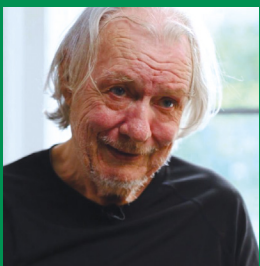


# Access to care 2025

The benefits of eye and hearing care in the community



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## Acknowledgements

Specsavers would like to thank **Tara and Jim** for sharing their stories, helping us to raise public awareness that eye and hearing care health have implications for physical and mental wellbeing. You motivate all of us to deliver the very best patient care and improve access to care for everyone.

We appreciate the support, advice and comment from eye and hearing health colleagues from public, independent and academic sectors who have contributed their expertise to this report. Together we can do so much more.

# Access to Care

Almost ten years ago Ireland committed to equitable access to services based on need and not ability to pay. The goal of Sláintecare health reforms was a universal single-tier health and social care system with plans to rebalance care towards communities, reduce pressure on hospitals and respond to ageing populations and rising chronic disease. This goal has endured and as Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill stated when launching Sláintecare 2025+, 'ensuring better access to healthcare in Ireland and reducing the time that patients are waiting for care is a priority'.

However, healthcare funding remains skewed towards hospitals. While shorter waiting times for diagnosis of some conditions has been achieved and more activity is being delivered in the community, barriers to progress remain.

We welcome the record allocation of €27.4 billion to the Department of Health as part of the health budget for 2026. We hope that this will enable faster and fairer access to care for everyone in Ireland. Minister MacNeill made it clear that realising this ambition will not be possible without the ongoing dedication and greatly valued expertise of the entire health and social care workforce. This report shows the contribution that optical and audiology professionals are already making - and we could do so much more.

The only way forward is to work for better services with a united voice, including with elected representatives at a local level.



**Rory Perry,**  
President of ISHAA

**The Irish Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (ISHAA)**, which represents clinical and hearing aid audiologists working in the private hearing aid sector, is dedicated to maintaining exceptionally high professional and ethical standards of hearing care and aftercare. In August 2024, the then Health Minister, Stephen Donnelly, convened a Working Group to develop a National Hearing Care Plan but publication has been delayed. ISHAA is represented on this group and is working with public health agencies, professional bodies, health-care providers and researchers to respond to this global call, so that all people in Ireland can enjoy good hearing as part of good health and wellbeing throughout their life.



**Garvan Mulligan,**  
Chair of FODO Ireland

**FODO Ireland** is the representative professional body for community eye care providers in the Republic of Ireland. It leads change by influencing government, legislators, policymakers and opinion formers to improve access to high-quality eye care for everyone. We welcome the roll out of the electronic medical card approval claim process, as this will help tackle barriers people face when trying to get their vital sight test approved. Last year, we also welcomed the decision from the then Health Minister, Stephen Donnelly, that children aged eight and over should also be entitled to an HSE-funded eye exam in the community. Despite assurances from Government, this extended entitlement has yet to be delivered, so we continue to push all departments to improve access to state-funded care for children.

# Shaping Care Together

Eye and hearing care services in the community can help HSE meet the five priorities for change set out in Sláintecare 2025+.

## 1. Healthy communities

### Healthy habits for children

Up to one in five school children [1] may have an undiagnosed vision problem that could affect their learning and development.

Since 2024, the HSE Sight Test has included provision for children aged eight and over. This has yet to be fully implemented so we urge the government to act so that these young patients can be cared for by community optometrists, freeing up GP and hospital capacity to treat sight-threatening conditions.

Myopia (nearsightedness) is becoming increasingly common, with one in three children globally now affected - a significant rise compared to 50 years ago [2]. This trend is strongly linked to lifestyle changes. Studies show that higher screen exposure correlates with faster myopia progression, while time spent outdoors can help delay its onset [3]. Myopia can affect a child's development, educational access and overall quality of life. Community optometrists can prescribe myopia management solutions, such as peripheral-plus glasses, dual-focus contact lenses and other solutions,



which have been shown to slow progression of myopia. Experts recommend early intervention - ideally before age 13 - and a personalised approach that considers each child's lifestyle and preferences [4].

The Irish Association of Dispensing Opticians provides continuing professional development to its members, including in the specialism of children's eye care. Research [5] indicates that parents are confused about children's eye care. An eye

test is a crucial part of a child's development check.

'Cementing healthy habits from birth aligns with the prevention agenda and gives parents and children control over their health. Our patients attend local practices everyday with highly trained staff ready to offer more care. Delivering provision for over-eights will improve access to care for all ages.'



**Kerril Hickey**, Specsavers  
Director and Optics Chair  
for Ireland

**TARA'S STORY**

Tara Gilseanan, 22, from Monaghan, was at risk of losing her eyesight due to Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension. This is a rare condition that causes high brain pressure and vision changes. Tara began experiencing blurred vision and severe headaches. She assumed it was due to screen time. When symptoms worsened, she booked an eye test at Specsavers Monaghan.

Optician Gerard McCann and his team carried out an OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) scan, revealing damage to Tara's optic nerves. Recognising the urgency, Gerard referred her to A&E at the Mater University Hospital, Dublin. He explained the condition to ease her concerns. At the hospital, Tara underwent CT, MRI and spinal tap tests and was placed on medication.



Thanks to swift action from her community optometrist and hospital specialists, Tara's vision returned to normal. She now continues regular check-ups at Specsavers Monaghan and urges young people to get their

eyes tested regularly. 'If I had not gone into Specsavers that day, I would have been dealing with a very different and severe issue. I'm so grateful for Gerard's support,' Tara said.

**Tackling stigma and denial about age-related hearing loss**

Stigma and denial about age-related hearing loss continues to result in people delaying seeking access to the care they need, or even going without care at all [6]. In line with BIHIMA's 2024/2025 audiologist survey [7], the Eurotrak 2025 [8] data suggests that stigma around hearing instruments is improving: 70% of users say they never feel mocked or rejected because of their devices, up from 64% in 2022. However, barriers like denial of hearing loss persist and remain a reason for non-adoption. In Ireland, only 7% of participants in a national survey [9] were using any assistive hearing technology, highlighting a large gap between need and uptake. In contrast, the average usage rate among people who report a hearing impairment in Europe is 53%.



Iconic rock band Aslan

Clearly more needs to be done to raise awareness among people with hearing loss and encourage them to seek help earlier.

'That's why Specsavers plays a leading role in sector initiatives to get the nation talking and thinking about hearing to help people embrace hearing differently as part of daily life, such as sharing positive images of hearing devices and working with celebrities like Aslan band members.'



**Orla Walsh**, Specsavers  
Director and Audiology  
Chair for Ireland



Image from the GN's The New Norm image bank



## Improving safety

### Reducing falls by looking after our vision and hearing



Each year **1 in 3** people aged 65 and older falls [10].

Maintaining good eye and hearing health is an essential part of ageing well, particularly because of the link between poor vision and hearing with falls [11,12].

Older adults with hearing loss are at 2.4 times greater risk of falls than their peers in the general population [13].

Three quarters of severe falls that result in hospital admission through A&E are directly attributable to sight loss [14] and absent or incorrect spectacles (such as an out-of-date prescription) is highlighted as a risk factor [15].

Falls is one of the most common causes of hospitalisation for people aged over 65, costing Ireland about €500 million every year [16].

There are more than 460 nursing homes in Ireland providing care to more than 25,000 people [17] who are disproportionately affected by poor vision and hearing loss.

The human cost of falls includes pain, injury, distress, loss of confidence and a greater risk of death [18].

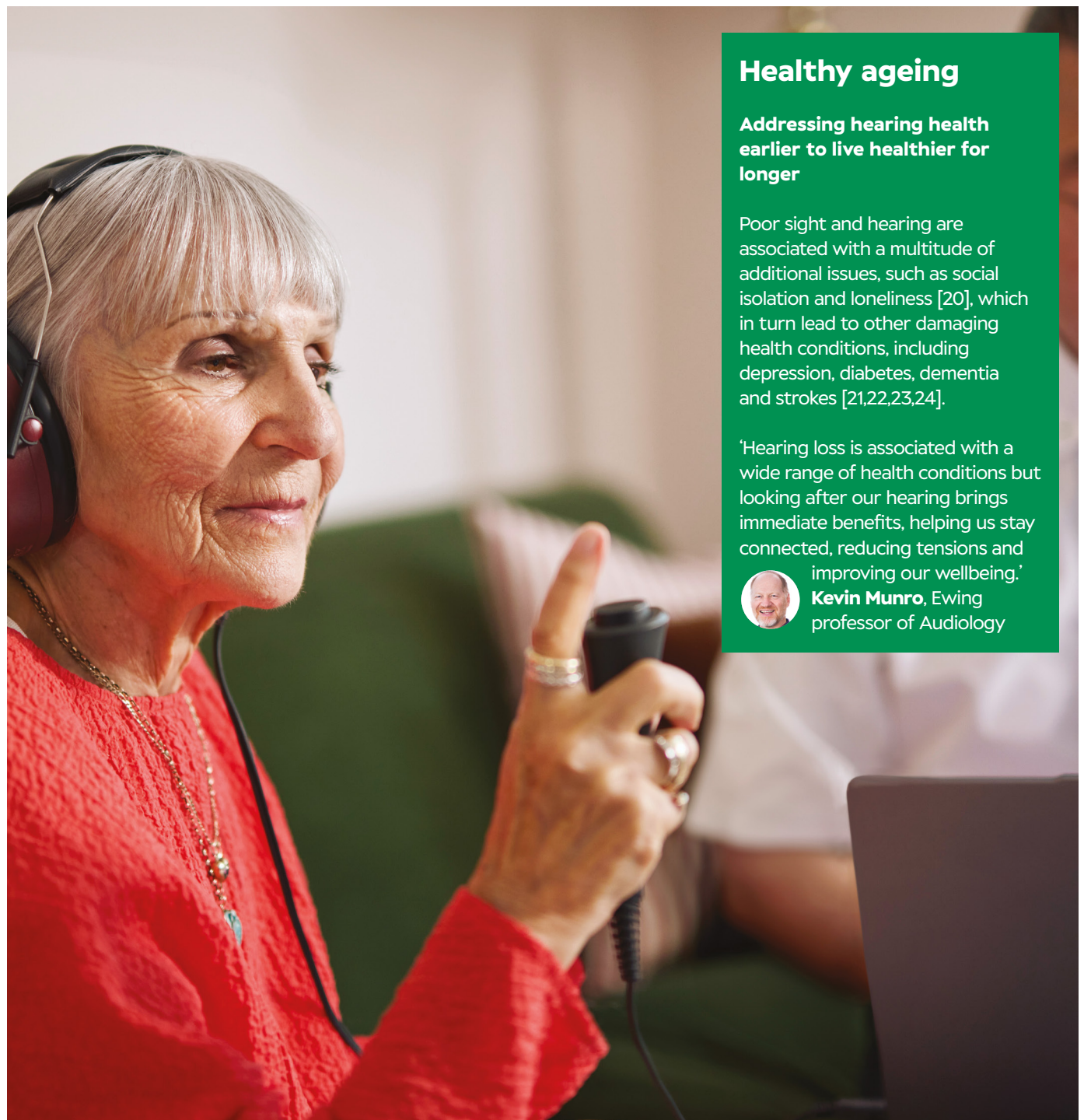
New evidence shows that restoring hearing through the use of hearing aids could be protective, especially when people wear them consistently [19]. Hearing aids can now be customised using smartphone apps to work with assistive living devices, such as wireless microphones and TV connectors, to enhance communication and listening experiences for people. Including hearing health as part of active living and falls prevention programmes can deliver wider health and wellbeing benefits.

Community optometry and audiology are an integral part of community-based care, providing a range of ear and eye health services. Using this highly qualified workforce to its full extent will free up capacity within the health service, in return for very little cost to the taxpayer and an overwhelming improvement in patient health outcomes and quality of life.

‘Patients who are not entitled to TBS/PRSI-funded care – HSE medical card holders – do not have access to community-based services. As part of a whole system solution, linking public and private provision as part of an integrated hearing care service could help meet increasing demand for services and improve access to care for vulnerable groups. Introducing a nationally commissioned community audiology service will address unmet need at reduced cost and take pressure off GPs and A&E departments. This approach would allow hospital based diagnostic and paediatric services the capacity to provide best care. More importantly, it could deliver a step change in the care and quality of life of adults with age-related hearing loss.’



**Orla Walsh**, Specsavers Director and Audiology Chair for Ireland



## Healthy ageing

**Addressing hearing health earlier to live healthier for longer**

Poor sight and hearing are associated with a multitude of additional issues, such as social isolation and loneliness [20], which in turn lead to other damaging health conditions, including depression, diabetes, dementia and strokes [21,22,23,24].

‘Hearing loss is associated with a wide range of health conditions but looking after our hearing brings immediate benefits, helping us stay connected, reducing tensions and improving our wellbeing.’



**Kevin Munro**, Ewing professor of Audiology



## 2. Right care

### Delivering value in health

Specsavers is a leading provider of eye and hearing care for the Department of Social Protection treatment benefit scheme and the HSE's COSS community eyecare scheme. Its partnership model means each local practice is owned and run by expert opticians and audiologists serving their communities.

With more than 92 optical and audiology businesses - open seven days a week - Specsavers supports local economies through jobs, professional development and increased footfall.

Clinical leads work with local teams to ensure safe, effective care. Patients benefit from advanced technology, such as OCT eye scanners for early detection of glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy, and AI-assisted hearing aids that enhance speech clarity in noisy environments.

Operating as a network of empowered local practices backed by global resources, Specsavers uses

data and patient feedback to develop services and support pioneering research, delivering life-changing outcomes for individuals and communities. This report highlights proven community models that improve efficiency, ensuring more patients get the care they need, as soon as they need it.

Local audiology teams already deliver vital health care and are ready to deliver even more, closer to home. Easy access to HSE hearing care should be a key part of prevention. Commissioning a community audiology care service could help tackle the wider health impacts of untreated hearing loss.

#### OUTSTANDING PATIENT CARE



Brian Maher, Hearing Aid Dispenser at Specsavers Clonmel, was one of the inaugural recipients of the Dame Mary Perkins Medal for Outstanding Patient Care.

Alongside his role in-store, Brian has earned a degree from Queen Margaret University and credits Audiologist David Hughes for his ongoing support throughout his professional development.

Brian's dedication is exemplified by his compassionate care for a patient experiencing hearing loss after the removal of an acoustic

neuroma brain tumour. He treated the patient with empathy and understanding, recognising the emotional and personal challenges that come with hearing loss. His commitment extends well beyond the initial appointment, ensuring continued support throughout each patient's journey.

Karen Dunlea, Retail Director at Specsavers Clonmel, says: 'Brian believes hearing care should be accessible to everyone. He consistently goes the extra mile, including running a monthly clinic in the local prison to support underserved individuals.'

## Economic cost and opportunity

Specsavers commissioned studies for Ireland to give an accurate view of need within the Irish audiology sector.

**51%** of the Irish adult population, or around 2m people, say they have a hearing issue.

The age breakdown is startling with **80%** of working age (18–64 years), including **28%** aged 18 to 34 years.

**€8,200**

In Ireland untreated, disabling hearing loss costs an average of €8,200 per person annually [25].

Audiology, when delivered via existing community audiology practices, is exceptional value for money relative to the cost of untreated hearing impairment.

**80,000+**

Hearing loss affects more than 80,000 of Ireland's workforce [26] - 40% of people with hearing loss retire early due to struggles with communication at work [27].

Hearing technology can empower people to stay in work.

**Age-related**

hearing loss, if untreated, is one of the largest avoidable risk factors for dementia [28].

Age-related hearing loss is the most common form of hearing loss accounting for 94% of cases [29]. This can be treated safely in the community yet currently patients are referred to busy hospital audiology services instead.

## Reducing unnecessary diagnostics

### Community practices using hospital grade technology to save sight

Specsavers has invested €3.4m to install more than 75 specialist OCT eye scanning machines in practices throughout Ireland, bringing hospital grade technology into the community and giving us huge capacity to support the health service. This equipment allows for the comparison of scans year-to-year, helping reduce avoidable vision loss.

'With the training we provide to ensure appropriate patient referrals, this technology is having a dramatic impact on our quality of care and the reassurance we provide to patients.'



**Kerril Hickey**, Specsavers  
Director and Optics Chair  
for Ireland

### Supporting the HSE

Specsavers audiology service cares for patients funded by the Department for Social Protection Treatment Benefit Scheme and patients who pay for their own care. With more than 80 hearing experts, including 50 registered Hearing Aid Dispensing Audiologists supported by association clinical practitioners, we test and fit the latest hearing technology.

'Our clinicians deliver a range of services, such as hearing tests, fitting hearing aids and wax removal, caring for communities throughout Ireland.'



**Orla Walsh**, Specsavers  
Director and Audiology  
Chair for Ireland



## 3. Right place

### Transforming access to HSE hearing care in the community

There are limited community hearing services for patients who are not entitled to PRSI funded care under the Treatment Benefit Scheme. This is a large cohort because many people who need support for age-related hearing loss are from a generation which predated voluntary PRSI contributions for self-employed people. Estimates based on responses to Freedom of Information requests and Ministerial responses to questions from TDs in 2024 indicate that more than 140,000 people need between 12,500 and 15,000 adult hearing loss pathways per annum. 14,000 of these are currently on a waiting list, with an average waiting time of 15 months.

The Department for Health has recognised the huge and growing need among adults with age-related hearing loss due to the ageing population. The Working Group, established in August 2024 and chaired by Gary Norman, National Clinical Lead for Audiology, is developing recommendations for a holistic model of hearing care in Ireland. The work includes reviewing current provision, capacity constraints, referral pathways between acute and community care, workforce planning and appropriate regulation. The

report, due in Q1 of 2026, will include recommendations to improve patient outcomes and reduce waiting times.

### Reducing adult hospital attendance by funding community audiology services for HSE medical card holders

Moving HSE care for age-related hearing loss into the community is a proven model in other countries where the biggest challenge driving long and growing ENT waiting lists is unnecessary referrals into ENT [30] - 50% of referrals into ENT should not be in hospital (hearing tests, wax removal, ear infections).

‘There’s a real opportunity to make better use of community audiology services to improve access to hearing care, particularly for older people. Expanding options for patients would help reduce waiting times and ease pressure on hospital clinics, ensuring people get the care they need when they need it.’



**Conor Sheehan TD**, Labour Party



Medical Optics and Specsavers founders, directors and senior leaders

'Glaucoma is a leading cause of irreversible blindness, with demand for care expected to rise 33% during the next decade. It can severely impact quality of life - limiting mobility and independence. Peripheral vision loss also increases the risk of falls and hip fractures. Regular eye exams and timely access to specialist care are essential to prevent avoidable harm and preserve vision.

Early detection is crucial because vision lost to glaucoma is irreversible. Glaucoma is a condition that often

requires lifelong monitoring and management - patients must receive repeated follow-up on time, every time. Optometrists, ophthalmologists and the HSE must work together locally to achieve this.

Medical Optics has been a trusted family business serving patients with glaucoma and a breadth of other eye conditions in Dublin for many years.

Medical Optics is now in partnership with Specsavers. This partnership will build on the incredible work we've always done in caring for our patients and will enable us to care for even more patients in the future. Together we can facilitate better access to care for people who need it.'

**Max Treacy**, Consultant Ophthalmologist and CEO of Medical Optics

### CLINICAL EXCELLENCE

Optometrist Catherina McGleenon has been honoured for looking after the eye health of Nutgrove by Specsavers founders Doug and Dame Mary Perkins. She is one of only five Specsavers optometrists from the Republic of Ireland and the UK to receive the 2025 Doug Perkins medal for clinical excellence. Catherina has been an optometry partner for more than 20 years and has built a reputation for delivering expert, personalised eye care in a welcoming and professional environment in her two practices: Dundrum and Nutgrove. She has played a pivotal role in providing enhanced eye care to patients in communities in South Dublin, ensuring they have high quality, affordable and accessible eye care. She has actively built partnerships with local GPs and ophthalmologists, ensuring a seamless referral process for



patients requiring secondary care. Her proactive involvement with local community groups, such as Active Retirement and Men's Sheds has made eye care more open, understandable and accessible to vulnerable and underserved groups within the community.

Says Catherina: 'I am passionate about supporting the next generation of optometrists and

have supervised numerous pre-registration students. I am incredibly lucky to lead a talented team of 20 optometrists in the two practices, who are all committed to providing the highest standard of care to every patient. I would like to see the role of optometrist expand in Ireland to include independent prescribing, shared care within an integrated healthcare model and funding for myopia management'.



## 4. Right time

Access to eye and hearing health services quickly and close to home can play a transformative role in early detection to preserve sight, prevent more serious conditions developing and minimising risk of further hearing loss.

### Reducing waiting times and optimising resources

#### Preventing avoidable sight loss

**Half of all sight loss is avoidable** with early detection and timely treatment, yet around half the adult population do not get regular eye tests [31].

**Ophthalmology** is one of the busiest outpatient specialities in the HSE and has the longest waiting list in the country [32].

**Glaucoma** is a leading cause of irreversible sight loss - often without symptoms in the early stages.

**Early diagnosis** and ongoing care can help most people retain useful vision for life [33].

Glaucoma accounts for **more than 20%** of outpatient appointments in hospital eye care [34].

**Almost 41,000 people are waiting** for their first HSE ophthalmology appointment [35].

Reform to make the delivery of glaucoma care in the community more consistent has already begun. An Oireachtas Health Committee [36] considered sharing the workload between hospitals and community specialists to prevent more people losing sight unnecessarily and there is now an ophthalmology-led pilot.

'In Ireland, about 3% of individuals over the age of 50 years have glaucoma [37]. More than 50% of glaucoma cases in Europe remain undiagnosed [38]. Increasing involvement of optometrists in glaucoma shared care schemes will help reduce the referral rate to hospital clinics [39]. Easy access to OCT machines within the community, supported by visual field analysis, is an excellent way of discovering glaucoma at an early stage. Suspected cases can be referred quickly for an ophthalmology opinion and appropriate treatment can begin preventing progression of the disease.'



**Dr Garry Treacy**, Consultant Ophthalmologist with a special interest in glaucoma

## Modernising hearing care pathways

# 30%

**HSE waiting lists for audiology treatment have increased by 30 per cent since 2020 [40].**

Despite the dedication of HSE clinicians, wait times for hearing services, including hearing aids, assistive tech and ear wax removal, continue to grow.

Around 14,000 adults with HSE Medical Cards are not eligible for the Treatment Benefit Scheme (TBS) and remain on waiting lists for treatment of adult-onset hearing loss.

International models show that community-based audiology can complement hospital services, helping reduce waiting lists and freeing up hospital capacity for complex cases like paediatric or hearing loss due to illness or injury.

The 2024 Waiting List Action Plan highlights ENT as a priority. To align with Sláintecare 2025+ goals of universal, timely and equitable care, community providers - already delivering HSE - funded eye care - could also offer hearing assessments and aids. This would ensure fair access for all Medical Card holders, regardless of TBS eligibility.

'The Treatment Benefit Scheme helps working-age and retired adults with sufficient PRSI contributions access hearing care. However, older and more vulnerable people who rely on a HSE Medical Card often face long waits, despite hearing loss having the most significant impact on their health and wellbeing. A nationally commissioned community audiology service would shorten wait times for HSE patients, ease pressure on hospitals, and - over time - reduce social isolation and support independent living.'



**Orla Walsh**, Specsavers  
Director and Audiology  
Chair for Ireland

### JIM'S STORY



Jim Blake, 79, from Rathfarnham, first started wearing hearing devices in his early sixties.

Says Jim: 'As a business consultant I can't afford to be in a meeting and miss out on any of the detail. I needed hearing aids and was able to get €1,000 towards the cost through PRSI. I just gave my ID number for an eligibility check - there was no form filling. The only issue I have is when I leave the house and have to go back because I've forgotten to put the blooming things in!'

## Ear wax removal - a vital service

'Relying on hospital ENT for wax management causes a delay and is an expensive and unnecessary use of specialist resources.' Professor Kevin Munro, Ewing Professor of Audiology, NIHR Manchester Biomedical Research Centre [41].

Commissioning this service from community audiologists (providing PRSI funded services), would enable standard setting and improve patient safety.

'Ear wax build-up presents a significant barrier to timely and effective hearing care, particularly for individuals with reduced dexterity who may struggle to self-administer ear drops. This issue can delay essential assessments, such as hearing tests and the fitting of hearing aids, often necessitating repeat clinic visits and prolonging access to appropriate care.

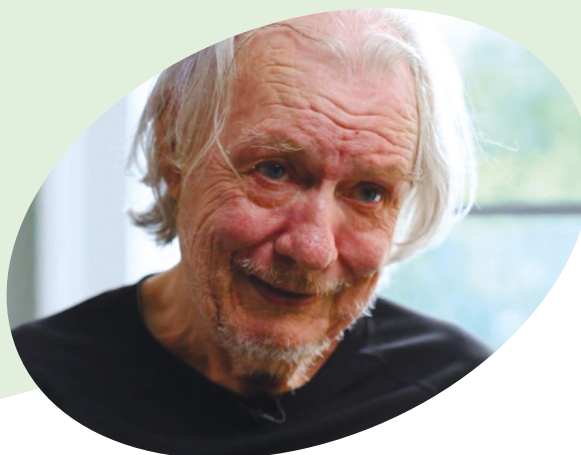
Our practice in Dublin provides ear wax removal services seven days a week to meet the high demand in our community. This enhanced access has enabled earlier identification of underlying hearing issues previously obscured by wax, allowing more patients to benefit from timely intervention and improved health



outcomes.'  
**Gillian Murphy**, Specsavers  
Audiology Director



Des, Focus  
Ireland LEAP  
Ambassador



## Improving equity of access for vulnerable populations

'Our ambition is for anyone experiencing homelessness to access free, appropriate eye and hearing care. We are working with Focus Ireland and people with lived experience to find ways to address health issues more creatively and less medically.'



**Giles Edmonds**, Specsavers  
Clinical Director (Optics)

'For families living in emergency accommodation, accessing what we consider basic care can be life-changing. The impact of being able to see or hear properly is huge. It opens up a whole new world and supports them in their next step, whether that's education, work, or moving on from homelessness.'



**Dee**, Support Worker at Focus  
Ireland

'The main reason people need that access to care, especially eye tests and hearing tests, is because it's a foundation. For me, especially coming from an engineering background, any trade job you go into, you're going to need to do a hearing test. You're going to need to do an eye test. You're going to need to do a medical in most jobs. So if you don't have that access, you can't move forward.'

**James**, Focus Ireland LEAP Ambassador

'I was asked by the council to go and do courses but how could I do the courses when I couldn't hear? Small things can be very hard to combat on the streets. Something as simple as booking a hearing test can feel impossible without support. Confidence is one of the main attributes I received from hearing aids. That's why access matters - it gives people the ability to move forward. I walk in confidence now.'

**Des**, Focus Ireland LEAP Ambassador

'Access to healthcare is about dignity. Something as simple as glasses can restore confidence and independence for someone who's been struggling in silence.'

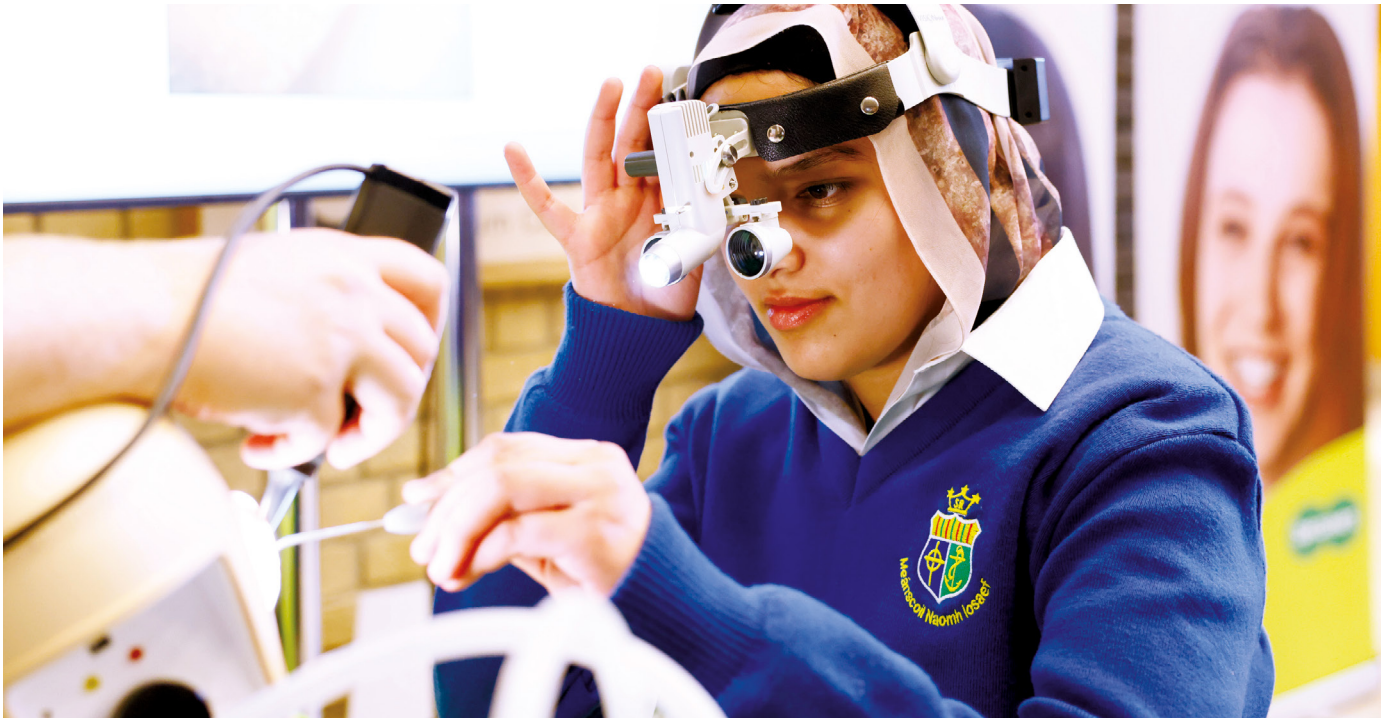


**Darren**, Specsavers Optometry  
Director

Early intervention supports communication, emotional well being and social inclusion, while normalising hearing checks and promoting health equity.

James, Focus  
Ireland LEAP  
Ambassador





Specsavers engaging students at TY Ireland 2025

# 5. Strong foundations

## Nurturing the next generation

Through our work to extend access to care, Specsavers is embedded in local communities and neighbourhoods throughout Ireland, supporting local economies, creating jobs and revitalising communities.



**In November 2025 we were named 8th Best Workplace in the world**

'Specsavers is committed to investing in the future of audiology. Irish stores sponsor employees to train as Hearing Aid Dispensers, enabling them to earn while they learn through hands-on clinical experience. We support practices with funding to cover course fees, travel and accommodation - removing barriers and unlocking career opportunities for the next generation of clinicians.'



**Laura Monaghan**, Head of Careers (Audiology)

## Leadership and learning

'To deliver high-quality care, we're constantly developing our workforce and investing in advanced training - equipping teams in practices, support offices and supply chain sites with future-ready skills. More than 100 CORU registrants have attended our hybrid development events in Ireland, combining in-person and online sessions.'



**Grant Duncan**, Director of Professional Development

**+100**

CORU registrants received continuing professional development credits through Specsavers development events

**+50**

students from Ireland and Northern Ireland have been trained as HADs in the last four years

'We're innovating to help practitioners thrive in modern healthcare. The modular approach of our Audiology Practitioner programme enables patient care once competency is met. Our audiology graduates training includes time with Focus Ireland, supporting our homelessness initiative - gaining clinical experience while making a meaningful social impact. To stay relevant in our fast-evolving field, clinicians need structured CPD, product education, employer support, feedback and opportunities for progression. Audiologists must lead change - not wait for it - especially with AI reshaping the field.'



**Sonam Sehemby**, Head of Audiology Clinical Training

'I didn't know what I wanted after school but a Specsavers placement changed that. I stayed on as an Optical Assistant and when the directors suggested audiology training, I saw it as a way to work and study. I completed all Audiology Practitioner modules and became Ireland's first fully qualified AP. I love problem-solving during fittings and aftercare to give patients the best results. Now, I'm studying for an audiology degree at Queen Margaret University while working because I've found the right career.'



**Holliee Quinn**, Specsavers Audiology Practitioner



# Technology advances in community optometry and audiology are already highly developed

Innovations in OCT advanced eye scanners are constantly transforming the range of diagnostic and monitoring activities that can be carried out in community practices.

**'Community optometry OCT scans, myopia control and AI are game changers in delivering eye care to our communities. Work is needed to integrate them into existing frameworks and pathways operated by the HSE in order to fully utilise the capacity that community eye care can offer in reducing wait times and improving outcomes.'**



**Owen Blee**, Specsavers Optometry Director

The latest hearing devices use AI and connect to smartphones, allowing audiologists to send remote adjustments that users can upload and give feedback on directly.

**'AI is transforming audiology - helping prevent, diagnose and treat hearing issues. It speeds up testing, predicts risks like falls and personalises care through smart hearing devices which enhance sound quality, reduce noise and connect via Bluetooth to phones and TVs. The real prize is better patient outcomes. We must lead this change responsibly, use data ethically and break down siloed care. AI gives us the chance to do better and we must seize it.'**



**Orla Walsh**, Specsavers Director and Audiology Chair for Ireland

'Over the counter hearing devices could encourage earlier action and reduce stigma. While OTC options offer convenience, they are self-fitted using apps and don't check ear health or rule out underlying issues. That's why it's important to see an audiologist first if you notice changes in your hearing.'

**Rory Perry**, President of ISHAA

**'Remote tests and OTC hearing aids risk missing occluding ear wax, which affects a significant proportion of users. We need to address this concern.'**



**Kevin Munro**, Ewing Professor of Audiology



Specsavers Longford has won the 2025 Dame Mary Perkins Medal for Customer Service Excellence, taking the top prize for Best Customer Service across all practices in the Republic of Ireland and the UK.

Optometry Partner Fiona Ferguson credits the win to the team's dedication to personalised care: 'Our team consistently goes above and beyond, tailoring each

experience to individual needs and receiving glowing feedback from the community. We're thrilled to be recognised and will celebrate this achievement together.'

The Longford team has built strong relationships with local healthcare providers and pride themselves on supporting older customers and those with reduced mobility through accessible, personalised service.

Fiona adds: 'Specsavers Longford is a vital part of the local health service, working to improve quality of life for our community.'

The team also celebrated a milestone in 2023, when a colleague who joined on day one of their training, qualified as a Dispensing Optician and became the new Retail Director. 'Career development at Specsavers is limitless,' says Fiona.

## We can do so much more for the nation's health



'The World Health Organization (WHO) calls for stronger public health action to prevent hearing and vision loss. We advocate for integrating hearing and vision care into national health plans and promotion of safe listening standards.' **Dr Shelly Chadha**, Technical Lead for Ear and Hearing Care at the World Health Organisation

'I'm a GP and for non-emergency hearing or vision issues I want you to know that you can go directly to your community optician or audiologist. These professionals are highly trained and can offer you expert advice and care - often without needing a referral. You will get quicker access to treatment for eye conditions and early support to make it easier to adapt to hearing aids.'

Community providers play a vital role in community healthcare, helping reduce pressure on GPs and hospitals. They are ready to help you take the next step in your health journey.

If you do suddenly lose hearing in one or both of your ears it could be a medical emergency and you should



contact your GP urgently or go direct to the Emergency Department.' **Dr Zoe Williams**, GP and TV doctor

# We're ready to help patients get more timely care

**Every day, our clinicians provide expert care that transforms lives through better sight and hearing. We are embedded in communities, helping people live healthier lives and reducing pressure on GPs and hospitals by delivering care closer to home.**

We are proud to support the HSE in tackling long waiting lists and improving outcomes. Our practices are locally owned and led by clinical partners who understand their communities and innovate to meet local needs.

Specsavers is committed to raising the bar in community services. We're investing in hospital-grade technology, such as OCT with AI, to detect conditions including glaucoma earlier. We are delivering joined-up care that spans audiology and optics and now we are partnering with Medical Optics, who deliver specialist ophthalmology services ensuring patients receive timely treatment for more complex eye conditions. We are also tackling health inequalities by improving access for disadvantaged groups, including people experiencing homelessness.

Specsavers is a trusted healthcare provider, building the expertise of future clinicians. Our people are our strength - dedicated, skilled and passionate about making a difference.

We must work together to deliver Sláintecare so that pressure on GPs and hospitals is reduced and patients are seen in a timely manner. Local optometry and audiology practices, staffed by qualified clinicians who are members of the community, are already delivering services close to people's homes. Making better use of existing resources and infrastructure will improve access to care - so people get the right care, in the right place, at the right time.



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## Specsavers access to care report

This report showcases proven community models that deliver efficiencies ensuring more patients get the care they need, as soon as they need it.

Qualified optometrists and audiologists in the community are already delivering vital healthcare services and they could be doing so much more. Our sector has the capacity, the technology and the skills to provide services closer to home.

Elected representatives must implement the right policy decisions to enable us to transform access to care, offering patients greater convenience, wherever they live.



‘We’re ready to help patients get more timely care’



**Kerril Hickey,**

Specsavers Director and Optics Chair for Ireland



**Orla Walsh,**

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This report is available to download from [Specsavers.ie/reports/access-to-care-2025](https://Specsavers.ie/reports/access-to-care-2025)

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