# Inquiry launched into misdiagnosis of hearing impairments in children



Wes Streeting, the UK Health Secretary, has initiated a significant inquiry concerning the misdiagnosis of hearing impairments in children by the National Health Service (NHS). This investigation follows alarming revelations that thousands of children may have been incorrectly diagnosed as deaf, which could have detrimental effects on their learning and communication abilities, leading to long-lasting consequences for their development.

The inquiry comes in light of an alarming statistic: at least 775 children across England have been recalled for reassessment after undergoing hearing tests from 2018 to 2023 due to concerns about misdiagnosis. Furthermore, an additional 1,374 children are anticipated to be evaluated in the coming two months. Among those reviewed, 107 have been identified as suffering serious harm due to these misdiagnoses, with many children mistakenly classified as deaf instead of receiving appropriate interventions such as hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Professor Sir Stephen Powis, the national medical director at NHS England, has acknowledged that the issues may extend beyond the reported 2018 timeframe. The consequences of these errors can be severe, potentially leading to developmental delays in language, learning, and social skills. There are fears that some children may have been mislabelled with learning disabilities and subsequently placed in special needs schools, despite their actual needs being manageable with appropriate hearing devices.

The inquiry's progress has been hampered by delays in NHS recall procedures, particularly in the southwest region, which has yet to commence its assessments. Camilla Kingdon, a consultant neonatologist and former president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, has been appointed to oversee the investigation.

Wes Streeting expressed his shock at the magnitude of this issue, categorising it as a ‘profound breach of trust’ between families and the health service. Speaking to The Sunday Times, Streeting emphasised the importance of early diagnosis, stating, “The first few years are a crucial window for speech and language development that, once missed, cannot be fully recovered.” He highlighted the lack of timely action from senior NHS leadership as ‘unforgivable’, asserting that the culture within the NHS often obscured problems rather than addressing them directly.

The origins of the concerns trace back to a 2021 incident at the NHS Lothian health board in Scotland, which prompted a review by NHS England across several hospitals. This led to a broader inspection of all 142 audiology centres in the UK, revealing systemic issues. Whistleblower reports in June 2023 indicated that subpar testing practices in paediatric audiology units had potentially impacted thousands of children. Subsequent internal reports estimated that as many as 1,500 children could have faced misdiagnosis, raising alarm about the speed at which the NHS was responding to these concerns.

Wes Streeting has mandated that hospitals across England now conduct thorough reviews of their records to identify and assist any children who may have been overlooked. He reiterated his commitment to ensuring that such incidents would not be repeated, stating the need for an independent review to provide clarity and to draw lessons from the situation.

Professor Sir Stephen Powis acknowledged the distress experienced by affected families, stating the NHS’s recognition of the urgency of the situation while noting challenges in securing enough expert audiologists to cope with the demand for reassessments. The broad scope of the inquiry into these misdiagnoses highlights significant issues within the NHS system, with further assessments ongoing to ascertain the full extent of the impact on children across the nation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.nhs.uk> - This NHS link would typically provide general information on hearing tests and diagnosis in children, although it does not directly address the misdiagnosis issue mentioned in the article.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news> - The UK Government News page might have announcements or updates from Wes Streeting regarding health initiatives or investigations related to the NHS, though it may not specifically address the hearing impairment misdiagnosis.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health> - BBC News Coverage of Health Issues often includes significant stories about NHS practices and investigations, which might cover the inquiry into misdiagnosis of hearing impairments in children.
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/news/uk> - The Sunday Times coverage might include interviews with Wes Streeting or articles on NHS controversies, potentially offering insights into the misdiagnosis scandal and its implications.
* <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events> - The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health website hosts news and updates from professionals in the field, which might touch upon misdiagnosis in children and ongoing investigations.