



Press release:

Hearing care – a sound investment

Brussels, the 28th of February 2014:

WHO is celebrating March 3rd as their International Ear Care day. WHO has identified a need for Member States to develop plans and programmes integrating prevention and management of hearing loss into the primary health care system of their member countries.

16% of the European population, i.e. 80 million people, are suffering from hearing loss, of which at least 30 million are undetected cases.

Besides being a problematic condition in itself (communication difficulties, job challenges, social isolation), hearing loss is often associated with a number of other diseases, including **obesity** – extremely obese women with a BMI over 40 have 25% more risk for hearing problems according to Curhan and all (2013); **diabetes** – diabetics are twice as likely to suffer hearing loss according to Bainbridge and all (2008), **dementia** – the likelihood of developing dementia increases with the severity of hearing loss according to a study by Lin and all (2011); and **depression** – the risk for hard-of-hearing people of developing depressive symptoms is reduced by 50% if they use hearing aids according to the SHARE study (2011).

In the light of the increased risk for hard-of-hearing people of suffering from other diseases, The European Federation of the Hard of Hearing (EFHOH), the European Association of Hearing Aid Professionals (AEA) and the European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (EHIMA) in a joint statement are calling on the EU Commission to say what policies and initiatives are in place at EU level to support systematic screening of hearing loss as part of medical check-ups in adults 55+ in the Member States?

Furthermore, because of the increased risk of multi-morbidity associated with their condition, hard-of-hearing people have particular needs in terms of integrated care. The three organizations therefore ask the Commission to indicate which progresses have been made at EU level to promote integrated care, in particular in the framework of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing? Initiatives in this respect would also be consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

The costs of *not* doing anything are rising, in parallel with the ageing of the European populations. Introducing mandatory hearing screenings from e.g. the age of 60, as well as promoting integrated hearing healthcare policies will be a sound investment for governments and health insurance companies – and for the 80 million hearing impaired Europeans.

Media contacts:

EFHOH: Chairman Marcel Bobeldijk. marbob32@hotmail.com. Phone: +31 6 43 03 31 20

AEA: Secretary General Mark Laureyns. general.secretary@aea-audio.org. Phone: +32 475 35 81 68

EHIMA: Secretary General Soeren Hougaard. sh@ehima.com. Phone: +45 40 45 71 35