Invited Commentary

Annual Tinnitus Report: 2026 Overview

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This report is extensive, detailed, and multifaceted. What follows is a personal overview that, by necessity, touches on only a fraction of its content. The document contains a wealth of valuable information, and I strongly encourage anyone with an interest in tinnitus to read it in full. Produced for release during National Tinnitus Awareness Week in February 2026, the Annual Tinnitus Report provides a comprehensive overview of global scientific progress in tinnitus research over the preceding year. It highlights increasing international collaboration and continued growth in publication output. Major international meetings, including the World Tinnitus Congress, the Tinnitus Research Initiative Conference, and the International Conference on Hyperacusis and Misophonia, continue to play an important role in driving scientific exchange and collective progress.

Research output and thematic trends

A PubMed search identified 502 tinnitus-focused publications between November 2024 and October 2025, of which 446 met eligibility criteria for geographic and thematic analysis. Research output remains unevenly distributed. China leads with 23.3% of publications, followed by the United States at 18.2%. Korea, Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Italy, and New Zealand form a second tier of major contributors. A relatively small group of journals publishes a disproportionate share of tinnitus research, notably *Hearing Research, European Archives of Oto-Rhino-Laryngology, Journal of Clinical Medicine*, and *The Laryngoscope*.

Six dominant research themes emerged. Epidemiology and population-based studies account for the largest proportion (32.7%), reflecting sustained interest in prevalence, risk factors, and comorbidities. Clinical interventions comprise the second largest category (29.6%), encompassing cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), digital CBT, hearing technologies, neuromodulation, pharmacological trials, acupuncture, and multimodal approaches. Pulsatile and structural tinnitus represents 12.3% of publications, while brain and neural mechanisms account for 10.3%, focusing on connectivity, oscillatory activity, and neurochemical pathways. Measurement and prediction studies form 11.0% of the literature and include psychometrics, machine-learning approaches, and diagnostic frameworks. Basic auditory and cellular models represent the smallest category (4.0%).

Treatment outcomes

Somatosensory interventions, including manual therapy, physiotherapy, and temporomandibular disorder management, demonstrate efficacy for selected cases of somatic tinnitus. Digital therapeutics, such as smartphone-based CBT, app-delivered sound therapy, and structured online programmes, consistently reduce tinnitus-related distress and appear cost-effective, particularly in settings with limited access to specialist services.

Hearing aids, sound therapy, and cochlear implants benefit individuals with tinnitus associated with hearing loss. Neuromodulation, somatosensory approaches, and surgical or endovascular interventions show benefit in clearly defined subtypes. Integrated and stepped-care services that combine audiology, counselling, CBT, sound therapy, and medical or surgical referral where appropriate achieve meaningful reductions in tinnitus handicap.

Across interventions, the most consistent benefits relate to reduced distress and improved coping rather than elimination of the tinnitus percept itself. Pharmacological studies, by contrast, remain largely disappointing, with most trials demonstrating minimal or no clinically meaningful effect.

Measurement science and precision approaches

Somewhat controversially, Professor Brian Moore cautions that tinnitus research risks stagnation if psychoacoustic measurement continues to decline. He argues that precise characterisation of the tinnitus percept, including pitch, loudness, spectral qualities, and maskability, remains essential for linking underlying mechanisms to treatment response. At the same time, structured imaging protocols, personalised sound-based therapies, and approaches that explicitly address emotional dysregulation are being explored. Advances in machine-learning models and electroencephalogram-based biomarkers suggest that more objective and stratified diagnostic tools may be approaching clinical relevance.

Lived experience

In a departure from the report's predominantly scientific focus, the inclusion of artwork by Eleanor Ponté provides a powerful reflection on lived experience. Her painting, From earth to sound … living with Tinnitus, presents an intimate portrayal of adaptation and coping. Repeated "T" motifs embedded within the landscape depict tinnitus as a constant presence, surrounding but not defining the individual. The work underscores that tinnitus is not solely a clinical phenomenon but also an existential and emotional experience.

DON MCFERRAN ON THE TINNITUS FIELD

Overall, the report depicts a field marked by steady progress, growing collaboration, and cautious optimism, while underscoring the need for more precise and compassionate evidence-based tinnitus care.