# National Deaf and Hard of Hearing NHS Staff Network - guidance for setting up a deaf and hard of hearing group in your organisation

The Leadership Group of the National Deaf and Hard of Hearing NHS Staff Network are planning to establish regional networks in March 2025, after the national network has been in place for a full year.

In the meantime, feedback from our national meetings has indicated that many deaf and hard of hearing members of staff have struggled to set up staff networks or support groups within their own organisations.

We have produced this guidance in response to that feedback. We recognise that all NHS organisations are different, varying widely in size and governance structures, but this guidance should help you to ask the right questions and make an effective case for establishing your group.

## What do you have in place already?

It's helpful to find out what is in place already, both within your organisation and within your Integrated Care System (ICS).

* If you are part of an NHS Trust you probably have staff networks in place already within your organisation. If information about their governance and budget is not available on your intranet, or if you do not have access to your intranet, contact your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team or Human Resources team and ask them for as much detail as possible.
* If you do not have staff networks in your organisation, e.g. if you are working for an Integrated Care Board (ICB) or in primary care, contact the Equality Diversity and Inclusion team or Human Resources team in your ICB to find out what's in place across the system.
* If other organisations in your system have a deaf and hard of hearing group already you can a) use them as an example of best practice, to prove you should have one too and/or b) ask if you can join or collaborate with them.

## Can you evidence the benefit of your group?

Showing how many people would benefit from your group, and what the positive outcomes would be, will help your case.

* If you can find out how many deaf and hard of hearing staff you have, either via a staff record system like ESR or by calling for people to get in touch with you (via your Communications team and/or traditional means like posters) you will be able to evidence how many people your proposed group will support.
* Committing to group outcomes beyond peer support will show further benefit, for example if you would like to check new or revised policies to ensure deaf inclusion, or if you can advise on improving patient care for deaf and hard of hearing service users and carers.

## Who will be running your group?

Ideally you will need a core group around you to help you establish, grow and future-proof the group.

* If anyone else has expressed interest in setting up this group, ask them exactly what they can commit to, e.g. sharing chairing responsibilities, managing the membership list etc.
* If no one else has expressed an interest in setting up this group, contact your Communications team and ask if you can put a call out for deaf and hard of hearing colleagues to get in touch with you, through the intranet, staff-wide communications, and more traditional means like posters and leaflets.

## What exactly are you asking for?

A clear ask in terms of governance, budget and support will help your case. Find out who your key decision-maker is, and present them with a well thought out proposal.

* Be clear about what you're asking for given your organisation's current groups, e.g. a staff network or a support group. If your organisation has a disability staff network you may be able to form a sub-group, which means you could benefit from any administrative or budgetary support they have.
* Set out a comprehensive plan of your proposed group's first year, including who will lead the group, how often you will meet, whether you will meet in person or face to face, and what you are going to achieve in your first 12 months.
* Be honest about what resources you will need, such as money for interpreting, or administrative support. If you can be fully self-sufficient then include this in your proposal too.

## Are you still experiencing barriers?

If your proposal is still met with resistance you can find allies, point to best practice, and appeal the decision.

* Look for other examples in neighbouring or similar organisations where a deaf and hard of hearing group has been established. Reach out to them for feedback on how well their group has been received, and the impact it has had, to show the difference your group would have.
* Find allies to support your cause, such as other staff network or support group leads in your organisation or neighbouring/similar organisations, or your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team. If you have a disability network they may also have an executive sponsor - a member of the Board who champions the network - and you could ask them for support/endorsement.
* If your application has been formally refused, ask for a written record of the reasons why and see if you can address those reasons on a point by point basis, e.g. if your organisation is concerned about the level of support you will need, look for ways to be self-sufficient.
* Do not accept any refusal on the grounds of unfairness to other disabilities or protected characteristics - other groups may need staff networks and support groups too, but this should not affect your proposal. The National Deaf and Hard of Hearing NHS Staff Network has already proven that deaf and hard of hearing colleagues have a distinct need for peer support in order to reduce isolation and improve emotional health and wellbeing.
* Look for further ways to strengthen your case, such as testimonials from deaf and hard of hearing colleagues about the barriers they currently experience, and how much a peer support group would help them.