

INNOVATION IN HEARING CARE (UK) – POSITION STATEMENT

March 2018

As a leading body in the hearing sector, the NCHA will champion all innovation which meets the criteria of safety, effectiveness, patient and public benefit. This will include safe self-management, innovation in hearing technologies (e.g. hearables, over-the-counter devices, hearing aids, cochlear implants etc.), enhanced community hearing services, properly funded hospital services and advancement of the hearing professions.

In the UK 11 million adults have a hearing loss, and within a decade this will increase to 13 million¹. The vast majority have unmet hearing needs, which can have a major impact on quality of life. The scale of unmet hearing needs in the UK is now widely recognised as a major and growing public health challenge. Innovation in hearing care will be at the heart of tackling this challenge as our population grows older.

In recent years, there has been opposition in many countries to new technologies which potentially challenge established modes of care in both the self and state-funded sectors. Almost invariably new technologies eventually find their place amongst existing services, often enabling previously excluded groups to access primary levels of care for the first time.

Most forms of innovation meet systems inertia and even outright opposition in the early stages of adoption, even when these are self-evidently in the public interest. Hearing care is no exception, with resistance to new models of care making it increasingly difficult for the NHS to meet growing hearing needs in a sustainable way, heightening the risk of implicit and explicit rationing of services.

For this reason, the NCHA is publicly stating its position of supporting innovation which improves quality of life, outcomes and access for people with hearing and communication difficulties, and challenging barriers to change in the public interest.

In these ways we and our sector partners will help avoid a public health crisis by improving access for millions of adults who are currently excluded from seeking help for hearing and communication difficulties in the UK.

End

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¹ NCHA 2018, UK adult hearing loss projections, better ear average dBHL over four frequencies, 2018 and 2028.