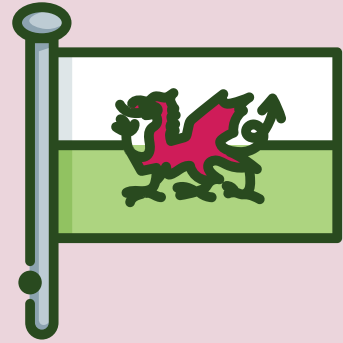




Senedd 2026

RNID: LOUD AND CLEAR



RN
I:D | Supporting people
who are deaf, have
hearing loss or tinnitus



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1 in 3 people in Wales, more than 850,000 people, are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus. This figure is set to rise, as the prevalence of hearing loss increases with age.

At least 500,000

are likely to need communication support or reasonable adjustments to access healthcare.



Over 100,000

would struggle to hear conversational speech.

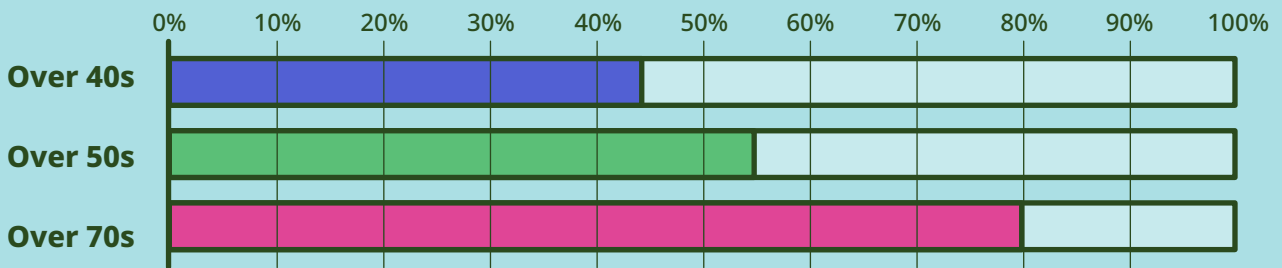


Over 400,000

are of working age.



The prevalence of hearing loss increases with age:



while **45% of over 40s** have some degree of hearing loss, this rises to **55% of over 50s**, and continues to rise with age to almost **80% of over 70s**.

Despite this, deaf people, people with hearing loss and tinnitus still face barriers in their daily lives. Whether that's while visiting their GP, searching or applying for a job, or within their community; communication challenges and negative attitudes are commonplace.

RNID surveyed more than 340 deaf people and people with hearing loss in Wales about the impact that negative attitudes had on them.

Our ***It Does Matter*** research found that:



More than **two thirds** (65%) told us they have experienced negative attitudes



Half

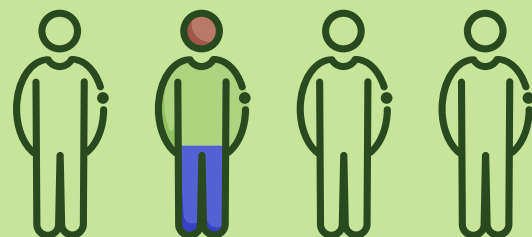
(52%) said they experienced this from retail staff



1 in 5

(18%) said they experienced this from work colleagues

Almost **a third** (28%) said most people ignore them in public settings



1 in 4 (28%) said this made them feel lonely or isolated

Who is RNID?

With our communities, RNID is changing society to make it more inclusive for everyone, help people hear better now, and fund world-class research.

While our communities experience barriers in every aspect of life, RNID has focused on three key areas to achieve change:

HEALTH

Ensuring access to high quality healthcare services



EMPLOYMENT

Guaranteeing equal opportunities at work



INCLUSION

Working with people who are deaf, BSL users or have hearing loss to transform their life chances



Since the 2021 election, RNID has worked with MSs from all parties to improve the lives of people who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus.

- We have campaigned for a **British Sign Language (Wales) Bill** which we hope will become law before the next election, and been members of the Government's British Sign Language Stakeholder Group.
- We have helped strengthen the **All-Wales Accessible Communication and Information Standards**, securing vital changes to improve deaf people's and people with hearing loss' access to healthcare.
- We have informed policy to support deaf and disabled people through the **Disability Equality Forum** and **Disability Rights Taskforce**.
- We have contributed to the new **Future Approach to Audiology**, which supports early intervention and diagnosis of hearing loss in primary and community care.

We have seen much change and progress in Wales since 2021, **but there is more we must do.**



How RNID supports our communities in Wales

RNID also supports people with hearing loss across Wales through our [RNID Near You](#) services. Our trained volunteers offer community-based, face-to-face help with hearing checks, hearing aid maintenance, as well as peer support, information and advice.

We have been running this service in Powys since **2014** but this year, thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund, we have expanded to support more people across South Wales,

working closely with Hywel Dda, Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Cardiff and Vale Health Boards to provide this service which also eases pressure on NHS Audiology departments.

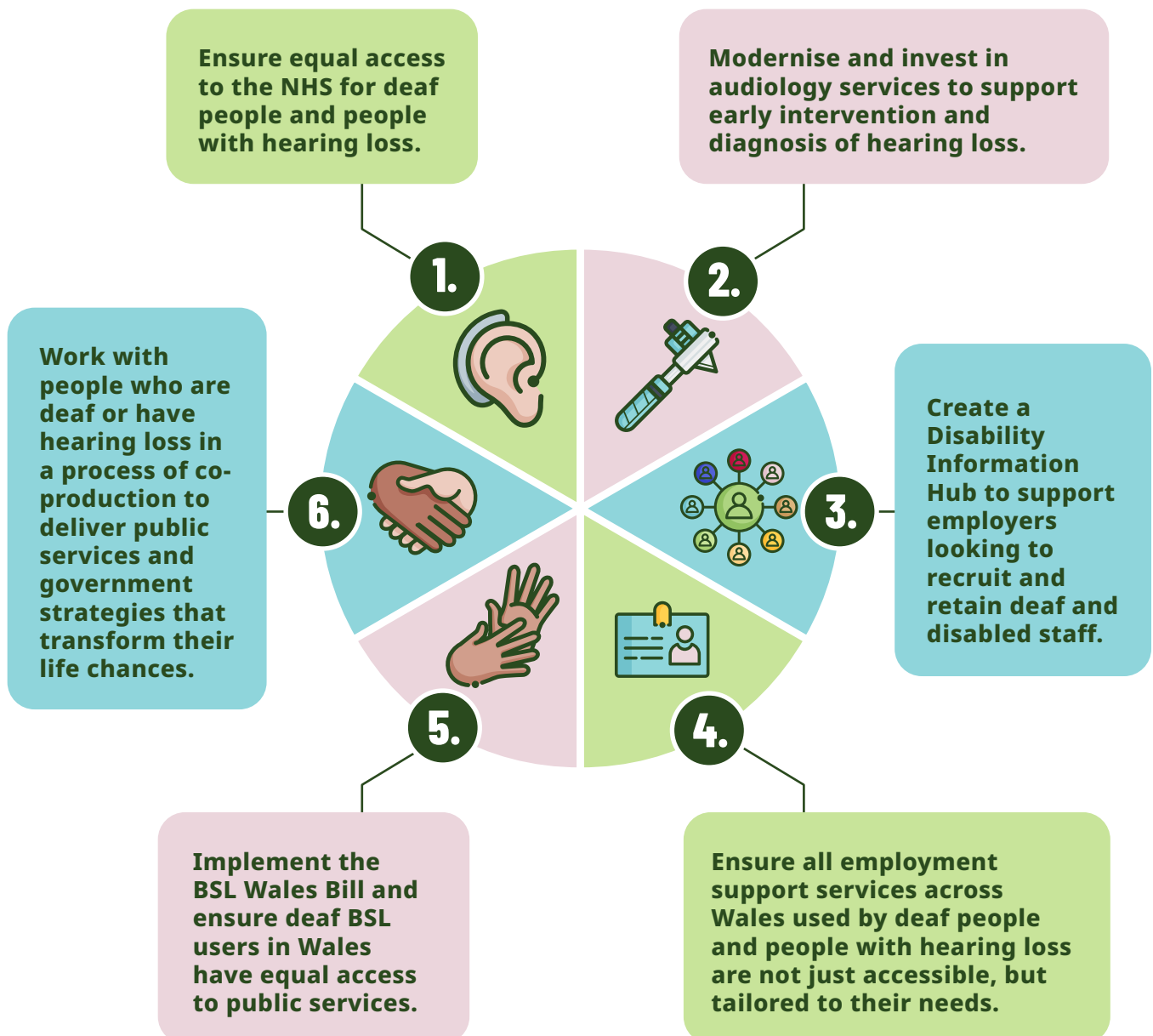
In Powys alone, we have supported more than **4,400 people since 2022**, and that figure is set to significantly grow as we embed our new services across three more Health Boards and reach more people who need support with their hearing.



RNID's vision

Our vision is for a Wales where deaf people and people with hearing loss are fully included, and treated with respect, dignity and understanding.

To achieve this, we are calling on the next Welsh Government to adopt **our six key asks.**



HEALTH: Ensure access to high quality healthcare services

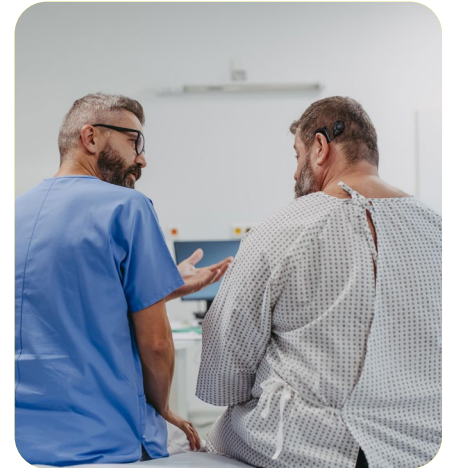
ASK 1: Ensure equal access to the NHS for deaf people and people with hearing loss.

Welsh NHS services remain inaccessible for people who are deaf or have hearing loss, putting their health at risk and undermining their right to privacy and dignity.

Equal access to healthcare is a human right, yet for too long, deaf people and people with hearing loss in Wales have been failed by an NHS that regularly neglects to meet their communication needs.

We estimate that 500,000 people in Wales have a level of hearing loss that means they are likely to need communication support or reasonable adjustments to access healthcare appointments.

That's 1 in 6 people in Wales. It's an urgent problem with a significant and wide-reaching impact.



Our 2025 research with deaf people and people with hearing loss, [Still Ignored](#) found that:

- **1 in 4** (25%) have been denied the information and communication support they need within the NHS.
- **More than half** (56%) have had to rely on friends or family to interpret or relay information at a healthcare appointment.
- **1 in 5** (18%) said a health condition was made worse due to the lack of accessible communication, and 1 in 4 (25%) said they avoided seeking help for a new concern.
- And **1 in 10** (8%) had avoided calling an ambulance or attending A&E as a result.
- Only **17%** of NHS Wales staff currently feel they can meet the needs of patients who are deaf or have hearing loss.

The next Government must:

- ▶ Fully implement the All-Wales Accessible Communication and Information Standards, ensuring robust governance and monitoring structures are in place, and for people who are deaf or have hearing loss to have equal access to NHS Wales care.
- ▶ Mandate training for NHS staff so they understand and apply the Standards in their work with deaf people and people with hearing loss.
- ▶ Guarantee the accessibility of the NHS complaints process and patient body groups, so that our communities' concerns are recognised, represented and captured in improvement priorities.
- ▶ Equip the Welsh NHS with the right technology to record, flag, monitor, share and meet the communication needs of deaf patients and patients with hearing loss, and making this a central priority for Digital Health and Care Wales.

HEALTH: Ensure access to high quality healthcare services

ASK 2: Modernise and invest in audiology services to support early intervention and diagnosis of hearing loss.

Despite the prevalence of hearing loss within the Welsh population, funding for hearing services has consistently been one of the lowest expenditures within the NHS Wales budget.¹

This lack of investment has a significant impact. More than 10,000 people are on a waiting list for a hearing aid – a simple and inexpensive intervention that can drastically improve people’s quality of life.² Similarly, an estimated 48,000 people who require wax removal are left without access to an NHS service, despite Welsh Government policy stating that this should be accessible to all who need it in primary and community care.³ Without access to timely NHS wax removal, people can experience symptoms like hearing loss and tinnitus, and be denied access to essential audiological care or diagnosis.

Failure to manage hearing loss can have a significant impact; it has been linked to isolation, depression and frailty. Untreated hearing loss is also associated with a higher risk of dementia, which has long-term consequences for the costs to the NHS.

To combat this, and encourage people to more regularly check their hearing, RNID have developed a free [3-minute online hearing test](#) which almost 700,000 people have now taken.

We want the next government to recognise the importance of hearing loss as a wider determinant of health outcomes, and that modernising and investing in audiology services can support healthy ageing and wider population health.

The next Government must:

- ▶ Ensure that everyone has access to high quality NHS audiology services within primary and community care, tackling the short-term problem of long waiting lists and creating a service fit for the future, building on the Future Approach to Audiology.
- ▶ Deliver an NHS wax removal service that is available for everyone who has a medical need, ending the postcode lottery. This must also include safe and consistent advice on self-management of ear wax.
- ▶ Promote regular hearing checks for people in Wales and introduce a national hearing check for people aged 50 or over to enable early identification and intervention. We also want to see a digital hearing check added to the NHS Wales website, health board websites, and the NHS Wales app to encourage people to regularly check their hearing.

¹Welsh Government, NHS expenditure programme budgets: April 2023 to March 2024, published 21 October 2025. Note: this is the latest release reflecting the most recent data, but the same reports are available for previous years reflecting ‘hearing’ or ‘hearing problems’ as the lowest spend category.

²StatsWales, Audiology services waiting times by weeks waiting, service, site and age group, October 2009 onwards, accessed October 2025: <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Hospital-Waiting-Times/audiology-services/waitingtimes-by-weekswaiting-service-site-month>

³RNID, Stop the Block: the crisis of NHS ear wax removal in Wales, 2025 - <https://rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/stop-the-block-2025-report-WALES-1.pdf>

HEALTH: Ensure access to high quality healthcare services

Principles for health policy:

In order to achieve meaningful change, the new Government must ensure that health policy is underpinned by the following principles:

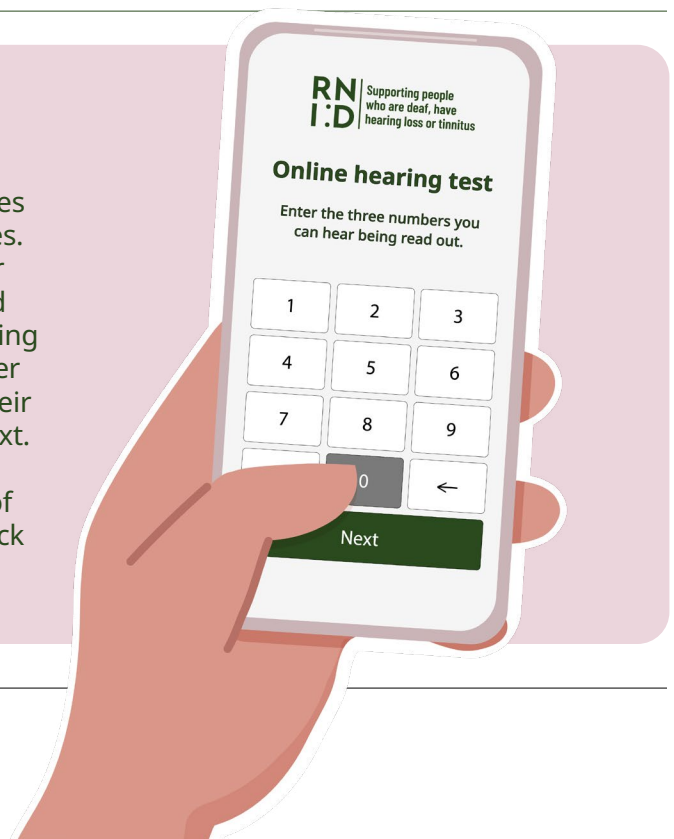
- 1. All Wales implementation and effective governance:** In the last Senedd term we have seen good policy be undermined by poor or inconsistent implementation, with variation across health boards, leading to a postcode lottery of services. The next Government must address this to ensure everyone in Wales benefits.
- 2. Embed an innovation approach:** We want the next government to embrace new technology and service models which have the potential to transform hearing care and create a future where services are more sustainable, accessible and person-centred. Our [Hearing Care Reimagined](#) report looks at how this could be achieved.



RNID's ONLINE HEARING CHECK

RNID has a free online hearing check which enables anyone to check their hearing in just three minutes. The check, which measures how well you can hear speech over background noise, is for anyone aged 18 or over who has not been diagnosed with hearing loss. After completion, the check indicates whether people need to see a health professional about their hearing and provides our advice on what to do next.

The RNID Hearing Check demonstrates the ease of embedding a routine digital check - a hearing check could be included in the new NHS Wales app.



EMPLOYMENT: Guarantee equal opportunities at work

ASK 1: Create a Disability Information Hub for Wales including resources for employers to recruit and retain deaf and disabled staff, and for deaf people seeking support.

People who are deaf or have hearing loss are less likely to be in employment than the non-disabled population. They face significant barriers to accessing the workplace, from inaccessible recruitment processes, to negative attitudes at work.

We know that poor attitudes and understanding from employers presents a significant barrier to deaf people and people with hearing loss in finding, progressing and retaining employment.

A Disability Information Hub would tackle this by creating a centralised portal of information, resources and guidance as well as signposting to other support programmes and funding schemes.

This would support employers to meet their legal obligations and replicate best practice, giving them the confidence to support their employees fully.

The Hub should also support deaf people and people with hearing loss who are seeking employment, by signposting to support that is available to them across Wales.



The next Government must:

- ▶ Ensure a Disability Information Hub reflects the full pathway of recruiting, retaining and supporting disabled employees of all ages, including those who become disabled or develop hearing loss within the workforce.
- ▶ Highlight examples of best practice and case studies where employers have improved practice and have seen benefits.
- ▶ Provide deaf and disabled jobseekers with information on what employment support schemes are available to them, with additional information on specialised support and accessibility.
- ▶ Be co-produced with deaf and disabled people and employers to understand their needs and experiences, and ensure it is regularly reviewed, updated and promoted.
- ▶ Provide an accessible map of the employment support schemes and resources available to deaf and disabled people across Wales.

EMPLOYMENT: Guarantee equal opportunities at work

ASK 2: Ensure all employment support services across Wales used by deaf people and people with hearing loss are not just accessible, but tailored to their needs.

The same barriers that deaf people and people with hearing loss face in finding and accessing work, are often replicated in the employment support programmes that should help them. Whether that is due to support programmes themselves being inaccessible, or whether they do not address the distinct barriers faced by people with hearing loss.

This is particularly stark for BSL users, who are further from the labour market. Analysis of census data shows that 38% of BSL users in Wales are economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability. This compares to 7% of the overall population in Wales.

In recent years, the landscape of employment support in Wales has dramatically changed, and there has been a reduction in the number of specialist support programmes available to deaf

people and people with hearing loss, leaving them without tailored support that understands the barriers they face and meets their needs. This is on top of an already confusing network of provision; provided by Welsh Government, UK Government, local authorities and third sector organisations.⁴

We want to see the next Government address this gap in provision through a strategic review of what employment support is available across Wales, and how it meets the needs of deaf people and people with hearing loss.

Good jobs support independence, mental health and wellbeing and it's vital that deaf people and people with hearing loss are supported to gain skills, build confidence and find work.

The next Government must:

- ▶ Identify and address the gaps in employment support that have emerged in Wales due to the loss of varied funding models, and assess the impact on groups who are more likely to be unemployed or further from the labour market.
- ▶ Ensure all employment support services in Wales are accessible to people who are deaf or have hearing loss, at a minimum, and that accessibility is embedded in the commissioning process for future support providers.
- ▶ Ensure that, within more specialised services, for example those targeted at disabled people or people aged 50+, support is tailored to the needs of deaf people and people with hearing loss, understands their needs and engages with the distinct barriers they face.
- ▶ If progress is not made to improve employment of people who are deaf or have hearing loss, consider commissioning specialist support.

⁴RNID analysis of Census data 2021

EMPLOYMENT: Guarantee equal opportunities at work

Principles for Employment policy:

To achieve the necessary impact, the actions must be underpinned by the following principles:

- 1. Ensure that closing the Disability Employment Gap is a cross-Government priority,** which all Ministers actively contribute towards, particularly for those who face the greatest barriers to work.
- 2. Improve cooperation, coordination and integration with UK Government led employment support schemes,** like Access to Work, which provide vital support to deaf and disabled people. The next Welsh Government must also campaign to protect those schemes and ensure they address Wales-specific challenges and meet the needs of deaf people and people with hearing loss in Wales.
- 3. Improve consistency and address the complexity of employment support services within Wales.** Ensure that information on available employment support is accessible and easy to find, and that all programmes contribute to a cohesive system of nationally commissioned support, alongside localised and specialist support services.
- 4. Introduce a sustainable and longer-term funding model to ensure greater stability for providers and the people who benefit from their support.** Changes in recent years have led to the loss of significant funding focused on employment support, particularly for disadvantaged communities. This has led to the loss of many services, and an inconsistent picture across Wales which must be addressed.



INCLUSION: Work with people who are deaf, BSL users or have hearing loss to transform their life chances

ASK 1: Implement the BSL Wales Bill and ensure Deaf BSL users in Wales have equal access to public services.

There are estimated to be between 4,000 to 7,000 BSL users in Wales for whom British Sign Language is their primary or secondary language. However, for too long, British Sign Language has faced weaker legislative recognition in Wales than elsewhere in the UK, like Scotland and England, where BSL Acts have been in place since 2015 and 2022 respectively.

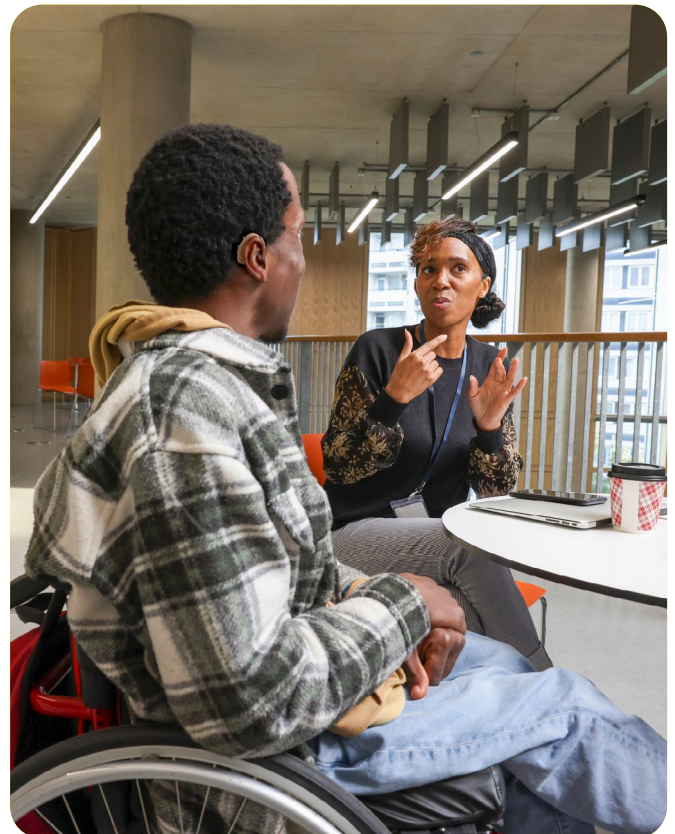
We are proud to support the proposed British Sign Language (Wales) Bill which was put forward as a Member's Bill and is currently passing through the Senedd. We hope this legislation will pass before

the end of this Senedd term, but it will be down to whoever forms the next government to ensure it is fully and meaningfully implemented.

This legislation is urgently needed. BSL users face significant barriers in every aspect of their lives due to poor provision of services in BSL across health, education, transport, and employment, and due to poor public attitudes and understanding. Our research with Deaf BSL users found that 71% believe the public holds negative attitudes towards deaf people, and 34% of the public say they don't know how to communicate with a deaf BSL user.⁵

The next Government must:

- ▶ Publish a robust national BSL strategy with clear, measurable targets and mechanisms for governance and monitoring.
- ▶ Co-produce implementation guidance for public bodies with BSL users across Wales as a first priority.
- ▶ Build capacity for implementation by:
 - Creating a workforce strategy for BSL interpreters and translators to support implementation and to ensure public services are accessible for BSL users.
 - Ensuring staff within essential public services like the NHS, local government, employment support providers and transport providers have deaf awareness training and understand how to support Deaf BSL users within their services.



⁵RNID, It Does Matter, 2024: <https://rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/RNID-It-Does-Matter-Report-V2.pdf>

INCLUSION: Work with people who are deaf, BSL users or have hearing loss to transform their life chances

ASK 2: Work with people who are deaf or have hearing loss in a process of co-production to deliver public services and government strategies that transform their life chances.

At the start of the last Senedd term in 2021, the focus was on pandemic recovery. The Government's July 2021 Locked Out report highlighted the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on deaf and disabled people, and how it further entrenched inequalities.

While progress has been made over the past five years, there is more work to be done to transform the life chances of deaf people and people with hearing loss. We want the next Government to ensure deaf people and people with hearing loss are involved in public policymaking through a process of genuine co-production, to inform the policies that directly impact their lives.



We want to see the next Government:

- ▶ Quickly publish a short, medium and long-term Disability Action Plan to tackle the inequality faced by deaf and disabled people in every aspect of their lives, based on the insight and contributions of deaf communities.
- ▶ Ensure this Action Plan has a clear vision, with measurable, time-bound targets, underpinned and scrutinised by a robust governance mechanism to ensure progress is regularly monitored and reviewed against milestones.
- ▶ Take a cross-Government approach to addressing the barriers deaf people and people with hearing loss face across transport, healthcare, employment, local government and wider public services, with access at the heart.
- ▶ Improve the data and evidence base on the experience of deaf people and BSL users in Wales to ensure this informs policy and captures outcomes. Current data does not fully reflect the varied experiences of deaf people, BSL users and people with hearing loss, and BSL users in particular are likely underrepresented.

INCLUSION: Work with people who are deaf, BSL users or have hearing loss to transform their life chances

Principles for Inclusion policy:

In order to achieve meaningful change, the new Government must ensure that inclusion policy is underpinned by the following principles

- 1. Embed accessibility within policymaking** and the delivery of public services, to ensure that deaf people, BSL users and people with hearing loss have equal access and benefit from public policy in the same way as hearing people.
- 2. Foster a culture of innovation** and accelerate technological solutions to improve equality for deaf people, BSL users and people with hearing loss. The needs of the deaf community should be central to conversations about emerging AI technology and digital transformation in Wales.



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[rnid.org.uk](https://www.rnid.org.uk)

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