



The Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists

Pre-Budget Submission 2019

IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPISTS

August 2018

Executive summary

The Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT) is the recognised professional association of Speech & Language Therapists (SLTs) in Ireland, representing both service users and professionals. It is the position of IASLT that significant investment in Speech and Language Therapy is required if the profession is to deliver the aims of Sláintecare (1);

- Speech and Language Therapy should deliver clinically appropriate care at the lowest level of complexity.
- Speech and Language Therapy must have provision for care in the community setting that is closest to the service user's home.
- Speech and Language Therapy must be provided in integrated packages of care for chronic illness and neurodegenerative illnesses (2).

IASLT call on the Government to address the needs of people with communication and swallowing difficulties in Budget 2019. IASLT have identified the following key areas for investment:

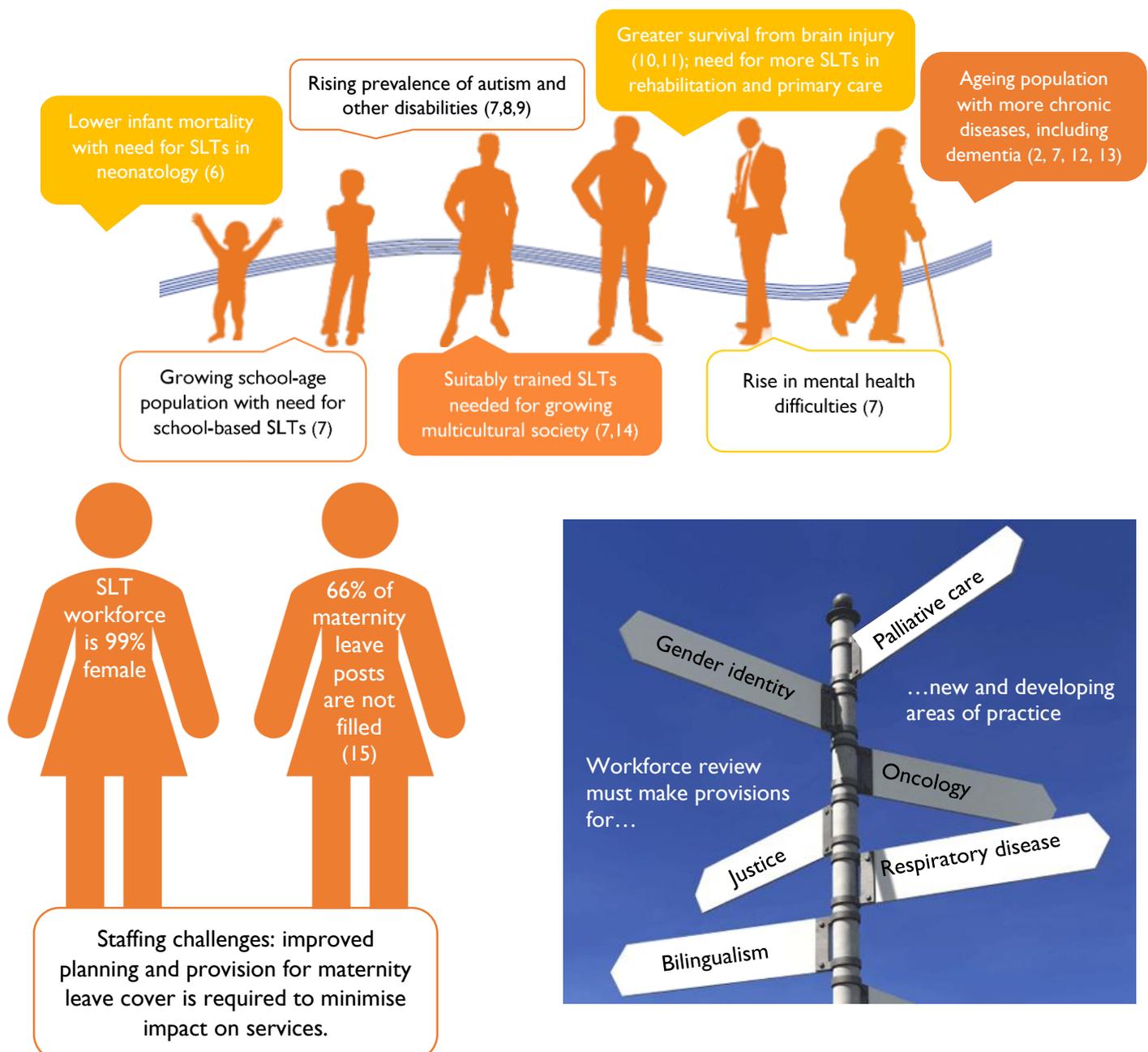


Evidence from the UK suggests that every £1 invested in Speech and Language Therapy will result in £1.46 to £6.43 in health care cost savings (3).



A comprehensive workforce review must be commissioned

The HSE identifies 1098 SLTs currently working in Ireland across CHOs and Hospital Groups (4). Substantial continued investment in Speech and Language Therapy services is required to meet the needs of our population, across the lifespan. IASLT calls on the government to commission a comprehensive analysis of the Speech and Language Therapy workforce, to identify how the profession can deliver the right care in the right place at the right time. Consultation with IASLT is critical to guide and inform this process, which will require consideration of relevant demographic and public health factors, as well as staffing challenges which have emerged since the Bacon Report in 2001 (5). Such a review must also make provision for new and developing areas of practice.

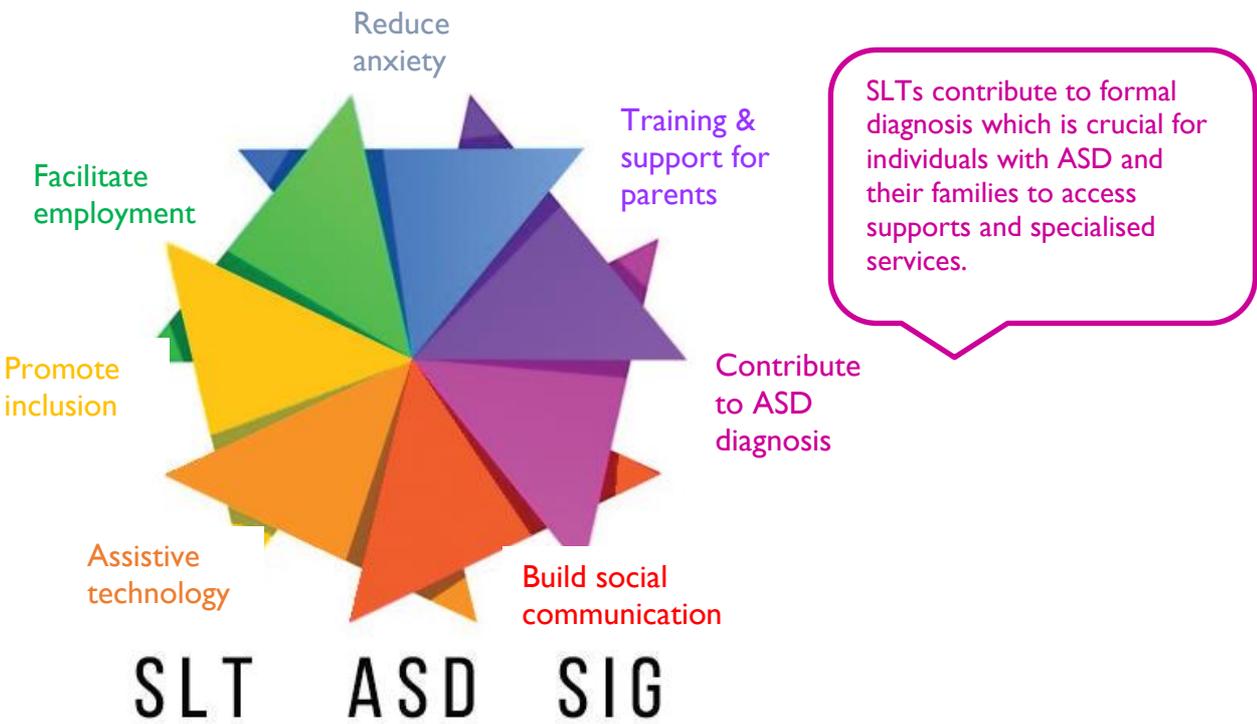


€6 million investment in Speech and Language Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorder

Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Ireland is currently estimated at 1/100 or 1% of the population (9). The prevalence of ASD is thought to have increased by approximately 20-fold in recent decades (17) indicating an urgent need for continued and increased investment in service provision for this population.

In 2017, Seanad Éireann passed the Autism Spectrum Disorder Bill, which outlined the need for a national Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategy to “set out how the needs of persons with autism spectrum disorder are to be addressed throughout their lives”. The Bill clearly acknowledges the critical role of SLTs, as part of a multi-disciplinary team, in the diagnosis and treatment of ASD.

As experts in social communication and interaction, SLTs’ specialist knowledge aims to support individuals with ASD across the life span. Current research suggests upward of 80% of adults with ASD are unemployed. Speech and Language Therapy interventions are essential to support people with ASD to transition into third level education and/or into a dynamic workforce. Adequate workforce planning of SLT grades is required to best meet the service provision needs of children and adults across Primary Care and Disability Network Teams. The HSE’s *National Model of Care for Paediatric Health Care Services in Ireland* recommends a ratio of 1.5WTE/100 children with disability.



€1.5 million for urgent provision of Speech and Language Therapy posts in mental health

There is a recognised need for SLT within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) (18). There is also a well-proven prevalence of communication and swallowing impairments among adults with mental health disorders, as studied in the Irish context (19, 20, 21).

While IASLT acknowledges that Speech and Language Therapy services are developing in many CAMHS teams, significant investment is still needed before the full benefits of SLT within mental health services can be realised. There is considerable under-staffing, within CAMHS in general but especially within SLT in CAMHS, as well as in infant mental health, adult mental health, psychiatry of later life, and for clients with dual diagnoses (e.g. mental health and intellectual disability or mental health and substance abuse).

Currently, only four dedicated SLT posts for adult mental health exist nationwide. The discrepancy between Speech and Language Therapy staffing for child and adult mental health services is inequitable, and in particular poses challenges to vulnerable young adults transitioning from child mental health services, but for whom adult services are not available.



Significant risks are posed by lack of Speech and Language Therapy provision within mental health multidisciplinary teams.

Choking episodes, related to medication-induced swallowing disorders, are prevalent in the adult mental health population where medications (e.g. for schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder) can significantly impair ability to swallow safely (20, 21, 22, 23). Choking can be life-threatening. SLTs in adult mental health services are therefore crucial to ensuring safe eating, drinking and swallowing for this population.

Choking is the 2nd most common clinical incident in mental health services; **326** events from 2010-2014 (24).



Communication ability is integral to participating in many child and adult mental health programmes to enable recovery. Lack of investment in Speech and Language Therapy for individuals with mental health difficulties therefore threatens to undermine the effectiveness and economic value of the “talking therapies” employed within Psychology and counselling.

€6 million to support development of Speech and Language Therapy services for chronic and neurodegenerative illnesses

IASLT welcomes the Sláintecare Report (1), and in particular the investment in expansion of capacity of primary care but warns that a significant increase in funding for Speech and Language Therapy in adult primary care is required to meet the needs of our population. SLTs in primary care provide care for individuals with chronic & neurodegenerative illness (such as stroke, Parkinson's Disease, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)) at the lowest level of complexity, in the setting closest to the service user's home (including in an individual's own home or nursing homes).



SLTs play a crucial role in prevention of hospital admissions for individuals with swallowing disorders due to chronic and neurodegenerative illness, who are at increased risk of pneumonia. Timely management of swallowing disorders by an SLT can reduce pneumonia incidence and avoid hospital admissions (3). Yet many older adults do not have access to community Speech and Language Therapy (25), with lengthy waiting lists in adult primary care nationwide and a complete lack of adult primary care SLT posts in some areas.

UK evidence shows that for people with swallowing problems following stroke, every £1 invested in low intensity SLT saved nearly £2.50 in health care costs, through avoidance of chest infections (3).

Focus on: rising numbers with Dementia

Over 56,000 people live with dementia in Ireland (2). Incidence of dementia in people with intellectual disability (ID) is up to five times higher than in the general population (26). These individuals may develop dementia at a young age (2) and are often unable to access dementia care through traditional pathways for over-65s. SLTs can support people with dementia, including those with ID, to make informed decisions, thus maintaining their independence and participation in society for longer. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act (2015) was designed to protect the autonomy of those with reduced capacity (e.g. due to dementia). Current SLT provision for community-based dementia care must be increased to support implementation of this legislation in full. SLTs also play a vital role in end-of-life care for individuals with dementia by supporting safe eating, drinking and swallowing. There has been minimal investment in SLT posts to support the Palliative Care Services 3-year Development Framework (2017). These gaps must be addressed as the prevalence of dementia is projected to rise by more than 100% by 2041 (13), so increased SLT provision for this population is urgently required.

A taskforce is needed to establish SLTs in the justice system

IASLT is calling on the government to urgently address the need highlighted in our 2018 pre-budget submission to employ SLTs across the criminal justice system. SLTs will play a key role in supporting the Department of Justice to minimise communication barriers across the Irish legal system. Communication disability discriminates against and disempowers all involved in the justice system- victims of crime, young offenders and all Garda, legal and justice personnel dealing with these vulnerabilities.

Although the (Criminal Justice) Victims of Crime Act (2017) was an important step in addressing the needs of victims, it has alarming exclusions. While the Act provides for provision of interpreters where a foreign language is deemed a barrier to communication, to avoid gross injustices, it is vital that equal provision is made for persons with communication disabilities.

IASLT holds that at present every Irish citizen with a significant communication disability is highly vulnerable to being excluded from due process

Role of SLT with victims:

- ✓ Assessing communication competence to testify
- ✓ Training Gardaí, legal and justice personnel to support communication
- ✓ Facilitating autonomous communication at all stages of the justice process



Role of SLT with offenders:

- ✓ Identifying communication disability
- ✓ Supporting understanding of the justice process
- ✓ Facilitating participation in verbally mediated rehabilitation

SLTs also work with young offenders. Over 60% of young offenders have a communication disability (28, 29, 30). Research shows that reoffending rates were cut by more than 30% when offenders received Speech and Language Therapy (31).

Ireland must ensure that the justice system makes provision for those with communication disabilities in line with best international practice. A taskforce to scope the development of Speech and Language Therapy in the justice system must be established without delay.

€1 million to make provision for new and developing areas of practice

To ensure that future Speech and Language Therapy provision in Ireland can continue to meet the needs of our changing population in the most economical way, IASLT is calling on Government to work collaboratively with the professional body by funding a Research Officer and a National SLT Policy Advisor.



These posts are required for key functions, e.g. to:

- Work with central government to ensure government strategy and policy supports those with communication and swallowing impairments
- Support, develop, and initiate research across the profession of Speech and Language Therapy, to ensure evidence-based, effective service delivery in the Irish context
- Act as a liaison for the Sláintecare Implementation Group
- Assist in identification of, and resource allocation for, new and developing areas of practice e.g. neonatal care, transgender services, etc.

A conservative estimate of €1 million is required within the next 2 years to address this.

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