

The Rt Hon. Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP
The Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

22 March 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

Improving access to speech and language therapy

As members and supporters of the Invest In SLT campaign, we are writing to say how pleased we were to hear your comments about speech and language therapy at Prime Minister's Questions on 11 February, and to urge you to lead cross-Government action on the issues affecting access to speech and language therapy for people of all ages.

As David Pinto-Duschinsky highlighted in his question, millions of people across the United Kingdom live with communication disability, difficulty, or difference. Many also have difficulties with eating, drinking, and swallowing. While your response acknowledged welcome work to support children and young people, it is vital to recognise that communication and/or swallowing needs affect people across the whole life course — from infancy and childhood, through working age adulthood, to later life — and for those people to live the lives they wish to live, achieve their potential, and contribute to the economy and to society, they need access to the unique professional experience and expertise of speech and language therapists.

Communication is fundamental to participation in education, employment, health care, and civic life, and central to our relationships and quality of life. Around 10% of children and young people have long-term speech, language, and communication needs. Many of these persist into adulthood, while many adults also acquire communication disabilities or difficulties, either through accident or illness. Without timely support from speech and language therapists, these needs can negatively affect mental health, educational attainment, employability, independence, and social inclusion, and sometimes they can lead to involvement with the criminal justice system. Unsupported difficulties with eating, drinking, and swallowing can lead to people choking, aspiration pneumonia, hospital admission, and sometimes even death. All of this can result in extra public funds needing to be spent down the line because people have not been supported earlier.

Despite the life-changing impact of speech and language therapy, access remains inconsistent and often delayed, with children and young people, and adults, facing long waits for services. In some cases, people with certain conditions, especially adults, effectively have no access to a service through the NHS. These delays and barriers to access risk poorer outcomes educationally, economically, socially, and in terms of overall wellbeing, leading to increased health inequalities, and greater long-term costs for public services.

There is also a recognised workforce challenge. Speech and language therapy is a profession in short supply, with longstanding failings in workforce planning, recruitment and retention, and continuing professional development. Without strategic investment and improved workforce planning, services will continue struggling to meet current and future demand.

We welcome the Government's recognition of these issues and welcome many of the recent proposals to reform SEND, including significant investment to provide education settings with wraparound support from professionals such as speech and language therapists; but more needs to be done to guarantee that children and young people with the most complex needs who require specialised or intensive speech and language therapy will have access to timely, evidence-based intervention. Much more also needs to be done to improve access to speech and language therapy for adults with communication difficulties.

Following the very powerful Westminster Hall debate on the Invest in SLT petition on 27 January 2025, we were pleased to meet the Minister for Care in March 2025 and were delighted that he pledged to work with us on developing an action plan with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, and NHS England to tackle the issues affecting access to speech and language therapy.

A year on, we, and many others, are concerned about the pace of progress and the absence so far of a published plan or clear implementation timelines. We are, therefore, calling on you to take the lead, and ensure that the action plan is published as soon as possible.

Investing in speech and language therapy is not only a health or education matter; it also supports the Government's wider missions, including economic participation, reduced inequality, improved mental health outcomes, safer communities, and better life chances. Early intervention and adequate provision for people of all ages – babies, children, young people, and adults – will help to reduce future demand on health, social care, education, and justice systems, and deliver both social and economic benefits.

As Prime Minister, you are uniquely placed to ensure that the speech and language therapy action plan is published so we urge you to help tear down the barriers to opportunity that too many people of all ages with communication and/or swallowing needs and their families face.

We stand ready to support you in that and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Mikey Akers, founder and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Louisa Akers, parent and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Francesca Beard, speech and language therapist

Samantha Berry, someone who has had speech and language therapy

Yas Firth, parent and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Dave Harford, parent

Karen Massey, speech and language therapist and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Sharon Oliphant, parent

Gillian Rudd, speech and language therapist

Pam Slater, parent and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Georgia Wilson, parent and trustee of Mikey's Wish Foundation

Steve Jamieson, Chief Executive of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Members of the Invest In SLT campaign home team

Charlie Ayling, speech and language therapist

Lorraine Bamblett, speech and language therapist

Laura Brown, parent and founder of Spinning World of Autism

Robyn Rice, parent

Ruth Rowntree, speech and language therapist and founder of Speech Apraxia UK

Members of the Invest In SLT campaign advisory group

The letter is also signed by:

Gillian Lacey-Solymar, co-presenter, on behalf of the *Movers and Shakers*

Action for Stammering Children

Afasic

ASLTIP (Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice)

Association of YOT Managers

Auditory Verbal UK

BACCH (British Association for Community Child Health)

BACD (British Academy for Childhood Disability)

BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

BASW (British Association of Social Workers)

BATOD (British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People)

Better Communication CIC

British Psychological Society

CLAPA

CommTap CIC

Communication Matters

Different Strokes

Disabled Children's Partnership

Down's Syndrome Association

Dyscover

Headlines

Huntington's Disease Association

Include.org

Intensive Interaction Institute

Mikey's Wish Foundation

MS Society

N-ABLES

NAPLIC

National Association for Hospital Education

NatSIP

Natspec

Pace

Parkinson's UK

pdnet

Rett UK

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

sen.se

SMiRA

Speakeasy

Speech & Language Link

Speech and Language UK

Speech Apraxia UK

Speech Bubbles

SPTS

Square Peg

STAMMA

Talking Mats

The Makaton Charity

The National Organisation for FASD

The Neurological Alliance

The SENCO Forum

UKABIF

Unique

cc: Education Secretary, Health and Social Care Secretary

Email of the petition organiser:

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