

Report on the Virtual Lunch Debate in the European Parliament “HEARING CARE FOR ALL”

3rd of March 2021

It is a yearly tradition that the joined European associations of Hard of Hearing People, Hearing Aid Professionals and Hearing Aid Manufacturers in strong cooperation with the World Health Organization, organise a Lunch Debate in the European Parliament in Brussels, to celebrate “World Hearing Day”.



MEP Alex Agius Saliba was the host of this year’s **Lunch Debate in the European Parliament “HEARING CARE FOR ALL” on the 3rd of March 2021**. He gave a very compelling and dynamic introduction and moderated the whole event and debate. All presentations were subtitled, and the debate was supported with speech to text, to ensure the debate is inclusive for people with hearing loss. He was very happy that more than 650 participants have registered for this lunch debate.



Shelly Chadha, who works at the **World Health Organisation as the Medical Officer for ear and hearing care**, kicked off the debate, with “HEARING CARE FOR ALL”, the World Report on Hearing.

- The “World Report on Hearing”, comes with a clear message, “We need to act now for ear and hearing care”.
- We need to act because the growing number of people who still have unaddressed hearing loss and ear diseases, this is really unacceptable. Because urgent action it is needed to prevent and then to address hearing loss across the life course.
- investing in cost effective interventions will not only benefit people who have hearing loss, but will also provide financial gains for the society at large.

- And so, countries must invest to integrate people-centered ear and hearing care within national health plans for universal health coverage, because the cost of doing nothing is one which we cannot afford.



Morten Buan, the vice president of the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People, presented the challenges, solutions and opportunities of “Access to Hearing Care during COVID-19” based on experiences from Norway.

- They fully support the health authorities’ order for protective infection measures in order to safeguard all hygiene considerations and we encourage everyone to contribute to the national effort to limit the spread of the Corona Virus.
- The majority of their actions run now via e-mail, SMS, telephone, digital video platforms (Teams & Zoom) and the it’s important that they always have an interpreter! An interpreter is absolutely necessary in meetings with hard of hearing people and it’s important to see the speakers face in the meetings. Then we are able to read lips as an additional support to the interpreter’s text.
- The Norwegian association offers, Digital Home Schooling, «Hybrid» lectures, Consultative services, Counselling for Hard of Hearing Students, Individual services and a Rehabilitation Centre for the Hard of Hearing, which allowed them to face the challenges during the COVID-19 period and turn them into opportunities.



Robert Mandara is the vice-president of the European Cochlear Implant Users Association; is a bilateral cochlear implant user and is happy to share his story during this lunch debate.

- Without his implants he is 100% deaf, but the good news is that cochlear implants, although not a cure, can restore his hearing to a level where he can function quite normally.

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- The bad news is that, of every 20 people who could benefit from implants, only around 1 in 20 candidates in Europe has one. Worse than that, the rate of implantation is falling behind, not catching up. If that's not bad enough news for you, provision is biased towards children. The older you are, the less likely you are to qualify.
- If your country does not invest nearly enough, you are one of the unlucky 19 out of 20. Along with losing your job, expect to lose contact with your loved ones, friends, music and mental health.
- He will focus on six action points member countries need to focus on to ensure that people who need cochlear implants, can get access and quality care.



Minister Julia Farrugia Portelli – Maltese Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing, gave a strong message on the importance of local actions and initiatives to ensure inclusion of people with hearing loss in society.



Patrick D'Haese is the chairman of Hear-It, hosting a non-commercial web site which has been established to increase public awareness of hearing loss. His topic is "The use of hearing aids and cochlear implants: are we fulfilling the need?".

- Hearing loss is associated with a multitude of comorbidities and additional problems like, Cognitive decline, Mental health problems, Social isolation and withdrawal, Reduced quality of life, Fatigue, both during and after work, Less physical activity and Higher incidence of falls
- What is the challenge to society? - Cost of not treating hearing loss in Europe is 216 billion Euro / year.
- Hearing Aid Adoption in Europe is increasing from 33% in 2009 to 42% in 2018
- For adults, eligible for cochlear implants in Europe the uptake is between 6,6 and 10%
- Hearing loss must be addressed as a public health issue

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- There is a need for policy-makers to allocate resources for, and plan strategically to promote, access to ear and hearing care
- Public health strategies should address prevention, screening and early intervention of hearing loss
- Need to raise awareness with medical professionals on indications and symptoms, the impact of hearing loss and its comorbidities and outcomes of people using hearing aids and cochlear implants



Mark Laureyns, president of the European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals and co-chair of the WHO “Make Listening Safe” Workgroup, presented studies and new findings on the evidence why “Hearing screening and hearing care for young active people with hearing loss” is so essential.

- Hearing Loss represents 8% risk factors for Dementia, and it is modifiable. Both the Lancet Commissions Report and the WHO World Report on Hearing, encourage early adult hearing screening and early intervention with hearing care, like hearing protection (safe listening) and the use of rehabilitation with hearing aids or cochlear implant for people with hearing loss.
- Hearing loss and tinnitus are related to (un)-employment, depression and burn-out.
- Initiatives to detect hearing loss early and increase the uptake and the use of hearing aids may provide substantial public health benefits and reduce socioeconomic inequalities in health
- Open space offices which represent nearly 30% of the offices used in Europe, they lead to more individual strain and interpersonal strain, which can result in more burnout problems ... even more so for people with hearing loss!

At the end of the lunch debate, the floor was opened to the participants and the most frequent/relevant questions, which were posted in the chat, were answered by the panel, who were all virtually present by video.

Now since, not everybody could join the debate, we made sure that you can all see the videos of the debate on your ease by using this link:

<https://www.aea-audio.org/portal/index.php/world-hearing-day>

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