



## **SASLHA President's Report to the AGM**

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**President:** Christopher Rorke

**Reporting Period:** June 2024 – June 2025

### **1. Introduction**

It is a privilege to present my first President's Report to the SASLHA AGM, covering the period June 2024 to June 2025. Stepping into this role in mid-2024, I inherited not only a legacy of transformation and restructuring, but also a growing call from our membership for relevance, representation, and responsiveness.

This year has been a balancing act — honouring the momentum created by the outgoing Council, while taking clear steps to address urgent priorities and reimagine what it means to belong to a professional association in South Africa today.

### **2. Strategic Overview**

Council has remained committed to the five strategic priorities that have guided our evolution since 2021:

1. Enhance member engagement and communication and elevate the SASLHA brand.
2. Focus on membership growth in targeted audiences to improve diversity.
3. Identify new and improve existing revenue streams.
4. Formalise stakeholder management.
5. Improve volunteer management and committee engagement.

In addition, the 2025 term has introduced a cross-cutting focus on digital modernisation, regional advocacy, and sustainable practice.

### **3. Member Value Proposition: Speech Therapists & Audiologists**



## YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED!!

At the start of the 2025 membership year, SASLHA launched a new tiered membership structure designed to meet the evolving needs of our diverse professional community. Whether you're starting out, scaling your impact, or looking for a more affordable way to stay connected, there's a membership tier designed for you:

### Membership Tiers Overview:

Tier	Description
Professional	Comprehensive benefits for most professionals, including CPD, advocacy, resources, and visibility.
Premium	Enhanced discounts and added visibility tools for more engaged professionals.
Essential	Affordable option offering core CPD benefits and limited access to exclusive content.
Pensioner	For members over 60 with prior full membership, offering targeted professional support.
International	For professionals residing outside South Africa.
Student, CSO, Life, Fellow	Free membership tiers with benefits tailored for early-career, retired, or honorary members.

The comparison of these tiers has allowed SASLHA to:

Improve **accessibility** while retaining value at each level - Offer **clear upgrade pathways** - Encourage **targeted engagement** through tailored benefits

This tiered model, along with our renewed Member Value Proposition, affirms SASLHA's commitment to delivering value, fostering inclusion, and strengthening professional identity.

With only four months into the 2025 membership year, we're already seeing encouraging signs of growth:

- **Total membership** has increased from **1,256 to 1,270**, reflecting a modest **1.1% growth**.



- **Paying members** have increased from **901 to 966**, which is a **7.2% increase** — a strong indicator of early engagement and value recognition.

This early momentum suggests that our outreach, visibility, and relevance are resonating well with the community.

MEMBERSHIP	2024	18 JUNE 2025
Total Membership	1256	1270
Paying Members	901	966

This year, SASLHA has worked to clarify and communicate the full spectrum of value we offer to both **Speech-Language Therapists** and **Audiologists**, beyond traditional CPD offerings. The revised Member Value Proposition highlights how SASLHA supports each practitioner throughout their professional journey — whether in private practice, public service, academia, or early career stages.

#### *For Speech Therapists:*

- **Continuous Learning:** Access to free CPD webinars and articles, discounted masterclasses, conferences, and exclusive content on ethics and best practice.
- **Practice Support:** Legal, compliance, and ethical guidance, as well as resources tailored to private and public sector needs.
- **Professional Visibility:** Opportunities to showcase profiles in the member directory, post jobs or CVs on the Career Centre, and engage in special interest areas.
- **Mentorship & Community:** Opportunities to learn from experienced professionals through mentorship, Ethics Bites, WhatsApp groups, and Echo updates.
- **Advocacy:** Ongoing lobbying and engagement with national stakeholders to elevate awareness of the role of SLTs in health and education systems.

#### *For Audiologists:*

- **Targeted CPD & Career Development:** Specialised audiology CPD content, masterclasses, and discounted courses to stay at the forefront of the profession.



- **Empowerment & Visibility:** Support in advancing careers through the Career Centre, member directory spotlight, and curated visibility tools.
- **Sector-Specific Guidance:** Tailored resources, essential practice support, legal and HR guidance, and WhatsApp groups for audiology-specific discussions.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** SASLHA continues to advocate with bodies such as HPCSA, BHF, medical schemes, and national forums to secure visibility and funding for audiologists.
- **Promoting Audiology:** A strong focus on elevating the public profile of audiology and driving advocacy around the critical role of hearing healthcare.

#### 4. Highlights from the Past Year

##### *Advocacy and Policy Influence*

- SASLHA joined the **UHAC Coalition** and co-signed an alternative proposal to the **NHI Bill**, delivered directly to President Cyril Ramaphosa, voicing the sector's concerns around service access, remuneration, and professional autonomy.
- We actively contributed to policy debates around the **Draft Block Exemption Regulations**, advocating for fair pricing mechanisms that protect both practitioner sustainability and patient care.
- Engaged with the **Department of Health** to integrate audiology into national elderly care strategies, including advocating for hearing and fall risk screenings as part of preventative health.
- Proposed and supported the development of a new **billing code for fall risk screening**, formalising audiologists' role in preventative healthcare and sustainability.

##### *Member Communications and Engagement*

- Continued growth of our **ECHO newsletter** and **quarterly eZine**, with a stronger focus on transparency, advocacy updates, and responsive messaging.
- Launched a **revamped membership tier system** to offer flexibility, inclusivity, and clearer value at every career stage.

##### *Professional Development and Events*

- Ongoing **Edu-Series webinars** and CPD initiatives reached more members than ever before, with increased attendance from public sector therapists and community service officers.



- The **October 2025 ENT/SASLHA Congress** preparation and planning are well underway with a refreshed format aimed at real-world, implementable clinical insights and inter-professional collaboration.

### *Stakeholder Engagement*

- Continued partnership building with IALP, ENT Society, iCan, SAAA, and other key national networks.
- Advocacy extended beyond healthcare into education and social policy spaces, reinforcing our multidisciplinary relevance.

## 5. Strategic Planning Weekend – June 2025

In June 2025, SASLHA held a high-impact strategic planning weekend facilitated by **Gillian le Cordeur** and **Angela Cherrington** from *YourHub*. Council members and Committee Chairs engaged deeply with the Association's goals, pain points, and future direction.

Emerging focus areas and key recommendations include:

- **Digital Infrastructure:** A review of the SASLHA website and scoping of a mobile app to better serve members on-the-go. Quotes are being sought and alignment with YM is under review.
- **Data and Outreach:** A strategy was initiated to improve student membership conversions by addressing database gaps, university engagement, and post-sign-up follow-up.
- **Inclusion and Representation:** DEI principles are being embedded in Committee terms of reference and volunteer onboarding processes, ensuring that future work is representative and just.
- **Internal Communication:** Proposals were made to improve inter-Committee communication through visuals, shared planning tools, and better goal alignment.
- **Visibility and Messaging:** There is a move towards shorter, more dynamic content – shifting away from long-form eZines toward WhatsApp updates, infographics, and member-led stories.

These outcomes are being tracked across Council and Committees, and a feedback loop will guide refinement as implementation begins.



## 6. Council Changes and New Appointments

We would like to inform members of several recent changes within the SASLHA Council.

In January 2025, Dr Xoli Mazibuko stepped down from her position as Vice President, having served in that role since mid-2024. She had previously contributed to Council as Ethics Officer for three years. Following her resignation as VP, Council voted to appoint Dr Alida Naudé to the role for the remainder of the term.

In May 2025, Xoli resigned from Council entirely. We thank her for her years of service and commitment to the profession, and we wish her well in her future endeavours — we hope to see her involved again in the future.

Following her departure, Council is pleased to share the following appointments:

- **Khomotjo Kgare** has been appointed to fill the vacant Council seat.
- **Qhawekazi Mazaleni** has been co-opted to represent the younger professional demographic, ensuring that the voices of early-career practitioners are actively included in SASLHA's leadership and decision-making.

**These appointments are tabled today for member ratification at this AGM**, in accordance with the Constitution. A formal announcement will follow via SASLHA's official communication platforms.

Please join us in welcoming Khomotjo and Qhawekazi into these important roles.

## 7. Challenges and Reflections

- While we celebrate growth in both membership and volunteer engagement, we acknowledge the continued need to sustain this momentum through ongoing communication, support, and recognition.

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- Some Committees continue to face capacity challenges, highlighting the need for structured onboarding, improved knowledge transfer, and sustained mentorship.
- Although SASLHA's value offering is diversifying, the perception of the Association as primarily "CPD-focused" still exists in some sectors. Shifting this narrative through advocacy and visibility remains a strategic priority.
- **Communication Balance:** While some associations may be in a position to notify members of every engagement, advocacy effort, or professional development initiative, we have received feedback that the volume of our communication — via email, social media, and other channels — can at times feel overwhelming. We hear this, and we are actively working to strike the right balance. Please know that even when updates are not overt, the work continues. The presence of a full-time CEO and dedicated office team ensures that progress is happening daily — often behind the scenes — in service of you our members and both our professions equally. We strive to be The Association for Communication and Swallowing professionals in South Africa.

## 8. Looking Ahead

- SASLHA will prioritise the continued advocacy and engagement with the HPCSA and Medical Funders.
- Planning and logistics for the October 2025 SASLHA/ENT Congress in Gqeberha will continue, ensuring a high-quality, interdisciplinary clinical event.
- Council has approved a review and refresh of the SASLHA website, with quotes currently under consideration and implementation planned for the next financial year.
- Student and early-career outreach strategies will be strengthened, particularly through partnerships with universities and targeted communication efforts.
- We will deepen efforts to reach public sector and underrepresented practitioner groups, including partnerships with RuReSA and community-based networks.
- **Elevating Audiology Advocacy:** We will continue working with medical funders and the HPCSA to expand audiologists' recognised scope, including successful steps toward fall risk screening reimbursements, and reinforcing ethical billing frameworks.
- **Strengthening Private Sector Support:** The Private Sector Audiology Committee will assist members in navigating claim submissions, coding changes, and new digital systems—particularly with Discovery, GEMS, and other funders.





- **Fall Risk Symposium & Clinical Education:** We are proud to be hosting the *Fall Risk Symposium* this year, which will spotlight the audiologist's critical role in fall prevention and promote interdisciplinary collaboration in clinical education.
- **Global Visibility:** SASLHA continues to contribute to WHO-led initiatives such as the ICHI task team—ensuring South African rehabilitation professionals have a voice in shaping global frameworks.
- **Public Sector Engagement:** Renewed support is planned for public sector audiologists, including participation in advocacy forums like the *Western Cape Think Tank on Universal Health Coverage*.

## 9. Acknowledgements

I would like to express sincere gratitude to Annaline Jack, our CEO, for her tireless and skilled organisational work behind the scenes. Thanks also to Phindile for your hard work and support across operations. I am especially grateful to every Council Member, Committee Chair and Committee member who has contributed to the work of our Association with generosity and conviction.

## 10. Conclusion

This has been a year of transition and momentum. We are no longer in a reactive mode — SASLHA is moving forward with intentionality, structure, and a renewed sense of purpose.

To every member: your voice matters. Thank you for showing up, engaging, and shaping the future of our professions.

As we look ahead, we encourage you to ask a colleague: *Are you a member of SASLHA?* Tell them about all the great things we do — not just CPD — but our advocacy, mentorship, representation, and professional support. Invite them to join!

Together, as the largest association for those working within the Communication and Swallowing arena in South Africa, we can be the diverse, inclusive, and equitable advocate that best represents ALL our members and our professions.

Let's continue growing, together.

**Christopher Rorke**

President – SASLHA