

## **Stroke and speech and language therapy**

### **January 2026**

#### **Why this matters**

- Every year, more than 100,000 people in the UK have a stroke — including over 400 children – and there are 1.4 million stroke survivors in the United Kingdom.<sup>i</sup>
- Around one-third are left with communication difficulties (aphasia, dysarthria)<sup>ii</sup> and swallowing problems (dysphagia) are very common after a stroke.<sup>iii</sup>
- These difficulties affect recovery, independence, return to work and family life.
- Speech and language therapy is crucial for stroke recovery, as it helps survivors regain communication skills necessary for daily tasks, work, and family life by improving speech and language abilities. This therapy supports a person's capacity to set and achieve functional goals through tailored interventions.
- However, people receive too little therapy and too late, despite communication being fundamental to daily living, and participation in family life and work.

#### **Where speech and language therapy makes the difference**

##### ***Acute care***

- Immediate speech and language therapy input supports safe swallowing and reduces risk of pneumonia, malnutrition, and hospital-acquired complications.
- It also provides a vital communication lifeline in the hours and days following a stroke, helping people understand, engage in other rehabilitation therapies, and have their needs met.

##### ***Life after stroke***

- Speech and language therapists support people to regain and adapt their communication so they can reconnect with family, return to work, manage finances, navigate services, and actively participate in their communities.
- They also help people with ongoing swallowing difficulties to eat and drink safely and enjoy meals, reducing the risk of isolation, malnutrition, and hospital readmission.

##### ***Children and young people***

- Over 400 children a year experience stroke. Speech and language therapists provide ongoing support to meet changing educational and social needs as they grow.

### **Advanced Clinical Practitioner (ACP) roles**

- In some stroke services, speech and language therapists in Advanced Clinical Practitioner posts lead service redesign, improve patient flow, and carry out capacity assessments for treatments (for example, anticoagulation).

### **Digital therapies**

- Alongside face-to-face therapy, speech and language therapists use computer and tablet-based tools and apps to provide additional self-administered therapy, which can increase the total amount of practice and offer more opportunities for recovery. Research shows benefits from these tools, supplementing face-to-face therapy, and enabling greater access to therapy.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Current issues**

- **Too little, too late:** stroke survivors report long waits before therapy begins, and support often ends too soon.<sup>v</sup> Many people cannot access the intensity and duration of therapy recommended for optimal recovery — even though the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy ROOT data shows that, when delivered effectively, therapy makes a significant difference to communication outcomes.
- **Recovery takes time:** recovery can be a lengthy journey, lasting months or even years. Therapy should continue for as long as people are making functional gains — yet, too often, services are withdrawn prematurely.
- **Workforce shortages:** community and hospital teams do not have enough speech and language therapists to meet demand. Many services fall short of the national workforce levels recommended by NICE and the National Clinical Guideline for Stroke.
- **Health inequalities:** people living in deprived areas and those from minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience stroke and face poorer recovery outcomes.
- **Children's stroke:** Services are not consistently resourced to address the long-term impact of stroke on children's learning, language development, and family life.

### **For more information**

- Visit: <https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/clinical-information/stroke/>
- Contact: [elissa.cregan@rcslt.org](mailto:elissa.cregan@rcslt.org)

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/statistics>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/effects/aphasia>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/effects/physical/swallowing-problems>

<sup>iv</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). *Computerised speech and language therapy can help people with aphasia find words following a stroke*. 2024. Available at:

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<https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/computerised-speech-and-language-therapy-can-help-people-with-aphasia-find-words-following-a-stroke/>

<sup>v</sup> Stroke Association. *Stroke Association highlights how stroke survivors with communication problems are left without support*. Press release, 20 May 2025. Available at:

<https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/stroke-association/pressreleases/stroke-survivors-with-communication-problems-are-left-without-support-3383289>