

ESLA Position Paper

Shaping the Future of Speech and Language Therapy with Artificial Intelligence

Published March 6 2026

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming healthcare systems across Europe and globally. Speech and Language Therapy (SLT), a profession grounded in human communication, interaction, and clinical judgement, is at a critical point of transition. AI offers important opportunities to enhance assessment, intervention, research, service delivery, and access to care. At the same time, it raises significant ethical, professional, and societal questions that require careful consideration.

This position paper outlines the perspective of the European Speech and Language Therapy Association (ESLA) on how Artificial Intelligence can and should shape the future of Speech and Language Therapy. It aims to support professionals, policymakers, educators, researchers, and stakeholders in using AI responsibly, ethically, and inclusively across Europe.

VISION AND CORE PRINCIPLES

ESLA envisions a future in which Artificial Intelligence supports, rather than replaces, the expertise and clinical judgement of Speech and Language Therapists. AI should enhance access to high-quality, evidence-based services while respecting human rights, dignity, diversity, and inclusion. Its development and implementation must be ethical, transparent, and collaborative, ensuring that technology serves people and communities rather than driving inequity or dehumanisation of care.

Human-centred care must remain at the heart of all AI-supported practice. Speech and Language Therapists must retain professional leadership and

accountability, and AI systems must be grounded in robust evidence, equity, and transparency.

OPPORTUNITIES OF AI IN SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to meaningfully support clinical practice by enhancing screening and assessment processes, assisting with intervention planning, and supporting outcome monitoring. AI-enabled tools may allow for more personalised and adaptive therapy approaches and contribute to improved services for multilingual and culturally diverse populations across Europe.

From a service delivery perspective, AI can help expand access to Speech and Language Therapy through digital and hybrid models of care, supporting early identification, prevention, and continuity of care. These approaches may help reduce geographical, logistical, and resource-related barriers, particularly for underserved communities.

AI also offers important opportunities in research, education, and professional development. Large-scale data analysis can support evidence generation and outcome evaluation, while AI-supported learning tools can enhance education, training, and lifelong learning for Speech and Language Therapists.

RISKS, ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, AND SAFEGUARDS

Despite its potential benefits, Artificial Intelligence presents significant risks and challenges. Speech and Language Therapy is a relationship-based profession, and there is a risk that inappropriate use of AI could reduce meaningful human interaction. Data protection, consent, privacy, and ownership of sensitive health and communication data are critical concerns, as is the potential for bias within AI systems that may disadvantage certain populations.

There is also a risk of over-reliance on automated tools without sufficient clinical oversight, which may undermine professional accountability and autonomy. Unequal access to digital technologies and AI-supported services could widen existing health inequalities if not addressed proactively. Strong regulation, quality assurance, and ethical governance are therefore essential.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Communication and swallowing are fundamental human functions that underpin participation, education, employment, health, and social inclusion. Speech and Language Therapists play a vital role across healthcare, education, and social care systems, and must be recognised as essential stakeholders in AI, rehabilitation, and digital health policy.

ESLA calls on European policymakers and institutions to ensure that Speech and Language Therapy expertise is embedded within AI health strategies, rehabilitation initiatives, and digital health governance. Investment is needed to support ethical, inclusive AI innovation, aligned with European values, human rights, and disability inclusion.

ESLA's position aligns with global and European frameworks, including the World Health Organization's Rehabilitation 2030 agenda and the World Rehabilitation Alliance, which recognize rehabilitation as an essential health service. It also aligns with the European Programme of Work, European digital health and AI governance frameworks, and the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION, AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

ESLA encourages close collaboration between Speech and Language Therapists, service users, researchers, developers, industry partners, and policymakers. AI tools should be co-designed with professionals and people with lived experience to ensure relevance, safety, transparency, and effectiveness.

Education and research institutions should integrate AI literacy, ethics, and critical digital competence into Speech and Language Therapy education

and training. At the same time, the profession must engage proactively and critically with AI developments, sharing knowledge, best practice, and concerns at national and European levels.

CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence will play a significant role in shaping the future of Speech and Language Therapy. ESLA calls for a deliberate, ethical, and collaborative approach to ensure that AI strengthens communication, participation, dignity, and inclusion across Europe, while safeguarding the human values and professional expertise at the heart of the profession.