



**Parliamentary evening to improve care
for people with severe to profound hearing loss
(On the occasion of World Day of Hearing March 3)**

PRESS RELEASE

**For a better health and quality of life: The German Hard of Hearing Association
calls for better access to cochlear implants for people with severe to profound
hearing loss.**

Berlin, March 4, 2021 – The German Hard of Hearing Association (DSB) called for better awareness of cochlear implants and more targeted education of health professionals to support people with severe hearing loss in referral pathways to cochlear implant treatment. During the Parliamentary Evening with policy makers and members of parliament in attendance, the focus of discussion was better care for people with severe hearing loss, and discussion about the urgent need for policies and strategies to help many more people to hear again.

In Germany a total of 14 million people, around 19%¹, live with hearing loss. Many with severe to profound hearing loss receive little to no benefit from hearing aids and may be suitable for evaluation for cochlear implants. However, less than 5% of those who may benefit receive cochlear implant treatment. Untreated hearing loss has measurable personal, health and economic consequences: It impacts quality of life, may cause secondary diseases and results in unemployment or underemployment rates².

The discussions about the need to increase awareness and improve care pathways for those who may benefit from cochlear implants coincided with today's release of the WHO's first World Report on Hearing³. The report calls on policy makers to raise the priority of hearing care and to invest in cost-effective interventions such as hearing aids and cochlear implants for children and adults.

On World Hearing Day (March 3), members of the German Bundestag and state parliaments as well as representatives of various ministries engaged in the Parliamentary Evening organized by the DSB to learn about the care needed for people with severe to profound hearing loss. Although cochlear implants open enormous opportunities for many hearing-impaired people, there is a lack of structure to guarantee those affected can access information, comprehensive advice and diagnosis. This was the unanimous opinion of the speakers present. "When hearing aids no longer provide sufficient help for hearing impaired people and other therapy services are not available, this is accompanied by considerable health and social risks for those affected," explained Dr. Matthias Müller, President of the DSB. At the same time, inadequate hearing care leads to high costs - it is therefore also of economic and social relevance. "The provision of high-quality cochlear implants allows hearing-impaired people

¹ Reference: <https://www.schwerhoerigen-netz.de/statistiken/?L=0>:

² Reference: PM des DSB, 11.03.2019: „Unbehandelte Schwerhörigkeit verursacht hohe Kosten“

³ Reference: WHO, World Report on Hearing, 2021. <https://www.who.int/activities/highlighting-priorities-for-ear-and-hearing-care>



to participate and enjoy a better quality of life. Unfortunately, the care path is far too often associated with almost insurmountable obstacles."

Speakers make it clear that while cochlear implant provision is available in many places⁴, those affected tend to have many questions and can struggle to make an informed decision.

The realities of life for those affected were highlighted during the event with Ursula Soffner, Vice President of the DSB and herself a cochlear implant recipient, providing additional information about her path to better hearing. "I only learned that the option of a cochlear implant was available to me after years of searching in vain," said Soffner, "Whether it was my re-entry into professional life, my volunteer work in the DSB or even my membership in a choir - the CI has fundamentally improved my life and opened up things for me that seemed impossible for a long time."

There are too many hurdles on the way to better hearing for people with severe to profound hearing loss: Those affected need timely access to information, counseling, diagnosis and treatment. They should not have to wait years.

When hearing aids are no longer sufficient, the search for a better hearing therapy proves too difficult for those affected, said Dr. Harald Seidler, head physician at the specialist ear, nose and throat clinic MEDICLIN Bosenberg in St. Wendel. "People with severe hearing impairment are too rarely referred to a CI clinic," said Seidler, who himself hears with a hearing aid and a cochlear implant. In addition, he said, the number of those who are profoundly deaf, yet do not have a cochlear implant, is increasing. To reverse this trend, all the professions involved in providing care - from ENT physicians in private practice and hearing care specialists to doctors and therapists in the clinics - must work hand in hand.

An assessment also shared by Prof. Dr. Timo Stöver, Director of the Department of ENT Medicine at the University Hospital Frankfurt am Main: "Particularly in the case of severely hearing-impaired people, it is important that ENT physicians and funding agencies critically review the effectiveness of a hearing aid fitting in accordance with applicable regulation. The new guideline on cochlear implant fitting provides clear guidance on when a cochlear implant should be considered⁵. In these cases, affected patients need early access to further information and support services."

Establishing consistent standards of care across the board needs the support of policymakers.

Many guests attending virtually took the opportunity to ask questions. Organisers considered this first event a success: "We are pleased that our informative program was met with such lively interest," explained Dr. Matthias Müller, "We hope that this will help to establish the high standards of care that we already have at numerous centers in Germany on a nationwide basis." Driving this forward is not only the task of the professional groups involved, the CI clinics, and the patient associations: "Active support is also needed from political stakeholders and payers," said Müller.

⁴ Reference: https://www.schwerhoerigen-netz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/dsb/Dokumente/Information/Service/Ratgeber/Ratgeber8_Das_Cochlea_Implantat.pdf, Seite 3

⁵ Reference: AWMF-Leitlinie „Cochlea-Implantat Versorgung“ der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Hals-Nasen-Ohren-Heilkunde, Kopf- und Hals-Chirurgie e. V. (DGhNO-KHC) <https://www.awmf.org/leitlinien/detail/II/017-071.html>.



Further information on the German Association for the Hard of Hearing e. V. (DSB) can be found at www.schwerhoerigen-netz.de.

If you have any questions about the DSB, please contact Dr. Matthias Müller, President of the German Hearing Impaired Association (Deutscher Schwerhörigenbund e. V.), and/or Renate Welter, Member of the Executive Committee: Tel.: (030) 47 54 11 14, E-Mail: dsb@schwerhoerigen-netz.de

Background Information:

The German Association for the Hard of Hearing (DSB) represents the interests of people with hearing loss and deafness in Germany at a local, state and national level. The foundation of the DSB's work are the local associations and self-help groups, which have joined together to form state associations and the national association. Further information can be found at www.schwerhoerigen-netz.de.

The **cochlear implant (CI)** is placed under the patient's scalp and extends into the patient's inner ear. It converts spoken words and other acoustic signals into electrical impulses. These impulses stimulate the auditory nerve, which is located in the cochlea. Each CI also includes a sound processor with a transmitting coil, which is worn either behind the ear like a hearing aid or alternatively free from the ear. For children born deaf and severely hearing impaired to deafened children, as well as severely hearing impaired and deafened adults, the CI can reopen access to the world of hearing and spoken words.