



About Deafness

What is Deafness?

- Deafness means that a person has a limited ability to hear sounds. It is a communication difficulty rather than merely a loss of sound perception.
- Congenital deafness affects all aspects of a child's development: cognitive, emotional, social and educational.
- Hearing Loss affects volume (loudness) and frequency (pitch).
- Adults who become deaf (deafened) do not rely on hearing alone to communicate. Vision is also important.
- The terms mild, moderate, severe and profound describe the extent of deafness.

Facts about Deafness:

- 3 in 1,000 children in Ireland are born with a disabling hearing loss (approx. 200 pa).
- Early detection of hearing loss in newborn babies is the most important factor in minimising the disabling impact of deafness over the child's life.
- 2,000 children with disabling hearing loss attend mainstream and special schools in Ireland.
- 3,000 profoundly deaf Irish Sign Language (ISL) users live in Ireland. ISL is unique to Ireland and has a strong cultural binding force on the deaf community.
- 20% of people aged 50 years and older experience a disabling hearing loss (225,000 people in Ireland).
- 44% of people aged 70 years and over experience a disabling hearing loss (145,000 Irish adults).
- A significant percentage of acquired hearing loss is preventable through better hearing care.
- Due to the increased portability of personal music players and the high incidence of listening to very loud music over a long number of years, it is expected that this generation will rewrite the hearing loss incidence statistics in the coming years.

Some Effects of Deafness and Hearing Loss on Individuals and Society:

In the first 18 months of a baby's life the neuronal pathways, which determine the capacity for language and cognitive development, are laid down. Development missed at this stage is irrecoverable, causing a life long effect including:

- Impaired development of speech, language and cognitive skills in children.
- Lower literacy and educational attainment.
- Social withdrawal and isolation, increased risk of mental illness.
- Difficulty getting a job, below average pay and poor promotion prospects.
- Major economic burden and social effects for the individual and society.
- A poor health record. This arises from a lack of communication between physician and deaf patients which results in many treatable conditions remaining undetected and untreated.

About DeafHear.ie

DeafHear (The National Association for the Deaf) is a Not for Profit Voluntary Organisation, established in 1964. It provides support services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and their families, and to professionals working with them. **DeafHear** campaigns and advocates for improved health and education services and better access to society for all Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. Over 30,000 people avail of **DeafHear** services every year.

Services Provided by DeafHear Include:

- Family and Support Services (Social Work, Counselling, Respite and Family Activities) from a network of 12 resource centres nationally.
- Assistive Technology – special alarms, doorbells and listening devices.
- Communication Therapy for those with acquired hearing loss (including lip-reading and coping strategies).
- Information and Advice on all aspects of deafness and hearing loss.
- Sign Language Classes throughout Ireland.
- A Mental Health Service accessible through Irish Sign Language (provided by a psychiatrist who is deaf).

Current Issues & Campaign Priorities:

- **Access, Advocacy & Equality Issues:** **DeafHear** is focused on a priority list of public policy initiatives to improve access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in all aspects of society and community life, including education, health and employment. We see social isolation as the key challenge, and promoting social participation as the effective solution. Priority issues range from developing remote ISL interpreting to improve access to health and other services for sign language users; programmes to support people with hearing loss to maintain social participation, better access to TV and telecommunications to reduce social isolation, more provision of loops and other technology to improve access in the wider environment.
- **Deafness in Older People:** Hearing loss in older people is a very prevalent condition affecting more than 40% of people aged over 60 years, and it has a major impact on their well-being and safety. The HSE report that 8% of Irish adults (270,000) have a disabling hearing loss. Hearing loss is a disability which affects quality of life, impacts on social life and psychological well-being, and increases social isolation. It results in increased risk of illnesses such as depression and dementia. Not hearing warning sounds such as smoke alarms and fire alarms affects safety. Access to assistive technology, information, and interventions to support people to manage their hearing loss proactively can radically improve the quality of life of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people and their families.
- **Deaf Awareness:** Deafness is a hidden disability masking the Deaf person's need for assistance. 50% of people with acquired hearing loss experience communication difficulties with family members, while 85% have difficulty communicating in hospitals (**DeafHear** Survey Survey, 2009). Deaf Awareness Training enables service providers to communicate effectively and politely with a Deaf or Hard of Hearing person without causing any embarrassment to the person or themselves.

Terms for Hearing Loss

Acceptable Terms:

- Deaf Person – denoting a person with a congenital hearing loss, usually communicating through sign language
- Hard of Hearing Person – describing a person with a mild or moderate hearing loss or someone who has acquired a hearing loss throughout their lifetime.
- Deafened Person – describing a person with an acquired profound hearing loss.
- Hearing Impaired Person – describing a person with any range of hearing loss, mostly used in medical circumstances.
- Deaf Community – collective term used to describe deaf people who predominantly use sign language and see themselves as part of a community.

Outdated & Unacceptable Terms:

- Deaf and Dumb – offensive to all deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Deaf Mute – offensive to all deaf and hard of hearing people.

Communication Code:

- **Make eye contact** – *Seeing your face helps me understand you.*
- **Speak clearly** – *Lip-reading helps me understand you.*
- **Use gestures** – *This helps me understand you.*
- **One voice only** – *I can only understand one speaker at a time.*
- **Write it down** – *Reading it helps me understand you.*

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