

## Quality of life for residents with hearing loss



# Introduction

My Home Life aims to promote quality of life for those who are living, dying, visiting or working in care homes for older people through relationship-centred, evidence-based practice.

My Home Life Cymru celebrates and shares existing best practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people. People are entering care homes much later in life, often with complex care needs, and residential care has to be responsive to this.

This booklet is for care staff working with residents who have hearing loss; it discusses the issues faced within care homes around hearing loss, how these can have an impact on the quality of life of all involved and how you as members of staff can better support these residents to enjoy a good quality of life. It's important to remember that we're all individuals, so find out what works best for each resident.



## My Home Life Cymru eight best practice themes

- Maintaining identity
- Sharing decision making
- Creating community
- Managing transitions
- Improving health and healthcare
- Supporting good end of life
- Promoting a positive culture
- Keeping workforce fit for purpose

At the core of best practice in care homes is relationship-centred care that includes all stakeholders – the residents, their families and care staff. Also, relationship-centred care means giving everyone voice, choice and control in their lives.

For this publication we have worked with Action on Hearing Loss Cymru, the charity working for a world where hearing loss doesn't limit or label people, where tinnitus is silenced and where people value and look after their hearing.



***“Blindness separates you from things;  
deafness separates you from people”***

***Helen Keller***

### **About hearing loss**

There are 10 million people in the UK who have hearing loss. Importantly around 50% of people between the ages of 60 and 80, and over 90% of people over 80, have a hearing loss.

Therefore many residents will have hearing loss, whether or not they have recognised it, or sought help for it. There is however a lot you can do to help ensure the best quality of life for each resident. This booklet will explore the steps, from identifying hearing loss to personalising living spaces, to help you achieve this.

### **Types of hearing loss**

Hearing loss is usually described in terms of severity: mild, moderate, severe or profound. The causes of hearing loss vary. Some people may have been born deaf whilst others

experience sudden hearing loss at some point in their lives. The most common type of hearing loss is called presbycusis or age-related hearing loss. It results in a gradual reduction in hearing ability.

### **Effects**

Hearing loss impacts upon the sense of self. It affects communication, ranging from social to critical, and can lead to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Depression is not uncommon. Some people express resentment or anger as a symptom of a profound shift in their emotional wellbeing. Others quietly resign themselves, completely unnecessarily, to a life without active participation believing the effects of hearing loss can't be addressed or not wanting to make a fuss.



# How to identify hearing loss

There are common signs of hearing loss you can look out for when supporting residents. People with age-related hearing loss often:

- **complain about others mumbling**
- **need to have things repeated**
- **don't react to you**
- **struggle to hear on the telephone**
- **have the TV or radio on very loud**
- **fail to follow conversation in noisy places.**

You might also notice a change in behaviour in residents. They could be more withdrawn or stop taking part in conversation and activities. This might be because of hearing loss.

## Intervention

If you notice anyone struggling to hear it is best to discuss this with them. It could be that they haven't recognised it themselves or they may be unaware of the easy steps to take to get a hearing loss diagnosed and treated. Acting sooner is likely to prevent social isolation and depression that can often be associated with unaddressed hearing loss.

## Diagnosis and treatment

Start by arranging an appointment with the GP who may decide to refer them onto an Audiology clinic or Ear Nose and Throat department for further testing.

Digital hearing aids are now free of charge on the NHS and can also be bought privately. Digital means that they can be set to match the patient's hearing loss and individual needs quite accurately. It's important to note that not one type of hearing aid is suitable for all and the audiologist will help decide which is best suited to the patient.

Further information about hearing aids can be found at:

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/hearingaids](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/hearingaids)**



### Top tip:

For an initial check, take the free Action on Hearing Loss hearing check. This is not a substitute for a full hearing test; however the results can be taken along to the GP to help them decide whether further testing is needed. You can take the test on the phone or online. Remember to check both ears.

### Telephone:

Just call **0844 800 3838** (Calls from a BT Landline cost up to 5p/minute. Other providers' charges may be higher and call set up charges may apply).

### Online:

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/hearingcheck](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/hearingcheck)**

# Jim tells us his story...



I'm 80 and living in a care home near where I grew up. My family visits lots, and I'm happy here. About a year ago I noticed that my family and carers were mumbling and I had to tell them to speak up. I started to find their visits a bit frustrating and sometimes they missed me out of conversations and I never got to find out any news.

Then about six months ago I was watching TV with a friend and couldn't hear it – I kept turning it up, until one of the staff came in and told me it was too loud. I kept quiet and got on with it for a while – but it didn't take long before one of the staff suggested I go to the doctor and get my hearing checked. I said no at first, said there was nothing wrong, but she kept at it, said it wouldn't hurt and I finally agreed. I'd been a bit embarrassed to be honest, being such an old man and causing inconvenience.

Anyway, I went to the GP who talked to me for a while and when we finished she said that I'm not hearing as well as I used to, but they could help me out. She sent me to an audiologist for more tests and he confirmed that I have hearing loss. I got fitted for a hearing aid and the hospital showed me how to use it.

Thank goodness that the care home staff have also been learning how to maintain hearing aids as that means that they can help me out when the batteries run out; sometimes I'm all fingers and thumbs! It took a little while for me to get used to my hearing aid and sometimes I was tempted to leave it in the drawer, but it has made a huge difference. My family's conversations all make more sense now and they know if I miss something to just face me and repeat it. I can also hear the questions in the quizzes we have every Sunday evening!

There are lots of gadgets to help and I've got one called a listener that works with my hearing aids and the TV. I can hear at normal volume now which is a blessing for my neighbours!

"Jim was always a popular, lively man and we noticed he started getting a bit withdrawn and was listening to the TV loudly. We took him to get checked out and he now has a hearing aid. He's back to his normal lively self and brightens up the place no end! Jim told us how isolated he had started to feel and we've decided to regularly screen all our residents for hearing loss to prevent other people getting into the same position".

Care home manager





# How can you support residents with a hearing loss?



## Communication

Hearing loss can have a profound impact on a person's ability to communicate. Support residents and encourage them to keep doing things independently:

- make sure you have the person's attention before speaking to them
- always face the person you are talking to. This is very important for people who lip-read to help understand conversations
- speak at normal volume - shouting is uncomfortable for hearing aid users and sounds aggressive
- use plain language - don't waffle or change topic without warning
- if someone doesn't understand what you're saying, try saying it in a different way
- writing can sometimes help in conversations where someone can't hear an important word or phrase. Only write down key words and continue the conversation. Avoid using CAPITAL LETTERS - it's the written equivalent of shouting and doesn't actually make things clearer
- it might be a good idea to mute TVs or radios whilst you're talking.

## Environment

There are many adjustments and assistive products that can be put in place to help make a person's living environment more comfortable:

- use soft furnishings such as padded table cloths and carpeted flooring to help absorb background noise
- have quiet areas, without televisions and radios, where people can go to have conversations
- install induction loop systems. These work for people who have a loop ('T') setting on their hearing aid and cut out background noise making the spoken sounds clearer. There are loops suitable for phones as well as whole rooms. Once you have loops, make sure they are switched on and maintained
- ensure there is good lighting in all areas as this can help residents who lip-read.

## Products

Action on Hearing Loss provide a wide range of products to support people with hearing loss including hearing aid maintenance kits, TV listeners, amplified phones and alerting devices. They also install induction loop systems into communal lounges.

For more information go to:

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/homelife](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/homelife)** or call quoting 'Homelife' for a FREE Solutions catalogue on:

**Telephone 01733 361199, Textphone 01733 238020**

**Text Relay 18001 01733 361199**

# The 'Hearing Aid Queen'!

Cheryl has been a care worker and activities organiser for 20 years and is called the 'Hearing Aid Queen' at the care home where she works – Castle Court in Chepstow. Cheryl lost a lot of hearing when she was a young child and has worn hearing aids herself since she was about four years old and she empathises with the residents who wear hearing aids.

"We have so many residents here who have hearing loss, around three quarters of them have hearing aids and because I understand what it's like when you have problems I decided to look after them myself.

"Every day I check with the residents that their hearing aids are switched on properly, batteries are working, that there's no whistling or any blockages in the tubes. I have to change batteries quite often because a lot of the residents forget to switch their hearing aid off at night.



"If there's a simple blockage in the tube I can clean that myself, but if the tube has gone hard and needs replacing I take them down to the audiology clinic. If I'm going to the clinic I'll check a few hearing aids to see if they need any maintenance pop them in separate envelopes and take them with me to the clinic.



"If I've been off for a couple of days when I'm back that's the first thing the residents ask is, 'Where's Cheryl? Can she have a look at my hearing aid?' Before I go away on holiday I make sure I see every resident with hearing aids and check them to see that they are OK."

Alison, the manager of the care home is a fan. "We couldn't do without our 'Hearing Aid Queen'. Having Cheryl here has made us much more aware of the needs of people with hearing loss. She highlights the need to be on top of any problems with hearing aids. We also make sure that we talk directly to people and speak clearly. In our activities we make sure that nobody is cut off because of their hearing loss. Our residents love quizzes and we go round each one to make sure they heard the question"

"I think every care home should have a 'Hearing Aid Queen', or King!" says Cheryl. "Looking after hearing aids is not difficult but it makes the world of difference to the residents."

# Supporting people with hearing aids

While hearing aids may not be suited to everyone, many find they improve their quality of life. It can take some time to adjust to a hearing aid and it's important that people get the support to make the most of them, including regular maintenance.

When you're supporting someone with a hearing aid, you should:

- check every day that hearing aids are working and that people are wearing them in the correct ears and inserted correctly
- know how to use the controls on hearing aids, such as the programme button and how to change batteries and how to clean hearing aids
- ensure there are adequate arrangements for hearing aid re-tubing, repairs and battery replacement
- be organised, to minimise the number of lost hearing aids, to ensure that lost hearing aids are replaced as quickly as possible and ensure 'found' aids can be traced back to their rightful owner
- understand that other long term conditions may have an impact on hearing aid use, for instance, people with dementia may forget that they have hearing aids. When supporting people with dementia you need to persevere to manage this.

## Further support with hearing aids

If people you support are not wearing their hearing aids or report problems, such as discomfort or an ear infection, seek support from your local audiology department and GP.

## Wax management

Excessive earwax is more common among older people and people who use hearing aids. Keep contact details to hand of your GP or nurse who examines ears for wax and arranges ear syringing, when appropriate.



## How you can get support or help for you and your team

Action on Hearing Loss runs a hearing aid support service called 'Hear to Help' in some areas. Their trained staff and volunteers can visit people living in a registered care home to provide support to residents or staff regarding hearing aid care. The service doesn't cover the whole of Wales, but it's growing all the time.

## Working with your local hearing loss services

It's a good idea to build relationships with local hearing loss services. In addition to NHS and private services, there are many voluntary organisations in Wales and across the UK who would be very happy to work with you to help you provide the best support for people with hearing loss, from audiology departments to groups for people who have a hearing loss. You can find information for your area at:

**[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/wales](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/wales)**

To find out if there is a Hear to Help service in your area or to get free leaflets on hearing aid care and management, contact the Action on Hearing Loss information line on **0808 808 0123** or **[informationline@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:informationline@hearingloss.org.uk)** You can also get further information on supporting people with hearing aids at: **[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk)**



# Top Tips for supporting people with hearing loss

- Have a **Hearing Aid Queen** or Champion or Co-ordinator within the team who has responsibility for looking after all hearing aids, takes people to the clinics for maintenance, checks batteries etc.
- **Adapt activities** to enable residents with hearing loss to either face each other or sit close to the activities leader so they can hear.
- Hearing loss can cause isolation and depression – **think twice** if someone says they don't want to take part in activities – is it because they can't hear properly?
- Always **face the person** you're talking to, it can help them read your lips and body language.
- **Use plain language**, try not to waffle or change topic quickly and without warning.
- On the medication checklist **put a reminder** to change hearing aid batteries weekly and make sure care plans have information on each resident's hearing aid needs.
- Have **quiet areas**, without televisions and radios where people can go to have conversations.
- Access **training** for your care home – local audiology departments often provide this on request.
- Share information about individuals that helps support them – **small things matter**, like which side the person prefers you to talk; do they have problems with their aids etc.
- Make sure the **environment** is best suited to someone with a hearing loss; that there is enough light for people who lip-read and that there are soft furnishings to absorb sound.





## Action on Hearing Loss Cymru

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[www.wales@hearingloss.org.uk](http://www.wales@hearingloss.org.uk)

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Tel: 01248 614420

### Information line:

Tel: 0808 808 0123 (freephone)

Textphone: 0808 808 9000 (freephone)

Fax: 020 7296 8199

Email: [informationline@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:informationline@hearingloss.org.uk)

## My Home Life Cymru

For more information on My Home Life Cymru go to: [www.agecymru.org.uk/mhlc](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/mhlc)

Tel: 029 2043 1555

Email: [mhlc@agecymru.org.uk](mailto:mhlc@agecymru.org.uk)

Please visit [agecymru.org.uk/mhlc](http://agecymru.org.uk/mhlc) to view other resources to help in developing the eight My Home Life best practice themes. Presentations from previous My Home Life Cymru events are also available to download.

In addition to this, the other My Home Life web sites – [myhomelifemovement.org](http://myhomelifemovement.org) and [myhomelifedvd.org.uk](http://myhomelifedvd.org.uk) give detailed information on the work of My Home Life and are full of case studies and examples of good practice in action.

*If you would like to support our vital work and make a difference to the lives of older people in Wales please contact the fundraising team at Age Cymru on 029 2043 1555 or donate at [www.agecymru.org.uk/donate](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/donate)*



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