

The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

39 Victoria St, London, SW1H 0EU

Sent via email: dhsc.sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Mr Streeting,

We are writing to you from a wide range of leading UK deaf organisations.

Every day we see the devastating impact that inaccessible health services have on our community.

Virtually every deaf person in the UK has experienced barriers to accessing healthcare: from the lack of accessible information in British Sign Language, to the poor provision of interpreters, to the over-reliance of many health providers on telephones.

And these are not minor issues. Lack of accessible information and communication can lead to misdiagnosis, incorrect treatment, misunderstood instructions, and in extreme cases, fatalities. In addition to serious health complications, there are also many ethical concerns raised by poor access: hearing children having to translate for their deaf parents, for example.

These are widespread problems. A recent report, [Still Ignored](#), published by SignHealth and RNID, shows that 88% of BSL users believe poor access to NHS services affects their mental health, and 82% say it affects their physical health.

These statistics are very worrying, but there is positive news on the horizon.

SignHealth, the UK's deaf health charity, manage a campaign [Still Sick of It](#), which is fighting to break down these healthcare barriers. Through webinars, political lobbying, media work and community engagement, they have been informing deaf people about the right to accessible healthcare and campaigning to ensure politicians, the NHS and the media are aware of the barriers our community faces. We would welcome your support for this vital campaign.

We have been pleased to see the Government's renewed focus on access in recent months. In the 10-year plan, the Government made two commitments which we believe will have a really positive impact.

Firstly, the promise of a Single Patient Record. This would remove the need for deaf patients to constantly have to inform healthcare providers that they are deaf and require accessible information. By listing a patient as deaf on their Single Patient Record, there would be the opportunity to break down these barriers, allow healthcare professionals to prepare in advance for a deaf patient and speed up treatment.

Secondly, we welcome the promise of greater investment in the NHS App. We note the Government's promise in the 10-year plan that *"Deaf people will be supported through British Sign Language accessibility"* via the App. This would be a major development for our community and could really help to break down barriers to access.

Alongside the 10-year plan, there is also the Accessible Information Standard (AIS) which is aimed at ensuring patients *"can access and understand information about NHS services"* and *"receive the communication support they need."* This is an important piece of guidance, but it is very rarely implemented. The Still Ignored report shows that 75% of NHS staff lack confidence in how to implement the AIS. We welcome the creation of a new sixth step to the AIS – review – and also note the Government's promise to make the AIS stronger in future.

It is clear that the Government is committed to making the NHS accessible for all.

Promises of a Single Patient record, a BSL-accessible NHS App and a strengthened AIS are all very welcome. We want to work with you to ensure these promises are delivered.

For decades, deaf people have been treated as second-class citizens in the healthcare system. Deaf people continue to experience misdiagnosis, disproportionate waiting lists, cancelled appointments and lack of accessible information on a daily basis.

We are encouraged by recent policy promises and we believe that by working together we can finally start to break down these long-lasting barriers.

We would welcome the opportunity for some of our representatives to meet with you to discuss these issues in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lucy Warnes', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lucy Warnes, CEO, **SignHealth**

In alphabetical order by organisation:

Craig Crowley, Chief Executive Officer, **Action Deafness**

Matt Jenkins, Chair, **Association of British Sign Language Teachers and Assessors (ABSLTA)**

Tessa Slaughter, Chair, **Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI)**

Dawn Marshall, Director, **Becoming Visible**

Gail Penberthy, CEO, **BID Services**

Kathryn McCarthy, Head of School (Primary), **Blanche Nevile School for Deaf Children**

Teresa Quail, National Executive Officer, **British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People (BATOD)**

Rebecca Mansell, Chief Executive Officer, **British Deaf Association**

Andy Palmer, CEO, **Cambridge Deaf Association**

Justin Smith, Chief Executive Officer, **Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (CfD)**

Mike Ritchie, Chair, **Chester and District Committee for Deaf People**

Philippa Wynne, Trustee, **Children of Deaf Parents UK (CODPUK)**

Matthew Shrine, Welfare Director (Chair of Board), **CODA UK & Ireland CIC**

Alison Jones, CEO, **Communication Unlimited**

Nicola Alloway, Acting Manager, **Cumbria Deaf Association**

Stuart Harrison, Director of Operations, **Deaf & Hearing Trailblazers CIC**

Philip Gerrard, CEO, **Deaf Action**

Gill Reader, CEO, **Deaf and Sensory Network**

Claire Adshead, Project Manager, **Deaf Cancer Support Project with Macmillan and Self Help UK**

Matthew Talbot, CEO, **Deaf Connexions and Rotary House for the Deaf (Norfolk and Norwich)**

Michelle Cunningham-Jones, Head of BSL Access, Engagement and Advocacy, **Deaf Empowering Network**

Alana Harper, CEO, **Deaf Links**

Jasveen Kaur, Committee Member, **Deaf Parenting UK**

Malcolm Sinclair, Chair, **Deaf Teachers of the Deaf**

Paula Garfield, Artistic Director, and Frankie George, Executive Director, **Deafinitely Theatre**

Niki Johnson, Chair; Janice Silo, Vice-Chair; and Teresa Waldron, CEO, **Deaf-initely Women**

Reg Cobb, Chief Executive, **deafPLUS**

Teresa Dawson, CEO, **Deafway**

Alexis Johnson, CEO, **Doncaster Deaf Trust**

Rebecah Taylor, **Doncaster School for the Deaf**

Dani Sive, Headteacher, **Frank Barnes School for Deaf Children, London**

Lesley Reeves-Costi, Co-Headteacher, **Heathlands School for Deaf Children**

IOCN Steering Group, **IOCN Steering Group, Interpreters Of Colour Network**

Claire Baldwin, Co-Director, **Manchester Deaf Centre**

Janice Connolly, Community Engagement Manager, **Merseyside Society for Deaf People**

NUBSLI Board Sign Language Interpreters / Translators, **National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters (NUBSLI)**

Fran Connor and Sarah Shaw, Joint Interim CEOs, **Nottinghamshire Deaf Society**

Dr Mark Wheatley, Chief Executive Officer, **Royal Association for Deaf People**

Paul Burrows, Headteacher, **Royal School for the Deaf Derby**

Craig Pothecary, Well-being Coach, **Sandwell Deaf Community Association**

Elaine Campbell, SCOSLI Secretary, **Scottish Collaborative of Sign Language Interpreters (SCOSLI)**

Kate Pesaud, SBC Representative for BSL Alliance, **Sign Bilingual Consortium of Schools (SBC)**

Tony Barlow, Director/Centre Manager, **Signing Network CIC and Leicester Deaf Centre**

Theresa Thomas-Morton, Chief Executive Officer, **The National Register of Communications Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)**

Irfan Yusuf, Chair, **The Regulatory Body for Sign Language Interpreters and Translators (RBSLI)**

Chris Ratcliffe, CEO, **UK Deaf Sport**

VLP Management Committee, **Visual Language Professionals (VLP)**

Richard Jones, Centre Manager, **Warrington and District Society for Deaf People**

Bob Marsh, Managing Director, **Zebra Access CIO**