



## **VULNERABLE POPULATION: People with Hearing Loss**

### **Definitions:**

**Hard of hearing:** A person who has a hearing loss that results in the possible dependence on visual methods to communicate in addition to use of residual hearing with or without the assistance of technology such as hearing aids.

**Deaf:** A person whose sense of hearing is nonfunctional, without technology, for the purpose of communication and whose primary means of communication is visual. In addition, unless otherwise specified, the use of the term "deaf" can also include persons who are hard of hearing or deaf-blind.

**Deaf-Blind:** A person who has a substantial loss of hearing and vision and who may utilize specialized visual, auditory, or tactile communication methods.

### **People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

"Deaf" or "hearing loss" are broad terms. For the purposes of emergency preparedness, persons who are deaf or hard of hearing or persons with hearing loss refers to a variety of hearing conditions seriously impacting a person's ability to function in everyday life activities related to communication without accommodation.

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH) lists many aspects of definitions of people with hearing loss ([www.fccdhh.org/services/basic-facts/glossary.html](http://www.fccdhh.org/services/basic-facts/glossary.html)). There is no cookie cutter approach to defining a person with hearing loss. People with hearing loss include people who are deaf, have varying degrees of hearing loss, or who are deaf-blind. Age of onset of hearing loss is an important factor. Any member of these groups may or may not use varying visual communication methods or assistive technology with varying levels of success.

The FCCDHH at the Florida Department of Health works in partnership with local communities, professional organizations, community advocates and private providers to assist people with hearing loss and their families. One of FCCDHH's main goals is to ensure the health and safety of the people it represents and to assist those affected by hearing loss, to maximize their self-sufficiency and personal independence through advocacy and education.

### **Key Issues:**

- Hearing loss is often considered an "invisible disability." You cannot tell just by looking at someone that they are deaf or hard-of-hearing.
- People with hearing loss use various methods to communicate or receive information including but not limited to American Sign Language, other forms of sign language, captions and other visual cues. Not all people with hearing loss know sign language, speak with their voice or read lips. Those who do may have limited proficiency in these skills. The best approach for providing communication access is to ask the person what they need.

- If a person does not use their voice, try communicating in writing to ask what accommodation is needed. If that does not work, use an interpreter.
- Persons with hearing loss should be advised to have a seven day supply of prescription medications available, if at all possible, and a written list of exact medications with dosages required.
- Persons with hearing loss should be advised to have written information about any adaptive equipment needed so emergency personnel can assist even if communication is not established.
- Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing rely on a variety of supportive equipment and/or services to maintain their independence (i.e., flashing signalers, phones and TVs with captions, video phones, service animals, as well as friends, families and support service agencies). When access to this assistance is no longer available, additional support may be needed to stay safe and healthy.
- If the event is severe or the recovery phase is of long duration, those who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who support them may require sheltering or other assistance to support both their physical and mental health care needs.
- Always remember, persons with hearing loss are PEOPLE first. Some persons may not do well with change, loud noises or crowds. Acting out may be caused by one or more of these issues.

#### **Planning Considerations:**

- Persons with hearing loss may live independently or with family members. Most people who are deaf or hard of hearing can be accommodated in a regular shelter including those who have co-occurring disabilities or are deaf-blind.
- Persons with hearing loss and co-occurring disabilities should be encouraged to plan for emergencies and advised of the opportunity to pre-register, if appropriate, for a special needs shelter with the local office of emergency management. It is better for special needs shelter staff to know the issues and plan for them.
- Plan for accommodations such as sign language interpreters or captioning.
- Work with FCCDHH, local Center for Independent Living or local hearing loss advocacy organization to ensure an interpreter or other communication accommodation is available if needed.
- Don't assume:
  - Because someone ignores you when you speak, they are being rude
  - Because someone is deaf, they cannot speak
  - Because someone wears a hearing aid, they can hear and understand you
  - Because someone is a family member or close friend, they are the best interpreter
  - Because someone who is deaf cannot read fluently, that they are unable to function independently if provided the information effectively

#### **Supporting Agency:**

Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (FCCDHH) [www.fccdhh.org](http://www.fccdhh.org)

Florida Department of Health [www.floridahealth.gov](http://www.floridahealth.gov)

Florida Division of Emergency Management [www.floridadisaster.org/disability](http://www.floridadisaster.org/disability)

**Additional Information:** The National Association of the Deaf provides resources and information on planning considerations, for persons with hearing loss, during disasters and other emergencies:

[www.nad.org/issues/emergency-preparedness/resources](http://www.nad.org/issues/emergency-preparedness/resources)