

Ear Wax: KONP Factsheet

Hearing and health are intimately linked. Ear wax blocking the ear canal is a major cause of hearing loss but treatment is no longer freely available on the NHS. This is a crucial example of just how easy it is to privatise an essential service resulting in negative impact on huge numbers of people.

- around 2.3 million people in the UK require professional ear wax removal each year
- this was once freely available at GP surgeries but now people are having to pay for treatment (e.g. £55 at Boots and Specsavers); the charge deters many from seeking help and some may resort to potentially harmful self-treatment
- hearing loss is important for lots of reasons – it can lead to withdrawal from social situations, emotional distress, depression and increase the risk of loneliness and of dementia¹; troublesome symptoms can include earache, ringing in the ears and dizziness
- if removal of ear wax does not restore hearing, further investigations are required, and hearing aids may be appropriate for some; wax must first be removed in order for a full assessment of hearing loss
- the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is clear that “ear wax removal should be offered (free on the NHS) where there is clinical need, in primary and community settings”²
- this is not happening in practice because GPs are no longer funded to provide the service
- a survey of 1500 people in 2022³ showed that provision of NHS provided ear wax removal services is at best patchy and at worse non-existent, driving it into the realm of the private sector
- KONP Oxon have produced a report based on local case studies and have been campaigning for two years to get the local NHS to fund a proper service⁴
- KONP nationally urges and support its local groups to campaign for free NHS provided ear wax removal treatments
- work is planned with other national organisations such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), Age UK and the National Pensioners Convention to press for funding for ear wax removal treatment to be included in the General Medical Services contract so that it can be done in GP surgeries once again
- this involves raising awareness amongst both the media and professionals about the importance of this issue and the impact the lack of service is having on millions of people, ultimately putting pressure on ministers, shadow ministers and MPs to reinstate a free, universal and NHS provided ear wax removal service
- the RNID has called for ear wax removal to be reinstated as a nurse led service⁵

1. <https://medicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-hidden-risks-of-hearing-loss#>

2. NICE Guideline [NG98], 2018, Hearing loss in adults: Assessment and management. Available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng98>

3. Access Blocked: The Impact of Cutting NHS Ear Wax Removal Services RNID 2022; <https://rnid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ear-Wax-Report-FINAL.pdf>

4. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19592953.oxfordshire-campaign-group-demands-nhs-ear-wax-treatment/>

5. <https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/primary-care/calls-to-reinstate-nurse-led-ear-wax-removal-in-primary-care-22-12-2022>