

Guidelines to Making Your Meeting Accessible to Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing People



This material was produced with the support of the Ministry of Citizenship.

Communication Is A Two-Way Street

Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people face systemic barriers to communication and information. Communication is two-way: When people face barriers to communication with you, you in turn face barriers to communication with them.

However, with accommodations you can get connected to others. Whether professional sign language or oral interpreter services, real-time captioning or computerized notetaking, assistive listening devices and/or other technical devices,

The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) can assist you in becoming accessible. The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms guarantees deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people the right to barrier-free access to information and barrier-free participation in communication.

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. The distinction between the terms deaf, deafened and hard of hearing is based principally on the individual's preferred language of communication, rather than on the actual degree of hearing loss.

Deaf (upper case 'D') is a term that refers to members a socio-linguistic and cultural group whose first language is sign language. In Canada, there are two main sign languages: American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ).

Hard of hearing is a term that refers to individuals who have a hearing loss ranging from mild to severe (although it is sometimes profound) and use their voice and residual hearing and occasionally sign language for communication.

Deafened, late-deafened and oral deaf (lower case 'd'), are terms that refer to individuals who have lost all hearing at some point in their lives, use spoken language and rely on visual forms of communication such as speechreading, text, and occasionally sign language.

Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants or other assistive listening devices.

CHS can assist you in being accessible. Contact the CHS office nearest you to get connected to the services that connect you to others.

For the most part, deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people relate to the world visually to a larger degree than hearing people. With this in mind, utilize visuals where possible (hand-outs, overheads) when planning your meeting. Whenever possible, ask the participants what accommodations would ensure access to you and you to them. By providing one or a combination of the following, you can ensure that your meeting will be accessible.

Interpreter Services

Sign Language Interpreters – facilitate communication between people who use American Sign Language (ASL) and people who use spoken English [or Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and spoken French]. Sign language interpreters are knowledgeable in the language and culture of both Deaf and hearing people. They provide communication in both a sign language and a spoken language and are bound by a professional Code of Ethics.

Oral Interpreters – facilitate communication in group situations where deaf, deafened or hard of hearing individuals rely on speechreading. The oral interpreter mouths the words of the speaker, changing them when necessary to synonyms that are more visible on the lips.

Text-based Services

Real-time captioning — uses stenographic and laptop computer technology. A captionist types verbatim what each speaker says; this appears on a laptop computer monitor or is projected on overhead.

Computerized notetaking – uses laptop computer technology. A notetaker types a live summary of each speaker’s comments; this, likewise, appears on a laptop computer monitor or is projected on overhead.

Captionists bring and set up their personal equipment and use the facility’s overhead equipment.

Assistive Listening Technology

Assistive listening technology, FM, Infrared and one-to-one devices such as the Pocket Talker, improve sound reception and overcome problems due to distance and noise.

FM system — sends signals from the transmitter to the receivers by way of wireless, designated radio waves. The speaker uses the transmitter or it can be jacked into the amplifier of an existing PA system. The receiver is worn by the hard of hearing individual who can adjust the volume. These systems can be used with or without a hearing aid.

Infrared systems — use light energy to transmit the signal from the transmitter to the receiver.

Pocket Talker — assists communication with a hard of hearing person who is not wearing a hearing aid. It is a portable one-to-one communication device. A speaker talks into the lapel microphone. The sound is then carried directly to the headset of the hard of hearing individual. This minimizes background noises and the distance between speaker and listener.

Other Technical Devices

Visual signalling devices – used in conjunction with fire alarms, flashing strobe lights alert people visually that the alarm has gone off.

Closed Captioning (CC) decoders circuitry — used to access captioning on television. All TVs over 13" manufactured after 1993 have built-in decoder circuitry. Separate decoders are available for older televisions. Ensure that any video materials used in the meeting are captioned and that decoder technology is used.

Telephone Technology

Telephone technology allows deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people to contact you directly for additional information about the meeting and accept or make calls at the meeting location.

TTY (Teletypewriter) – consists of a keyboard and small display screen allowing telephone communication over the phone lines via typed conversation. Some TTYs are used in conjunction with conventional phones, others plug directly into the phone jack. If both the caller and the receiver have a TTY, the call can take place directly person to person. If, however, one of the parties does not have a TTY, they can still communicate through a telephone relay operator using a toll-free number: 1 800 855 0511. The operator acts as a communication link by typing what the hearing person says so that it appears as written text on the TTY screen and voicing what the TTY user types.

Voice Carry Over (VCO) — allows TTY users to speak for themselves and to use the TTY display to read the response when making or receiving relay operator calls. VCO works with a conventional phone and a TTY, as well as with stand-alone phones equipped with the VCO feature.

Telephones, including public pay phones, can be equipped with TTYs and with volume controls that are compatible with hearing aids.

E-mail Technology

E-mail allows deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people to contact you regarding the meeting. E-mail has contributed to leveling the playing field for deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. It is a valuable tool to gain instant, inexpensive access to people and information.

Training and Signage

Your staff should be trained to operate and maintain technical devices and communicate effectively with participants.

The International Access Symbol can be displayed to communicate accessibility to services for deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. Display this symbol to identify buildings, meeting rooms and special areas that are accessible.

Helpful Tips

- Ensure that the assistive listening system is working properly.
- Test for electrical interference that may affect hearing aids and assistive listening systems (e.g. air conditioners, fluorescent lights).
- Provide materials ahead of time to interpreters and text-based service providers so they can be familiar with content, names, terms, etc.
- Confirm that interpreters and text-based service providers are ready to begin before starting the meeting.
- Take periodic breaks.
- Choose meeting rooms that are free of obstructions, such as pillars and hanging obstacles.
- Ensure meeting rooms have proper lighting and ventilation.
- Ask the deaf, deafened and hard of hearing participants for input on how to make the meeting accessible.

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