearing Day 2020, ARUK launched the James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership (PSP) to identify key research priorities by collaborating with affected individuals and their HCPs. This initiative focuses on determining the most critical areas for future research on preventing, diagnosing, and treating these combined conditions. Additionally, they recommend getting hearing tests regularly as a preventative measure against dementia.^{23, 24, 25, 26}

Alzheimer's Society

The Alzheimer's Society is working towards a world where dementia no longer impacts lives. The Alzheimer's Society is made up of people with dementia, caregivers, trusted experts, campaigners, researchers, and clinicians. They provide vital support through their helpline, online resources, expert advisers, and online community to guide people living with dementia through challenging times. Their goal is to help them navigate their journey, offering practical advice and support from the onset of memory concerns. In addition to offering crucial support, they are committed to advancing dementia research. The society has funded over 600 projects aimed at improving early diagnosis, care, and treatments. Through evidence-based advocacy and collaboration with campaigners, they hold decision-makers accountable and strive to make dementia a top priority. The Alzheimer's Society acknowledges hearing loss as a risk factor for dementia and recommend getting regular hearing tests. In line with their hearing-related efforts, in 2022, the Alzheimer's Society partnered up with Eargym, a digital fitness platform offering immersive hearing training games, designed to challenge and strengthen hearing and cognitive skills.^{27, 28, 29}

Dementia UK

Dementia UK is a specialist nursing charity that provides free, expert advice and support to help families cared for loved ones. Their Admiral Nurses offer personalized, practical support to thousands of families annually, providing reassurance, understanding, and a listening ear.

Whether through their Helpline, clinic services, or community support, families receive the guidance they need to feel more in control and less alone. Dementia UK acknowledges hearing loss as a modifiable risk factor and recommends getting regular hearing tests.^{30, 31}

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