



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
The Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Sent via email

26 October 2021

Dear Prime Minister and Chancellor,

Building back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs

As Chairs, Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs of All-Party Parliamentary Groups representing people who may require help with communication or eating and drinking safely, we are writing to call for improved access to speech and language therapy.

We know over 80 organisations wrote to you about this in March, Prime Minister. Some of these organisations provide our secretariats. We know you recognise that there is an issue with people accessing speech and language therapy. The Government made this clear in its response to a parliamentary petition calling on you to fund improved support for people with communication and swallowing needs. We urge you to use the Budget to ensure everyone is able to get the speech and language therapy they need.

As you know, many of the people our APPGs represent depend on and value speech and language therapy. It transforms their lives. It enables them to achieve their potential at school and in the workplace. It supports them to be economically active. It contributes to them living as independently as possible for as long as possible. It helps them to live better lives.

People who contributed to a recent report by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, *Speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19*, said that speech and language therapy makes their lives better. They also said that it makes the lives of their families and carers better.

For many of those people, however, the impact of COVID-19 on their access to therapy has been extensive. *Speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19* found that:

- 81% of children and young people had less speech and language therapy during the first UK-wide lockdown. 62% did not have any therapy at all.
- 52% of adults had less therapy than before lockdown. 44% had no speech and language therapy at all.



- People living in the most deprived areas of England fared worst. A higher percentage in the most deprived areas had less therapy than in the least deprived areas.

Those who had no, or reduced access to, speech and language therapy include:

- children with delayed speech or language development.
- children and young people with a long-term speech, language and communication need. This includes those with developmental language disorder. It also includes those with a stammer, those who are deaf or those with a genetic condition or rare disease, such as 22q11 Syndrome.
- children and young people with a special educational need or disability or with a specific learning difficulty.
- autistic people of all ages.
- people with learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or muscular dystrophy.
- working age adults recovering from a stroke or with an acquired brain injury.
- people living with a progressive neurological condition. These include Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, and multiple sclerosis.
- an older person living with dementia.

People have said not having access to speech and language therapy made their lives worse. It affected their education. It affected their social life and friendships. It affected their mental health, their work and their home and domestic life. They also said it made the lives of their families and carers worse. They are also concerned about future access to therapy. They are worried how this will affect their education. They are worried about the effect on their mental health. They are also worried about the impact on their social life and friendships and on their home and domestic life.

Academic research bears this out. Failing to identify and support communication and swallowing needs can affect people's physical and mental health and wellbeing. It can affect their educational attainment and put them at risk of exclusion from school. It can affect the forming of positive relationships. It can also affect their employment. It can put some people at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. This can include youth justice settings or adult prisons.

Providing adequate funding for speech and language therapy services now is crucial to reducing present and future risks. It can reduce the need for even more public funds to be spent in the future because people's needs have not been identified and supported earlier.

It is also crucial to addressing pre-pandemic issues with access to therapy. Many services were under severe pressure before March 2020. COVID-19 has only exacerbated those pressures. Services now face a significant identification and intervention backlog. This includes the need to provide:

- speech and language therapy to people with long COVID, a brand new clinical area.



- extra support to children whose language development has been impacted by lockdown.
- extra support to adults whose condition has deteriorated significantly because of reduced access to therapy.

As the Government recognises, there is also a growing role for speech and language therapy in mental health services. There is also an increased emphasis on access to community rehabilitation.

We know that you want to build back better. We know that you want to spread opportunity across the country. We know from the Secretary of State for Education that a moral imperative for the Government is children recovering what they have lost during the pandemic. We know that you want to address what the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has recently described as ‘the disease of disparity’. We urge you to use the Budget to improve access to speech and language therapy. If you do, people with communication and swallowing needs will be able to live the happy and fulfilled lives that we all want them to live.

Yours sincerely,

Geraint Davies MP
Chair, APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties

Lord Shinkwin
Vice-Chair, APPG on Speech and Language Difficulties

Lilian Greenwood MP
Chair, APPG on Assistive Technology
Chair, APPG on Deafness

Huw Merriman MP
Chair, APPG on Autism

Paul Maynard MP
Chair, APPG on Cerebral Palsy
Chair, APPG on Penal Affairs

Mary Kelly Foy MP
Co-Chair, APPG on Cerebral Palsy

Steve Brine MP
Chair, APPG on Childcare and Early Education

Wera Hobhouse MP
Chair, APPG on Childhood Trauma

Baroness Tyler of Enfield



Co-Chair, APPG on Children
Co-Chair, APPG on Social Mobility

Baroness Greengross
Co-Chair, APPG on Dementia

Dr Lisa Cameron MP
Chair, APPG on Disability
Chair, APPG on Down Syndrome
Chair, APPG on Health

Apsana Begum MP
Chair, APPG on Domestic Violence and Abuse

Andrew Lewer MP
Chair, APPG on Motor Neurone Disease

Lord Monks
Vice-Chair, APPG on Multiple Sclerosis

Mary Glendon MP
Chair, APPG on Muscular Dystrophy
Chair, APPG on Parkinson's

Emma Hardy, MP
Chair, APPG on Oracy

Baroness Gale
Co-Chair, APPG on Parkinson's

Lord Storey
Co-Chair, APPG on School Exclusions and Alternative Provision

Sir Bob Neill MP
Chair, APPG on Stroke

cc: The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, Secretary of State for Justice