

Amplifying Awareness

Turning up the volume on hearing health in live music

TINNITUS



Dedication


This report is dedicated to Andy Shiach, founder of ACS, whose integrity, tireless advocacy and technical innovation of custom hearing protection will have a lasting impact on hearing health.

As a champion of the tinnitus community, Andy's commitment to improving lives and amplifying awareness continues to inspire progress, compassion, and hope.




Contents

About Tinnitus UK	4
About Tinnitus	4
About the authors	5
Introduction	6
Executive summary	7
Hearing health in live music: the key facts	8
Why hearing health matters in live music	10
Tinnitus and hearing loss: societal and NHS costs	12
Listening habits and hearing protection: the live music audience perspective	14
Hearing health is a major occupational risk in live music	17
Accessing NHS hearing health support	20
Venues and promoters: from awareness to action	21
A call to action	25
Recommendations: turning awareness into action	27
Summary	33
References	34



"Music was the most important thing in my life from childhood. I can no longer hear silence or listen to music without being conscious of the ringing. It feels like a form of living death to be without music or singing, the things that made me most fully alive."



About Tinnitus UK

Tinnitus UK is the only charity in the UK dedicated solely to supporting people affected by tinnitus. We provide free, confidential support through our helpline (by phone, email, SMS and webchat), online forum, peer support groups, and a wide range of trusted information resources.

Our services make a meaningful difference. Among those who engaged with Tinnitus UK, 85% felt more reassured, 82% gained a better

understanding of tinnitus, 65% felt better able to manage their tinnitus, and 83% were clearer about the care and support options available to them (Tinnitus UK, 2025/26).

Funded by donations, we also support clinicians and researchers working in the field. For those people struggling with tinnitus, our guidance and connection isn't just helpful; it's a lifeline.

Visit **tinnitus.org.uk** to learn more.

About tinnitus

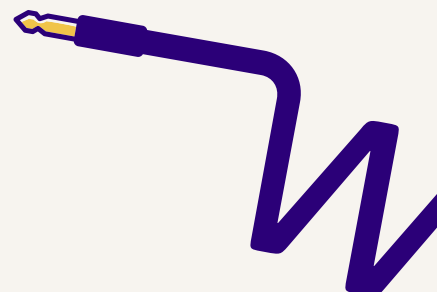
Tinnitus is the perception of sound such as ringing, buzzing, or hissing in the ears or head without an external source (NHS, 2024). It affects approximately one in seven adults (Biswas et al., 2021) and one in thirty children (Benton et al., 2016). While some experience tinnitus as a mild inconvenience, for many it becomes a persistent, life-altering condition.

In the UK, an estimated 1.5 million people struggle with severe tinnitus (Tinnitus UK, n.d.), profoundly impacting quality of life. The condition frequently contributes to clinical anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances, creating a ripple

effect on home, work, and social environments. Many distressed individuals turn to Tinnitus UK for guidance and support, as the broader societal and healthcare implications of tinnitus continue to escalate.

The financial burden of tinnitus-related healthcare in the UK exceeds £750 million annually and was projected to rise to at least £850 million by the end of 2025 (Stockdale et al., 2017).

Despite its growing prevalence, tinnitus has no recognised cure (McFerran et al., 2019).



About the authors



Sonja Jones is a Clinical Audiologist, Hearing Aid Dispenser and Clinical and Audiology Lead at Tinnitus UK.

She has a wealth of experience across multiple sectors within the hearing healthcare industry. She was previously a Senior NHS Audiologist, working with both children and adults.

She has also been at the forefront of hearing aid innovation where she has been a technical trainer and support audiologist for two leading hearing aid manufacturers, Starkey and Widex, across the UK and Ireland. Furthermore, she has

been a clinical assessor and mentor of fledgling audiologists and hearing care assistants.

For over a decade, Sonja has worked with high profile orchestras and music conservatoires across the UK, focused on hearing conservation and hearing health assessment and education.

In 2018, Sonja founded her own private practice in Cardiff, where she continues to offer personalised care and innovative solutions for patients with hearing difficulties.

Sonja is a member of Tinnitus UK's Professional Advisory Committee, an independent group of tinnitus experts who volunteer their time to support the charity.



Anne Savage is a DJ, Producer, Presenter, and Noise Safety Champion.

She has toured the world DJing since the 90s, producing dance tracks across multiple genres and making her mark in hard dance. She's also hosted radio and TV shows for the BBC and Ministry of Sound.

With a BSc in Events Management and NEBOSH-qualified experience in Festival Health and Safety, Anne discovered her passion for noise safety. She's now completing a PhD in *Noise Safety in the Dance Music*

Industry and has been a leading voice for safer sound for over 12 years.

Anne has worked with Tinnitus UK lobbying for research funding at the Houses of Parliament and was a spokesperson for the 'Plug'em' campaign to protect music fans from tinnitus.

She shares her expertise at DJ schools and universities, highlighting the risks of music-related hearing damage, with talks at Goldsmiths University of London, Robert Gordon University, Sheffield Hallam University, and Lisa Lashes School of Music in Manchester. Based in Aberdeen, Anne continues to produce and DJ across the UK and internationally.

Introduction

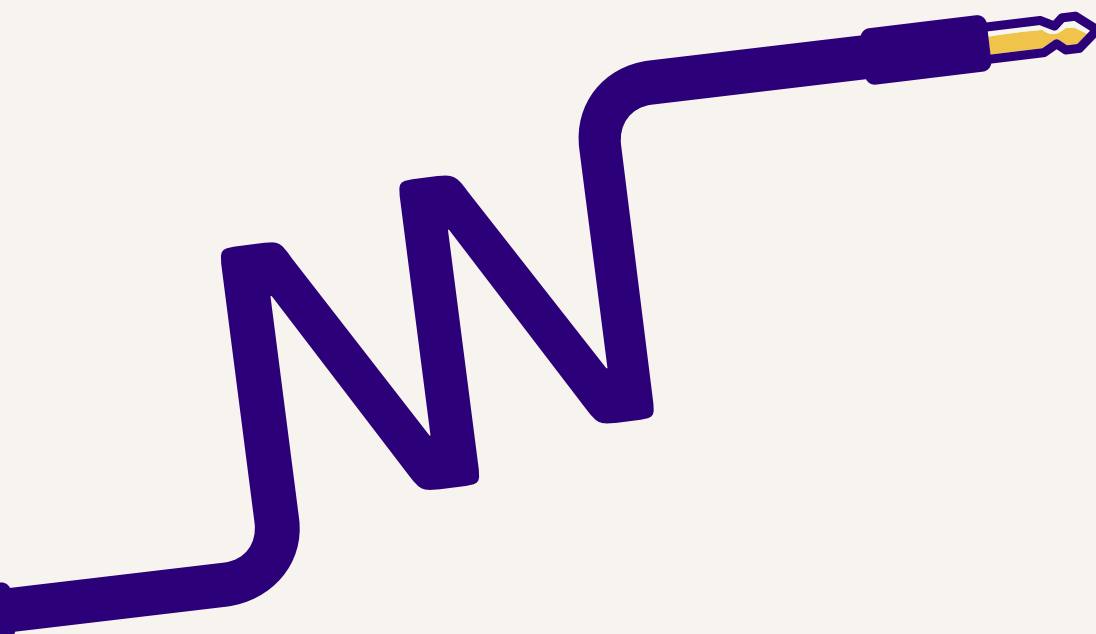
Live music is one of the UK's most dynamic cultural and economic forces. In 2024, it helped drive the UK music industry to a record £8 billion in GVA (Gross Value Added) (UK Music, 2025). Consumer spending on concerts, gigs and festivals surged to £6.68 billion, reflecting a 9.5% increase in 2024 versus 2023, with a 28.2% increase on 2022 (UK Music, 2025).

With a live event taking place somewhere in the UK every 137 seconds, the sector supports over 200,000 jobs (UK Music, 2025; LIVE, 2024) and fuels vital secondary spending across hospitality, travel and tourism. Together, these factors underline the essential role live music plays not only in enriching cultural life but in powering local economies and sustaining the UK's creative ecosystem.

But behind the joy, connection, and importance in many people's lives, there is a hidden risk: unsafe sound levels that can cause permanent hearing damage and tinnitus.

For many, the ringing in the ears after a gig is brushed off as part of the experience. Yet, this ringing is very likely to be the result of damage and could be an early warning sign of long-term harm such as tinnitus and/or hearing loss.

Tinnitus can be something people learn to live with, but for others tinnitus and hearing loss can have a profound impact on wellbeing, mental health, relationships, and careers, particularly for the very people who dedicate their lives to music: performers, sound engineers, and venue staff.




Executive summary

Amplifying Awareness captures vital insights obtained from live music fans and professionals in our 2025 surveys. Over 1,200 people responded, spotlighting the urgent need for real action on hearing conservation within the live music industry. With hearing damage and tinnitus prevalent within the industry, this report calls for coordinated, practical action that safeguards careers and enjoyment without compromising the live music experience.

As the UK's only charity dedicated to tinnitus, Tinnitus UK brings decades of expertise in hearing health, research, and support. Our deep ties to the music community, combined with clinical insight and frontline advocacy, position us to lead this critical conversation. While we may not have all the solutions yet, we're driving the conversation forward between industry stakeholders with clear, evidence-informed recommendations for musicians, engineers, venues, and decision-makers on how to build a safer live music future.

This is not another campaign. It's a wake-up call.



"Stop the talk, ulterior motives, commercial partnerships or more campaigns and let's see some action and actual outcomes! People are at risk!"

Jono Heale, Director, ACS Custom.



Hearing health in live music: the key facts

Hearing damage linked to live music is widespread, preventable, and placing avoidable pressure on the NHS. Our surveys showed the following:

1. A workforce exposed: 81% of live music workers receive no training on hearing safety

Live music professionals are routinely exposed to high sound levels without basic guidance on hearing risk, highlighting a significant gap in duty of care across the sector.

2. 92% of fans experience tinnitus after live music events

Post-gig ringing ears are often dismissed as normal, yet the data shows temporary tinnitus is almost universal among attendees.

For many, the damage lasts. In our survey sample, 92% of respondents reported temporary tinnitus following attendance at live music events, with 40% of those indicating that symptoms later became persistent.

These findings are broadly consistent with a large cohort analyses from the UK Biobank (Couth et al., 2019) suggesting that repeated noise exposure is associated with increased tinnitus risk, particularly in higher-exposure groups.

3. Nearly one in five now live with permanent hearing loss

These findings show that repeated exposure to unsafe sound levels can result in long-term, life-changing hearing damage.





4. Awareness is high; protection is not. Knowing the risk does not mean people act on it

98% know loud music can damage hearing, yet 46% will stand close to speakers and only 32% of fans will wear hearing protection throughout concerts.

Despite near-universal awareness about the potential effect of loud music on hearing, protective behaviours remain inconsistent, pointing to cultural and practical barriers rather than a lack of information.

So, what are the possible implications of inaction? Tinnitus and hearing loss cost the NHS £1.3 billion a year (Munro, 2020; Stockdale et al., 2017). Preventable hearing damage sustained in high-exposure settings such as live music contributes directly to demand for NHS GP, audiology and ENT services.

Hearing damage associated with live music is common, preventable,

and costly. Workers lack training, audiences and professionals experience widespread symptoms, and the NHS absorbs the long-term impact. Turning awareness into action requires consistent standards, shared responsibility, and sector-wide leadership.

"The UK Hearing Conservation Association's (UKHCA) mission is to promote hearing health for all through common sense, cost-effective, evidence-based solutions. This includes hearing conservation strategies within the live music industry, which is often overlooked compared to other industries such as construction and manufacturing, despite the high prevalence of hearing loss and tinnitus for workers and audience members. We fully support Tinnitus UK's drive for meaningful change within the live music industry to ensure a safe, sustainable, and inclusive experience for everyone involved."

UHCA

Why hearing health matters in live music

For many people in the music industry, tinnitus comes alongside hearing loss, and both can be caused by spending too much time in loud environments without hearing protection. The effects might not show up straight away, but over time they can make it harder to sleep,

focus, hear clearly, or enjoy the music you love.

In live music, sound levels often go above 100dB (World Health Organization, 2022). That's as loud as a chainsaw, and enough to damage your hearing in just minutes.

Here are some examples of average intensity of a sound made by different things and the maximum amount of time it is safe to be exposed to these each day, without needing hearing protection. These are intended as a guide only. Different brands of washing machines or hair dryers for example, will produce different levels of sound.

Decibel level	Source of sound	Length of time
15dB	Leaves rustling	Indefinite - safe level
30dB	A quiet room	Indefinite - safe level
40dB	A quiet library; birds calling; refrigerator hum	Indefinite - safe level
55dB	Normal conversation	Indefinite - safe level
60dB	Dishwasher	Indefinite - safe level
70dB	Car at 10 metres; vacuum cleaner; washing machine; shower, piano practice	Indefinite - safe level
80dB	Busy traffic at 10 metres; alarm clock; whistle;	Indefinite - safe level
85dB	Kitchen blender; noisy restaurant;	8 hours
88dB	Forklift truck	4 hours
90dB	Power tools; lawnmower; hair dryers; Tube train;	2 hours
100dB	Road drill at 1 metre; chain saw; jet ski; hand dryer	15 mins
103dB	MP3 player at full volume	7 min 30 secs
106dB	Motorbike; nightclub; bars	3 min 45 secs
110dB	Sporting events; car horns; symphony orchestra;	1 min 42 secs
115dB	Ambulance siren; live rock band	28 secs
120dB	Loud car stereo; amplified music at 2 metres; thunderclap; siren 1 metre;	7 secs
130dB	Jet taking off at 100 metres	Less than 1 sec
140dB	Rifle being fired at 1 metre	No safe time
150dB	Rock music peak	No safe time

Whether you're a gig fanatic, performer, sound engineer, or crew member, repeated exposure can lead to permanent hearing loss, tinnitus, or both. And once it's there, it can't be undone.

The good news is that most of this damage can be prevented. Simple steps like wearing high fidelity earplugs, stepping away from loud areas when you can, and being mindful of your exposure can protect your hearing for life.

Venues have a part to play too.

The WHO's Global Standard for Safe Listening Venues and Events (World Health Organization, 2022) sets out clear, practical measures to make live music safer without losing the excitement of performance. In the UK, the Night Time Industries Association's Listen for Life campaign has reinforced this call, encouraging promoters, venues, and audiences to take hearing health seriously and embed safe listening as part of the culture of live music (Night Time Industries Association, n.d.).

This report explores how festival and concert goers, performers, sound engineers, and promoters perceive hearing health, and what more can be done to protect it. By sharing these insights, we aim to spark conversation, encourage positive change on a UK wide level, and help

everyone in the music community enjoy a lifetime of listening.

Together, we can make safe listening the norm so that the music we love today can be heard, enjoyed, and celebrated for generations to come.

"Individuals can take simple but effective steps too: wear properly fitted ear protection, take regular breaks from high-noise areas, monitor personal exposure levels, and speak up if conditions feel unsafe. Protecting hearing is not about limiting creativity or passion; it is about ensuring that the people who make live music possible can continue to enjoy healthy, fulfilling lives both inside and outside of work."

**Phil Pinnington,
Head of Audit and Consultancy
at British Safety Council**

.....

Visit the Tinnitus UK website to learn more about the risks of noise-induced hearing damage in the live music sector, including: how it happens, what to look out for, safe sound levels, your maximum daily sound exposure, how to prevent harm, and impartial information about hearing protection.

Tinnitus and hearing loss: societal and NHS costs


Tinnitus creates a major financial strain on the NHS, costing around £750 million a year for GP appointments, hearing services and therapy. This estimate is based on 2017 research and reflects only NHS costs, not wider impacts such as lost work productivity, reduced wellbeing, or mental-health effects. As more people seek help (BIHIMA, 2025), and as healthcare costs rise, the overall NHS cost of tinnitus is forecasted to increase to around £850 million annually by the end of 2025.

However, tinnitus is only part of the issue. A 2024 analysis by the University of Nottingham and The University of Manchester (Akeroyd and Munro, 2024) estimates that 18 million adults in the UK (one in four) now have some level of hearing loss. Untreated hearing loss places a substantial and avoidable burden on society.


Economic modelling suggests that disabling hearing loss costs the UK economy around £25.5 billion every year, due to reduced quality of life, lower workforce participation and other impacts on wellbeing and productivity (Hear-it, 2019).

The NHS also faces significant costs from hearing loss. The direct cost to the NHS of managing hearing loss is estimated to cost up to £450 million a year (Adcock & Powell, 2016), a figure that is likely to have increased in 2025 due to population growth, higher prevalence and inflationary pressures (NHS England, 2019).

Collectively, this data shows that hearing loss and tinnitus are not only personal health issues but major public-health, societal and economic concerns.



"I don't go to music venues and clubs anymore because of the tinnitus. It's sad but I just don't want it getting worse. The uncertainty of it all adds to this fear. I used to promote lots of techno/house/drum and bass events. This makes it harder as I love music."



Addressing hearing health within the live music industry as a matter of priority, has the potential to alleviate a considerable financial and societal burden, especially when the combined NHS burden of tinnitus and hearing loss now approaches £1.3 billion every year (Hear-it, 2019).

The financial burden associated with hearing loss and tinnitus directly links to the long-term ambitions of the NHS 10-Year Strategy, launched by the UK Government in 2025. The Life Sciences Sector plan (Department of Health and Social Care, 2025) aims to redesign care so that more diagnostics, triage and long-term condition management takes place in community settings, with greater emphasis on prevention.

Hearing and tinnitus services are well suited to this shift. The live music sector could directly contribute to this call within the community, by ensuring preventive action is taken across the industry, reducing the prevalence of hearing loss and tinnitus, avoidable GP appointments, and therefore, demand for treatment.

By uniting for hearing health conservation, the live music sector has the potential to help reduce the NHS's £1.3 billion annual burden. This report therefore aligns directly with the strategy's broader ambition to modernise care, ease systemic pressure, and deliver lasting long-term value.

"Hearing loss is often ignored in its early stages, and instead the world is blamed for being quieter or more mumbly than it used to be. But it's not the world, it's you. If you have a typical hearing loss you will miss quiet sounds, you will miss high-frequency sounds, and even what you can hear, how loud it is may be different. All this affects what you hear in music, be it listening, making, or producing. There is no treatment for hearing loss that cures it or undoes it: the day you've lost some hearing is the day the music changed"

**Michael A Akeroyd,
Professor of Hearing Sciences,
University of Nottingham**



Listening habits and hearing protection: the live music audience perspective

The results of the survey aimed at audiences of live music events indicate that awareness of hearing-related risks is exceptionally high.

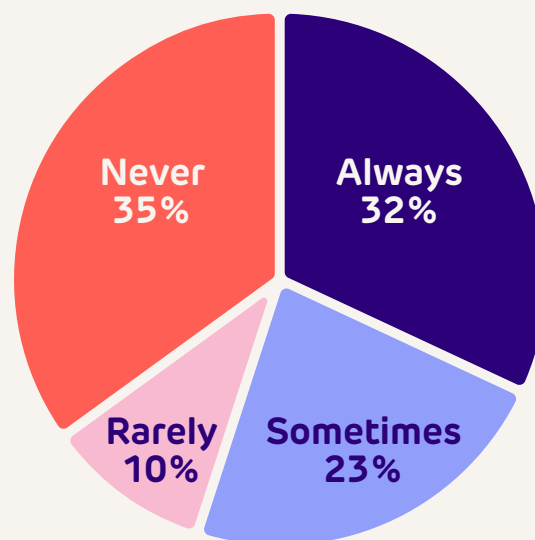
98% reported they know concerts can affect hearing, even on a temporary basis, and 98% knew what tinnitus was without needing to look it up. However, despite this strong awareness, audience behaviours do not consistently align with safe listening practices.

The awareness and prevention paradox

Although just over half of respondents avoid standing close to speakers, a substantial proportion still choose high-exposure positions at least some of the time, with 37% reporting that they sometimes stand near speakers and 9% doing so habitually. This highlights a disconnect between understanding the risks and actively reducing exposure.

A similar pattern appears in the use of hearing protection.

While 32% of respondents stated that they always use hearing protection at live music events, many adopt inconsistent or minimal protective behaviours. Around a quarter (23%) use protection only sometimes, 10% rarely use it, and 35% never use hearing protection at all. Overall, the data reveals a clear attitude-behaviour gap; although most attendees are aware of the potential impact of loud environments on hearing, this awareness does not reliably translate into protective action. This suggests that future interventions should focus less on basic education and more



How often respondents said they use hearing protection at live music events

on addressing behavioural barriers, convenience, social norms, and the situational factors that influence decision making prior to arriving at and during live music events.

The reasons respondents gave for not wearing hearing protection highlight a series of practical, behavioural, and perceptual barriers that persist despite high awareness of noise-induced hearing loss risks. When asked to advise all reasons that apply to them as an individual for not wearing hearing protection, forgetfulness emerged as the most common factor, with 30% reporting that they simply forget to bring earplugs, suggesting that even well-intentioned individuals may struggle to turn protective behaviour into a habit.

A further 25% had never thought about using hearing protection at live music events.



"Live music has been a source of great pleasure all of my life but, it is fair to say that nowadays, I am very wary and cautious when I am anywhere - stadiums, arenas, theatres, cinemas or even the underground - where there may be sudden or continuous loud noises - and I always have ear protection."



Together, these findings suggest that the availability and visibility of hearing protection options remain insufficient, and without prompts or accessible solutions, many attendees do not consider protection until it is too late.

Perceptions about the listening experience also play a significant role. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23%) expressed concern that hearing protection would negatively affect sound quality, reflecting a common misconception that earplugs diminish, rather than refine, the live music experience.

Comfort and social factors further contribute to reluctance, with 16% finding earplugs uncomfortable and 8% feeling self-conscious wearing them, indicating that product design and stigma remain barriers for a minority of attendees. Additionally, 7% reported that they do not believe

hearing protection is necessary, underscoring that a small segment still underestimates the risks of high sound levels.

Notably, 28% of respondents provided their individual specific reasons, with many noting that they already experience tinnitus, have existing hearing loss, or rely on hearing aids. This suggests that some attendees may believe earplugs are incompatible with their existing hearing loss or tinnitus, or that hearing protection is no longer necessary once damage has already occurred.

This highlights a wider lack of awareness that ongoing hearing protection remains essential, as further noise exposure can worsen hearing loss and tinnitus and reduce long-term quality of life.

.....

"I already have tinnitus."

"I don't want to get so used to them that I can't manage without...[I'm] trying to maintain some resilience."

"I wear hearing aids, so [there's] no room for earplugs as well! But I can turn them down or switch them off."

"I've never thought to wear them at a live event for myself. For other younger or elder relatives, yes."

.....

These findings illustrate that the obstacles to hearing protection use are diverse, ranging from lack of habit and poor availability to sensory concerns, comfort issues, and misconceptions about sound quality and that there's no need for it if the damage has already been done; effective interventions will need to address both practical barriers and attitudinal factors.

The need for greater awareness

81% of respondents believe music events are not doing enough to raise awareness about hearing health. Only 2% felt they were, with the remainder unsure.

When asked specifically about access to earplugs at venues, 62% of concert and festival attendees said they had not seen earplug giveaways or hearing health information at the events they attended. This highlights a significant missed opportunity to promote safe listening habits in environments where sound levels are often high.

The reality of hearing damage amongst fans


A striking 81% of respondents said they had experienced muffled hearing after a live music event, which is a sign of noise-induced hearing damage.

The same proportion reported a temporary reduction in hearing sensitivity that lasted up to several days, and nearly 20% now live with permanent hearing loss. These findings show that hearing health issues are not unusual among live music fans. In fact, they are extremely common.


Tinnitus was even more widespread: an overwhelming 92% had experienced it after a gig - a common warning sign of potential permanent hearing damage - compared with only 8% who had never been affected. For many people these symptoms were not short-lived. 40% said their tinnitus was constant, which is almost

three times higher than the estimated UK average of around 14%. Others reported tinnitus that lasted a few hours after a gig (30%), one to two days (14%), more than two days (5%), only a few minutes (5%), while 6% were unsure.

Among respondents living with constant tinnitus, more than a third believed it was directly caused by live music. 26% attributed it to frequent attendance at events, while 9% linked it to a single loud concert. These results underline the significant long-term impact that high-volume sound can have on listeners and show a clear need for stronger hearing health interventions within the live music environment.



"When I lived in London some years ago. I used to go to O2 for concerts. These were loud but the ringing wore off over time. One night in a night club the music was so loud I had to leave. From that day the Tinnitus has never gone away."



Impact on the enjoyment of music

The effects of tinnitus and hearing changes extend beyond physical health. 64% of respondents said tinnitus reduces their enjoyment of music.

"I have had to leave when the music is too loud in small venues."

"Experiencing temporary hearing loss after entering a nightclub for 40 mins without my earplugs was frightening."

"It breaks my heart knowing what is likely to happen to other people."

These findings reveal a widespread lack of hearing health awareness and support at live music events.

Many attendees experience temporary or lasting changes in their hearing, yet few have access to protective measures or educational information. There is a clear need for coordinated public health action and closer collaboration with the music industry to create safer listening environments without reducing the enjoyment of live performance.

"Turn it down – it really doesn't need to be as loud as it sometimes is."

"If you need earplugs, then by definition it's too loud."

"I am paying the price now. If I'd known more at the time, I would have taken precautions."

"When it's too loud, it actually ruins the sound."

Hearing health is a major occupational risk in live music

Within the workforce, the picture is even more worrying. 93% of respondents have experienced hearing problems as a direct result of working or performing at live music events; underscoring the scale and urgency of the issue.

Most concerningly, 59% reported experiencing permanent tinnitus. The prevalence among live music workers is therefore roughly five times higher than the national average, indicating a significant occupational risk.

Temporary tinnitus was also common, affecting 65% of respondents at some point in their career. Although these episodes may subside, they are well-recognised warning signs of excessive noise exposure and can predict future permanent damage. Beyond tinnitus, more than a third of respondents (36%) reported noise sensitivity or hearing distortion, and 29% said they had diagnosed hearing loss or were experiencing symptoms of hearing loss.

Together, these findings paint a troubling picture of auditory health among people working in – or performing – live music. The data suggests that hearing related issues are not isolated incidents but a widespread and serious concern across this community.

“Our research shows that musicians and industry professionals are more likely to report experience of – and more severe – tinnitus and hearing difficulties compared to those outside of the music industry. As well as providing education on the risks of music exposure, we also propose that there needs to be a shift in attitudes within the sector to create a culture of healthy hearing.”

**Dr Samuel Couth,
Manchester Centre for
Audiology and Deafness**

Safe and sound?

The survey revealed encouraging signs that many live music workers are taking steps to protect their hearing - although there is still considerable scope for improvement. Almost half of respondents (45%) said they always wear hearing protection, and a further 37%

reported using it at certain events or in certain venues. Only a small minority never wear protection (14%), have stopped using it (2%), or intend to use it but have not yet done so (2%). These figures suggest that people are generally more willing to use hearing protection than to avoid it, which provides a positive foundation for behaviour change initiatives.

The data also highlights several barriers that prevent more consistent use. The most common issue, reported by 45%, was concern that earplugs affect the quality of the music (which was noted in our audience’s survey too). This indicates a clear need for education about acclimatisation, filter choices, and the benefits and limitations of different types of hearing protection.

A further 27% said they forget to bring earplugs or do not always have them to hand, suggesting that simple solutions such as key-chain products or reliable on-site provision at festivals and venues could make a significant difference. Cost was identified as a barrier by 19% of respondents suggesting further work could be done on highlighting the availability of good quality affordable options.

Workplace and employer responsibilities amiss?

The survey indicates significant gaps in how employers, event organisers and venues support hearing health for workers and performers in the live music sector. A large majority of respondents (61%) said they had not been offered hearing protection by any employer, venue or event organiser. This lack of basic provision suggests that hearing safety is still not treated as a routine or essential

part of workplace welfare within the industry.

Training and guidance are similarly limited. 81% of respondents reported that they had not received any health and safety training that included information on sound exposure or hearing protection. This indicates a major shortfall in duty-of-care practices, as workers and performers are frequently exposed to high-volume environments without the knowledge or tools needed to protect themselves.

"Recent guidance from the World Health Organization and the Audio Engineering Society sets out best practice for responsible sound management at live music events, but such practice is often inaccessible or applied inconsistently across the sector. The UK-based HELA Initiative (Healthy Ears, Limited Annoyance) turns this guidance into practical, whole-team training focusing on a structured sound-management approach that goes beyond simply 'turning it down' to enhance the safety, sustainability and enjoyability of live music across the world."

Adam Hill, HELA

Respondents were also asked whether they felt UK venues are doing enough to promote hearing safety. Nearly three quarters (72%) said no, demonstrating a strong perception that current venue practices fall short of what is required to safeguard the hearing of audiences, artists and staff.

A similar picture emerged when assessing the role of promoters. When asked if promoters are doing enough to support hearing protection for performers and crew, 59% said no and only 3% said yes. The remaining responses give a wider context: 20% felt that promoters somewhat support hearing protection, while 18% were unsure.

These results reflect a general belief that the industry has not yet prioritised hearing health at the level required with the data; revealing clear and consistent gaps in the systems that should protect hearing within live music settings.

Overall, these findings show both the potential and the urgency for coordinated education, product innovation, and policy change to support safer listening habits across the live music sector.

"Many of us like to think of hearing loss as something that happens to the unlucky few, but we now know that we are all gradually accumulating damage to our ears as time goes by. While there is a degree of inevitability about the decline in hearing that comes with ageing, taking care of your ears now could be the difference between enjoying a long and productive career in music or being forced to retire decades early due to hearing loss and/or tinnitus."

Dr Ian Wiggins, University of Nottingham and Consultant to The World Health Organization's Make Listening Safe initiative

Accessing NHS support

53% of live music professionals have sought advice or treatment for work-related hearing issues, with most relying on the NHS. This demonstrates the NHS's central role in supporting those affected by noise exposure and highlights a clear opportunity for the live music industry to take a more proactive approach, alleviating pressure on public health services.


Among music professionals who sought help, 59% accessed NHS care, including; 30% who were seen by NHS audiologists, 16% by NHS ENT services and 13% by GPs. A further 26% consulted private audiologists and 5% private ENT specialists. Some additional responses were unclear, but likely fall within these same pathways, suggesting NHS access may be even higher than reported.

Hearing health needs are also significant amongst live music audiences. 67% of gig and festival goers experiencing tinnitus have sought advice, with the majority within the NHS. When asked to select all options appropriate to them; 67% had seen a GP, 61% an NHS audiologist and 40% an NHS ENT consultant; reinforcing the substantial burden placed on NHS hearing services by both workers and audiences in live music environments.

Introducing hearing health standards across the live music sector and better sign posting would reduce preventable harm, protect the workforce, and significantly ease NHS pressure in resources and cost.



"I'm definitely more careful with where I position myself at gigs and I try not to stand next to the speakers. If I can feel my ears getting 'itchy' I usually move further back if I can. I've been wearing ear protection for the past 10 years or so (since my mid 20s) but should have started earlier. I didn't bother because I was young and wanted to look cool! I'm pleased to see younger people at gigs wearing hearing protection now. I try to avoid gigs at very small venues where I know that it's extremely loud, however it depends on how keen I am to see the band! I'm also much more careful with how loud I play music and podcasts through my ear buds."



Venues and promoters: from awareness to action

Live music should inspire and uplift, not cause harm. With simple, affordable measures, venues could protect audiences, artists, and staff without reducing the power of the music.

Responses from venues and promoters show a sector that recognises the risks associated with unsafe sound levels, but lacks clear guidance, consistent support, and practical frameworks needed to translate awareness into action.

While 60% of respondents reported being aware of guidance on audience hearing protection, only 18% said they had implemented meaningful measures to reduce risk at their events, such as free earplugs and visible signage.

This gap between awareness and action is reflected across the findings and highlights the need for clearer standards, more consistent guidance, and a coordinated national approach to safe listening at the venue level.

"I find it inexplicable that the same health and safety rules do not seem to apply to noise levels as to smoking, electrical safety, tripping hazards, etc."

In the UK, guidance on sound levels in live music venues exists but is fragmented and largely focused on protecting workers rather than audiences. While workplace noise regulations (HSE, 2025) and HSE guidance (HSE, 2023) influence how venues manage sound, recommendations for audience exposure are non-statutory and inconsistently applied, and local licensing conditions tend to address nuisance rather than hearing health (DEFRA, n.d.).

As a result, there is currently no unified statutory standard specifically protecting audience hearing health at live music events, leaving a significant gap in public health protection.

The venues represented in this survey cover the full breadth of the UK live music ecosystem; from grassroots spaces and mid-sized venues to arenas, clubs, festivals, touring companies, and university-affiliated venues. Many of these host dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of live music events each year. This means that even small improvements in hearing-safety practices could benefit thousands of workers and potentially

millions of audience members each year. The scale of the possible impact is enormous.

Many venues reported caring deeply about audience safety, with nearly two-thirds expressing concern about the risk of hearing damage at their events. Yet in practice, hearing health remains a low-visibility issue. Although 65% of respondents said they monitor sound levels, 52% offer earplugs and 47% display signage, these measures are not consistently recognised by audiences or workers. This disconnect is mirrored in other parts of our survey: 62% of music fans said they had never seen earplug giveaways or hearing health information at events, and 61% of music professionals said they had never been offered hearing protection by a venue or organiser.

52% of venues surveyed listed hearing-protection initiatives as part of their current practice, yet 62% of audiences reported not seeing these measures in real terms. This suggests that measures, where they exist, are often inconsistent, poorly communicated, or not visible enough to make a difference.

Similarly, the low level of audience complaints reported by venues does not reflect the high prevalence of symptoms among attendees. Only 10.5% of venues said they frequently receive feedback about sound levels or hearing symptoms, with a fifth saying they never receive such reports. Yet among audiences, 81% experience muffled hearing and 92% report tinnitus after gigs. This striking mismatch suggests that audiences are simply not reporting symptoms, leaving venues unaware of the extent of hearing damage occurring at their events. A lack of reporting does not indicate a lack of harm, it suggests a

lack of pathways for people to speak up.

"[I wish for] the requirement for hearing protection to be available to anyone at music and entertainment venues, where event exposures are likely to exceed the lower action values, and for improved health surveillance for workers in the music and entertainment sector, with digital health surveillance data accessible to the worker via their personal health record."

**Dr Rachel van Besouw, HM Specialist
Inspector of Health and Safety
(Noise and Vibration)**

A major factor behind these gaps is the fragmented regulatory landscape. Under the UK Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (Health and Safety Executive, 2005), venues and promoters must protect workers, including freelancers, DJs visiting artists, and technical crew. Duties include providing information and training, offering hearing protection, completing noise risk assessments, and ensuring sound exposure limits are not exceeded.

However, enforcement sits not with the Health and Safety Executive but with Local Authority Environmental Health Officers. Many respondents described uncertainty about what standards to follow, a finding that aligns with the reported barrier of "lack of clear guidance or regulation" in the venues survey data. Venues are not unwilling; they are navigating a system that gives unclear signals and little support.

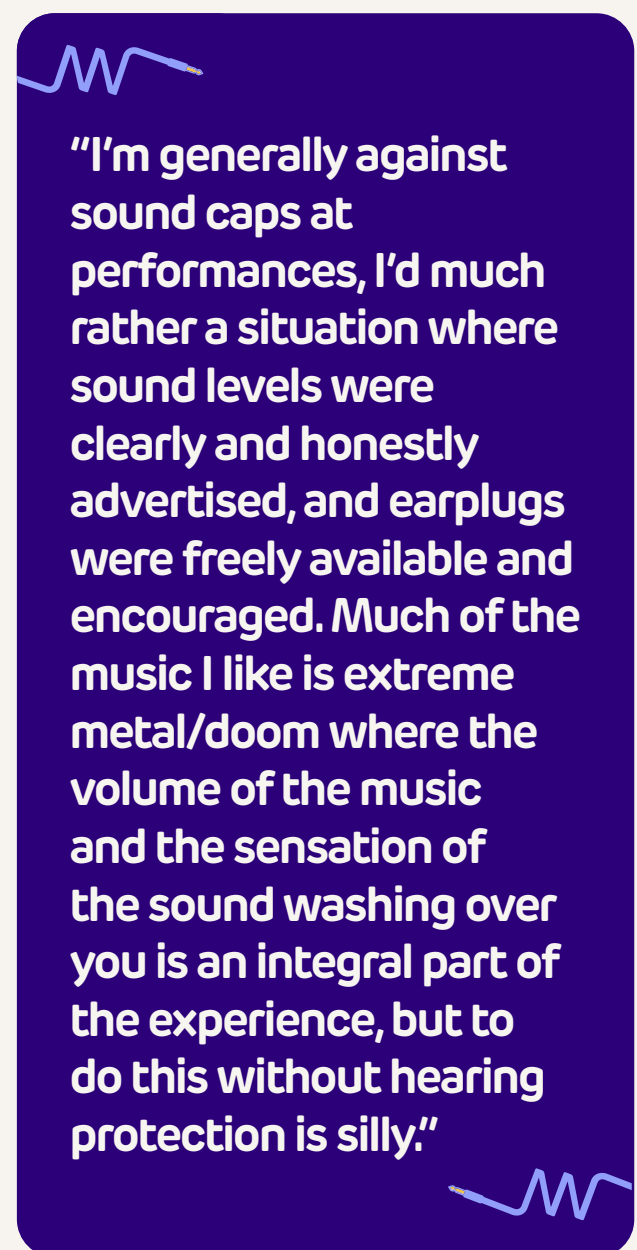
Despite this uncertainty, the results show that venues are not resistant to change. Rather, they lack the tools and direction needed to embed safe listening practices consistently. Many respondents asked for clearer national guidance, practical templates, and a unified approach that would allow them to adopt hearing protection measures with confidence.

Suggestions included better access to affordable earplugs, on-site education, charity partnerships, and alignment with national or international standards. Positively, 47% explicitly expressed interest in joining or supporting a hearing health campaign if one were made available.

"We urge employers across the music and live events sector to adopt proactive and preventative measures. That means comprehensive noise risk assessments, investment in high-quality hearing protection, quieter equipment where possible, and clear training so workers understand the risks and how to manage them."

Phil Pinnington, Head of Audit and Consultancy at British Safety Council

The industry is not starting from scratch. Clear, credible frameworks already exist that set out practical and achievable steps to reduce sound-related risk, including the World Health Organization's Global Standard for Safe Listening at Venues and Events (2022), the Night Time Industries Association's Listen for Life charter, Live DMA's European noise regulation framework (Live DMA, n.d.), and the UK's longstanding Sound Advice guidance (Health and Safety Executive, 2014). These frameworks demonstrate that protecting hearing is not incompatible with live music; proven measures



such as real-time sound monitoring, quieter rest zones, clear audience information, free earplugs, and training for staff and performers are already well established.

What is missing is not knowledge, but the conditions needed for consistent implementation. 60% of venues and promoters in our survey identified budget constraints as the single biggest barrier to introducing or improving hearing-protection measures. This makes clear that progress cannot rely on voluntary uptake alone.

Without targeted funding, coordinated support, and national leadership, hearing conservation will remain uneven and dependent on individual capacity rather than embedded as standard practice across the sector.



"I still frequently attend live music events, however, my behaviour has changed since developing tinnitus. I now routinely wear hearing protection, specifically earplugs, when attending concerts.

I also make use of a decibel meter on my phone to monitor sound levels and have, on occasion, left concerts early due to the volume being too high. When this has happened, I have informed venue staff of my reason for leaving, they advised that they would pass this feedback on to management."



Encouragingly, the survey shows a strong appetite for action: 60% of venues would consider offering free earplugs, almost half support on-site audience education, and 40% are open to partnering with hearing-health charities or professionals. With the right support, this willingness creates a clear opportunity for rapid progress across the sector.

What is needed now is unified, practical guidance and cross-industry leadership. Venues and promoters repeatedly asked for clear tools, training, and templates that would make it easier to adopt safer practices. Many highlighted cost, unclear expectations, and logistical pressures as barriers; all of which can be alleviated through coordinated national action and shared resources. Venues and promoters are already stretched. Unified, straightforward guidelines would make compliance simpler, faster and more achievable for organisations of all sizes.

The desire for support is matched by the willingness of venues to engage, signalling a strong moment of opportunity for sector-wide change.

Through coordinated partnership with key stakeholders, including the NTIA, WHO, Live DMA, the Hearing Conservation Association, BAPAM, the British Safety Council, the HSE, and others prepared to lead, the live music sector will move beyond good intentions and towards consistent, visible, and effective hearing conservation.

With clear national guidance, stronger standards, and sustained sector-wide collaboration, venues and promoters can and should play a decisive role in protecting both audiences and the workforce who bring live music to life.

A call to action

To address the pressing issues uncovered in this report, Tinnitus UK is calling:

1

For Venues

Make venues safer for staff and audiences by clearly following appropriate hearing safety guidance, and by providing practical toolkits, guidelines, and training for venue operators.

2

For live music professionals

Demand safe working conditions, including appropriate hearing protection, noise monitoring, and training; hearing loss should never be part of the job.

3

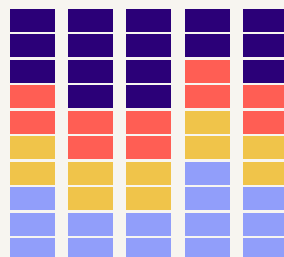
For All

Normalise hearing protection at live music. Wearing earplugs should be as routine as wearing seatbelts, and driven by public-health campaigns and visible leadership from artists, DJs, and influencers.

4

For Government

Set clear, enforceable standards on sound levels, hearing protection, and training, ensuring they are monitored and enforced to protect workers and audiences alike.



"Protecting hearing health is a vital responsibility for everyone involved in live music and the night-time economy. From artists and DJs to sound engineers, venue staff, and audiences, exposure to high sound levels is a daily reality, and the consequences of neglecting hearing conservation can be lifelong. The Listen for Life Campaign and the Night Time Industries Association are committed to promoting awareness, education, and practical measures that reduce risk, from consistent monitoring of sound levels to encouraging the use of effective personal protection. Industry-wide action is essential - not only to safeguard the wellbeing of professionals and audiences but also to ensure that live music and nightlife remain vibrant, sustainable, and accessible for generations to come. Together, we can make hearing conservation a standard part of every venue, festival, and performance."

Michael Kill, CEO, NTIA

Recommendations:

Turning awareness into action

These findings point to a clear and urgent need for a coordinated approach to hearing health in the UK live music sector. While awareness of risk is high, meaningful protection remains inconsistent, fragmented, and often invisible. Venues want guidance, promoters want clarity, workers want training, and audiences want easier access to protection. This creates an opportunity for Tinnitus UK, together with its industry peers, to lead a national shift towards safer listening across the live music ecosystem:

1 Establish a standardised national guideline for safe listening at live events

A consistent message from venues and promoters was the absence of clear, authoritative guidance on hearing safety. Many operators reported uncertainty about which frameworks to follow; whether international guidance such as the WHO standard, UK resources like Sound Advice, local authority expectations, or none at all. This lack of clarity creates inconsistency and acts as a barrier to action.

Establishing a single, practical, UK-wide standard for safe listening at live events would directly address this confusion and provide the sector with a clear baseline for action. The guideline should be audience-focused, proportionate, and achievable across venue types, and should draw on existing best practice, including:

- WHO Global Standard for Safe Listening at Venues and Events (2022)
- NTIA Listen for Life charter
- Live DMAs European sound-regulation framework
- Sound Advice (HSG260) and the UK Control of Noise at Work Regulations

Harmonised national guidelines would give venues and promoters a trusted reference point, support more consistent implementation of hearing-safety measures, and help embed hearing conservation as a standard part of live music delivery across the UK.

2

Enhance the visibility and accessibility of hearing protection at live events

Hearing protection remains underused when it is hard to find or poorly signposted. Venues should make ear protection visible, accessible, and normalised by:

- Providing free or low-cost earplugs in high-visibility locations
- Promoting availability via screens, posters, and digital messaging
- Including hearing-protection reminders in tickets and event communications

Making hearing protection easy to see and access would significantly increase uptake and embed hearing safety as a standard part of the live music experience.

3 Mandate basic hearing-health training for live music workers

In line with the Health and Safety Executive's emphasis on information, instruction, and training under the Control of Noise at Work Regulations, basic hearing-health training should be treated as a core requirement across the live music sector. The survey identified training as the single largest gap, despite the fact that it can be delivered quickly and at low cost.

All venues and promoters could include a short (10–15 minute) hearing-health module within standard inductions and refresher training for staff, crew, and performers, covering:

- How loud sound causes hearing damage
- Correct use of hearing protection
- The importance of breaks and access to quiet spaces
- Safer positioning of sound equipment

Embedding this training as standard practice would establish a consistent baseline of compliance and significantly reduce preventable hearing damage across the live music workforce.

4 Support venues with practical tools and ready-made resources

Venues consistently asked for practical tools that make hearing-safety measures easier to implement. Many expressed willingness to act but reported a lack of accessible, ready-made resources, including:

- Model safe-listening policies
- Risk assessment templates
- Signage and earplug messaging packs
- In-venue scripts and audience messaging
- Staff training guides
- Step-by-step implementation checklists

Tinnitus UK is well placed to convene this work in partnership with other stakeholders. Providing practical, ready-made resources would reduce administrative burden, support consistency, and significantly increase the likelihood of sustained adoption across the sector.

5 Encourage artist-led advocacy and peer influence

Artists and DJs are among the most trusted voices for audiences. Messages delivered by performers (on stage, online, or ahead of events) can shift attitudes to hearing protection faster and more effectively than venue-led messaging alone.

Artist-led advocacy should be enabled through coordinated sector action.

Tinnitus UK is well placed to work with artists, managers, booking agents, promoters, and industry bodies to develop voluntary, credible approaches that support safer listening without compromising artistic independence.

This could include:

- Short, artist-endorsed safe-listening messages
- Artist-featured hearing-protection campaigns
- Backstage resources for touring crews
- Partnerships with promoters and agents to amplify reach

This approach aligns with WHO guidance, which identifies behaviour change driven by trusted voices as key to reducing harm.

6 Promote hearing health as a positive part of live music

Safe listening should be championed to protect enjoyment, not restrict it. Audiences and professionals want to keep experiencing live music without risking long-term hearing damage, and hearing protection should be framed as part of that future.

To shift culture, the sector should:

- Focus messaging on enjoyment, choice, and longevity
- Promote the sound-quality benefits of filtered earplugs
- Normalise earplug use at live events
- Celebrate venues and artists who lead by example

By embracing hearing health as part of the live music experience, the sector can help make safe listening the norm and safeguard the future of live music for everyone.

7 Make hearing health a mandatory licensing requirement

Local authorities should require hearing-health protections as a standard condition of licensing and event safety management for live music. Given the role of Environmental Health in enforcing noise regulation, hearing conservation must be treated as a core public safety issue, not a discretionary add-on.

As a minimum, licences and event plans for live music should require:

- Real-time sound monitoring
- Provision of quiet or lower-sound areas where feasible
- Clear, visible hearing-health information for audiences
- Readily available hearing protection on-site

Making these measures mandatory would provide clarity for venues, support consistent enforcement, and embed hearing protection as a routine expectation of live music delivery across the UK.

8 Expand access to affordable high quality earplugs

Cost continues to limit access to hearing protection for audiences and workers. Expanding provision at scale offers a clear and credible opportunity for industry partners to demonstrate leadership in health, wellbeing, and corporate social responsibility.

Tinnitus UK can work with manufacturers, promoters, festivals, and sponsors to deliver funded and in-kind earplug schemes, including:

- Bulk-purchase programmes for venues and touring crews
- Free or low-cost earplugs at live events
- Festival pop-ups combining education and protection

By backing these initiatives, corporate partners can make hearing safety visible, protect the live music workforce and audiences, and demonstrate responsible practice with immediate, measurable impact.

9 Launch a united national safe listening campaign across the UK live music landscape

There is strong demand across the sector for a visible, coordinated national campaign to improve hearing health and shift cultural norms around safe listening. A unified approach would reduce fragmentation and ensure consistent messaging across venues, festivals, promoters, artists, and audiences.

A national campaign should align with UK government prevention priorities, including early intervention, population-level health promotion, and reducing long-term avoidable harm. Consistent with the WHO Global Standard for Safe Listening at Venues and Events, the campaign should focus on awareness, behaviour change, and harm reduction, and include:

- Consistent branding and messaging across live music events
- Social media and digital toolkits for venues, artists, and promoters
- On-site educational displays and audience prompts
- Campaign ambassadors from across the music industry
- Partnerships with major promoters, broadcasters, and industry bodies

Tinnitus UK is well placed to lead this work in partnership with government, public health bodies, and the music sector, translating prevention policy into a practical, high-impact campaign with national reach.

Summary

The live music sector is ready for change. Audiences want protection, workers want training, and venues want clarity and practical tools. The recommendations translate these findings into a roadmap for action.

With coordinated leadership, collaborative partnerships and a unified national approach, the UK can take meaningful steps towards protecting the hearing of everyone who creates, delivers, and enjoys live music.

"The UK's music scene has set global standards for generations, from The Beatles to Black Sabbath, and today's live music and events professionals continue to carry that legacy. A steep rise in work-related, noise-induced hearing loss shows that the industry faces a serious and immediate challenge. Swift and coordinated action is needed, not only to safeguard the sector's future, but to protect the people whose talent and hard work keep it thriving."

**Phil Pinnington,
Head of Audit and Consultancy
at British Safety Council**

References

- Adcock, A. & Powell, T. (2016). *NHS England's Action Plan on Hearing Loss and the adult hearing service commissioning framework* (Debate Pack No. CDP-0126). House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2016-0126/CDP-2016-0126.pdf>
- Akeroyd, M. A. & Munro, K. J. (2024). Population estimates of the number of adults in the UK with a hearing loss updated using 2021 and 2022 census data. *International Journal of Audiology*, 63(9), 659–660. DOI:10.1080/14992027.2024.2341956.
- Benton, C., Munro, K. J., Tyler, R. S., & Hall, D. A. (2016). *British Society of Audiology Good Practice Guidance for the management of children with tinnitus. British Society of Audiology.*
- Biswas, R., Lugo, A., Akeroyd, M. A., Schlee, W., Gallus, S., & Hall, D. A. (2021). Tinnitus prevalence in Europe: A multi-country cross-sectional population study. *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*.
- British Irish Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (BIHIMA) (2025). *Annual Audiologist Survey Report 2024 – 2025*.
- British Safety Council. (n.d.). *Occupational noise and hearing protection in the live events sector*. British Safety Council.
- Couth, S., Mazlan, N., Moore, D. R., Munro, K. J. & Dawes, P. (2019). Hearing difficulties and tinnitus in construction, agricultural, music, and finance industries: contributions of demographic, health, and lifestyle factors. *Trends in Hearing*, 23, 2331216519885571.
- Department of Health and Social Care. (2025). *Life Sciences Sector Plan*. UK Government.
- Department for Work and Pensions. (2005). *Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005*. Health and Safety Executive.
- Health and Safety Executive. (2014). *Sound Advice: Control of noise at work in music and entertainment (HSG260)*. HSE. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg260.htm> (Accessed: December 2025)
- Health and Safety Executive. (2023). *Noise at work*. HSE. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/> (Accessed: December 2025)
- Health and Safety Executive. (2025). *Regulations – Control of Noise at Work*. HSE. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/noise/regulations.htm> (Accessed: December 2025).
- Hear-it AISBL / European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association. (2019). *Hearing loss: Numbers and costs*. Available at: <https://www.ehima.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Hear-it-Report-Hearing-Loss-Numbers-and-Costs-2019.pdf>
- Live DMA. (n.d.). *Sound regulations in Europe*. Available at: <https://live-dma.eu/sound-regulations-in-europe-2/>
- Live music Industry Venues and Entertainment (LIVE). (2025). *LIVE Annual Report and Economic Highlights 2024*. LIVE. Available at: <https://www.livemusic.biz/news/latest-live-annual-report-records-another-record-year-for-live-music>
- McFerran, D. J., Stockdale, D., Holme, R., Large, C. H. & Baguley, D. M. (2019). Why is there no cure for tinnitus? *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 13, 802. DOI:10.3389/fnins.2019.00802. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/neuroscience/articles/10.3389/fnins.2019.00802/full>
- NHS. (2024). *Tinnitus*. Available at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/tinnitus
- NHS England. (2019). *Commissioning and delivery of hearing services in England*. NHS England.
- Night Time Industries Association. (n.d.). *Listen for Life: NTIA launches charter to safeguard workforce and consumer hearing*. Available at: <https://ntia.co.uk/new-ntia-listen-for-life-charter-launches-to-safeguard-workforce-and-consumer-hearing>

Stockdale, D., McFerran, D., Brazier, P., Pritchard, C., Kay, T., Dowrick, C., & Hoare, D. J. (2017). An economic evaluation of the healthcare cost of tinnitus management in the UK. *BMC Health Services Research*.

UK Music. (2025). This Is Music 2025. UK Music. Available at: <https://www.ukmusic.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/This-Is-Music-2025.pdf>

World Health Organization. (2023). *WHO global standard for safe listening at venues and events*. World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240043114>



Please email
communications@tinnitus.org.uk
if you have any questions about
our survey data.

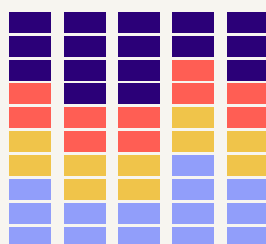
This report would not be possible without our Tinnitus Week partners.



Thank you for your support, dedication and expertise.

If you would like to learn more about our partners, how Tinnitus UK collaborates with industry, or how you can get involved, please visit **tinnitus.org.uk**.

**Together, we can amplify awareness and
create a world without tinnitus.**



Tinnitus UK

Ground Floor, Unit 5,
Acorn Business Park,
Woodseats Close,
Sheffield S8 0TB

Helpline

Email

Website

0800 018 0527

helpline@tinnitus.org.uk

tinnitus.org.uk

Registered charity no: 1011145 | Registered in England
Company limited by guarantee no: 2709302