

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH), hereafter referred to as the Coordinating Council, is mandated by section 413.271, Florida Statutes to serve as an advisory body, which recommends policies that address the needs of Florida's community who are deaf or hard of hearing. This report describes current issues, resolutions achieved and opportunities for improvement in Florida to ensure equal access for all residents and visitors.

2015 FCCDHH Biennial Report

to Governor Rick Scott, the Florida Legislature & the Supreme Court

COMMUNICATION ACCESS

The Issue: Effective communication is the key to opening doors to equal access for the approximately 2.5 million Floridians who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened or Deaf-Blind, hereafter referred to as deaf or hard of hearing.¹ People who are deaf or hard of hearing want to learn, to work, to be safe in case of an emergency and to be productive citizens. This is all possible when they receive equal access to communication. Although current technology and services in Florida make access to communication easier than ever before, effective and appropriate programs and policies must be in place in order for this to occur. With successful outreach, all people in Florida who are deaf or hard of hearing can be made aware of and receive the accommodations necessary for successful communication.

EMPLOYMENT: Approximately half of people who are deaf or hard of hearing are of workforce age, but in 2012 the employment rate for people with a hearing disability was only 45.2%. Employers must realize that with appropriate communication access, deaf or hard of hearing adults can be productive and successful employees who do not require government support. CONTINUED PAGE 2

1. National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), 2011/2012, Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health. Accessed online from: <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2450&r=11>. Blackwell DL, Lucas JW, Clarke TC. Summary health statistics for U.S. adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2012. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 10(260). 2014.



The Coordinating Council is composed of 17 members appointed by the Governor. Appointment of members representing organizations is made by the Governor in consultation with the organizations.

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Employers with 15 or more employees must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including making their facilities accessible to qualified applicants and employees who are identified as deaf or hard of hearing.

COMMUNICATION ACCESS FROM PAGE 1

EDUCATION: Students who cannot access instruction effectively will not be able to achieve their potential. The provision of appropriate and mandated accommodations, when combined with instruction by qualified educators in a variety of school settings, is critical to effectively addressing the challenges that students with hearing loss experience in classroom settings and facilitating appropriate communication across all learning environments.

EMERGENCY SERVICES: Every Floridian deserves to be safe in the event of any type of emergency. With proper training and equipment, first responders and emergency personnel can help to ensure the safety of all Floridians and visitors with hearing loss. Appropriate access to communication during emergency situations can and will save lives.

HEALTH CARE: Equal access to effective communication with health care providers is essential to ensure the health of all Floridians with hearing loss. Effective medical treatment requires that patients understand and comply with treatment recommendations. Without access to effective communication, people with hearing loss and/or their family members are placed at increased risk of hospitalization and death. All individuals must be able to communicate effectively with medical personnel in order to be properly diagnosed, receive appropriate treatment recommendations and understand what follow up is necessary.

2. Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (Ithaca, N.Y.). (2008). Disability status reports. Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University.

3. Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (Ithaca, N.Y.). (2012). Disability status reports. Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University.

4. October 2006 Clarity Study & EAR Foundation, http://www.southalabama.edu/alliedhealth/speechandhearing/ramkissoon/teaching/643/boomer_survey_06.pdf

EMPLOYMENT

The Issue: Floridians with hearing loss are severely underutilized in the workforce. Many find employment only in the manual labor market, which often requires little need for communication and limited opportunity for advancement.

In 2012, the employment rate for people with a hearing disability was 45.2%, a decrease from 2008, when the rate was 52.0%. From 2008 to 2012, the rate of full-time employment among people with a hearing disability also decreased from 37.7% to 31.4%. In 2012 the estimated annual earnings for people with a hearing disability was \$36,400, which is \$1,400 less than the annual earnings for people with no disability.^{2,3} Among individuals with a hearing loss, 23% report that their hearing loss has affected their success in the workplace.⁴ The most common difficulties reported were hearing and understanding phone calls (64%), and conversations with co-workers (61%).⁴

RESOLUTIONS ACHIEVED:

- During the 2013–2014 state fiscal year, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation served 4,507 individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Blind Services provide job training, support and placement services to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES & POTENTIAL RESOLUTIONS:

- Provide greater access to vocational education opportunities to allow for gainful employment for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Encourage state employment agencies, including local workforce centers and local providers, to work together to promote the hiring of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

In 2014, the Florida Department of Education reported serving 5,533 students who are either deaf or hard of hearing and 137 students who are Deaf-Blind.

- Educate and train employment agencies, local providers and employers regarding people who are deaf or hard of hearing, available accommodations and local support to facilitate long-term employment success.
- Provide reasonable accommodations in the workplace to permit qualified individuals to perform effectively in their jobs.
- Train more Support Service Providers (SSPs) to empower deaf adults who are Deaf-Blind to maintain successful employment.
- Continue to work with Vocational Rehabilitation to explore possible options for acquisition of hearing aids (such as partnership with businesses, no-interest loans, etc.).

EDUCATION

The Issue: The learning capabilities of Florida students who are deaf or hard of hearing (from pre-school through post-secondary) have often been underestimated when compared with their hearing peers.

As a consequence, many do not achieve their academic potential. This is often due to a lack of accurate assessment, effective intervention and appropriate accommodations. In 2014, the Florida Department of Education reported serving 5,533 students who are either deaf or hard of hearing and 137 students who are Deaf-Blind.

- The quality of accommodations and training/certification of teachers serving students who are deaf or hard of hearing directly impacts the quality of education they receive.
- Many students do not receive the Frequency Modulation (FM) systems needed for mainstream classrooms, nor are sound field systems provided for the majority of classrooms.

- Teachers, administrators and school audiologists often lack proper training and need ongoing information about the latest technologies and interventions that can be used as best practice in a classroom setting.
- Students are often without functioning hearing aids or assistive technology.
- There is a lack of interpreters fluent in tactile sign for students with dual sensory loss, and many educational interpreters are not Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)-Certified; thus they may not be qualified to effectively teach using American Sign Language (ASL), signed systems or tactile sign.
- According to the Florida Department of Education, only 40% of students who are deaf or hard of hearing graduated with a standard diploma in 2014.

RESOLUTIONS ACHIEVED:

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that children who are deaf or hard of hearing receive individualized education plans.
- Increasing numbers of classrooms are now equipped with sound field systems that benefit all students and teachers and do not single out students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Secondary and post-secondary (trade schools and universities) schools are expected to provide appropriate classroom accommodations, including but not limited to: note-takers, sign language and oral interpreters, Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioners, Pocket-Talkers, sound field systems, Braille and other assistive devices.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES & POTENTIAL RESOLUTIONS:

- Require professional educators to have training in effective language acquisition for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and bilingual (English and ASL) educational techniques.
- Provide access to updated classroom technology to allow students who are deaf or hard of hearing to maximize learning in a classroom setting.

For more information about the
Coordinating Council or hearing loss:
Visit www.floridahealth.gov/fccdhh
Call toll free: (866) 602-3275
FAX: (850) 414-6625

- Regulate minimum standards and provide training for sign language interpreters, oral interpreters and listening and spoken language professionals who work in schools.
- Increase funding for tutors and educational facilitators, including those who are experts in ASL, tactile sign, and listening and spoken language.
- Provide more textbooks or e-textbooks with graphics, pictures or descriptions for students who are Deaf-Blind.
- Support the adoption of minimum standards including RID certification for educational interpreters, and provide training opportunities for educational interpreters.
- Increase the number of deaf and hard of hearing persons in educational positions, including counselors.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & PUBLIC SAFETY

The Issue: State and local emergency managers and public safety workers have not consistently provided effective communication for people who are deaf or hard of hearing in all phases of emergencies.

- Resources such as access to interpreters or other communication needs are not consistent in local emergency shelters. Training is needed both for public safety personnel and shelter managers.
- The only direct connection to 911 services available to people who are deaf or hard of hearing is through a TTY, an antiquated technology that is rarely used due to video phones, cell phones and other digital communication technology.

- Public safety personnel are often unaware of the communication needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing; additional training is needed. The public also needs information on how to request accommodations.
- Public information is not always accessible. When interpreters are provided, they are not always visible on screen for the entire segment.

RESOLUTIONS ACHIEVED:

- Coordinating Council members collaborated with the Florida Department of Health to provide technical assistance to support effective communication for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing with regard to emergency and disaster planning.
- The Coordinating Council provides trainings to public safety organizations on proper interaction with people who are deaf or hard of hearing and continues to advocate for ways to meet needs during emergencies.
- Coordinating Council members have provided, and continue to provide, training and resources to people who are deaf or hard of hearing at the community level about how to protect themselves in an emergency or disaster.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES & POTENTIAL RESOLUTIONS:

- Provide information and training to state and local emergency management agencies and public television stations on effective methods to make broadcast information accessible.
- Expand “Texting to 911” service to all counties in Florida. This service provides direct access to people who are deaf or hard of hearing in many emergency situations, but is currently only available in two of Florida’s 67 counties. **CONTINUED PAGE 5**

*http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/911/Text_911_Deployments.pdf
<http://www.fcc.gov/text-to-911>

Doctors' offices and hospitals do not always understand the federal requirements for providing sign language interpreters, CART Captioners or other necessary forms of effective communication as required by the ADA.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & PUBLIC SAFETY FROM PAGE 4

- Continue to educate and collaborate with state and local public safety agencies to develop standards for provision of services for effective communication, such as contracts for interpreters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Provide information and training to residents and visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing on how to access effective communication in emergencies and how to request accommodations when needed.
- Continue to work with the state to create a pool of qualified interpreters and SSPs trained to participate on emergency management teams and with the appropriate specialized ASL vocabulary and utilization, in compliance with the definition of "qualified interpreter" under the ADA.

HEALTH CARE

The Issue: Effective communication is not consistently available to people who are deaf or hard of hearing in health care settings.

- Doctors' offices and hospitals do not always understand the federal requirements for providing sign language interpreters, CART Captioners or other necessary forms of effective communication as required by the ADA.
- Health care workers need ongoing training on providing effective communication to people who are deaf or hard of hearing during outpatient medical visits or inpatient hospitalizations.
- Hearing aids are not covered by the majority of health insurance companies; consequently, financial resources remain extremely limited to assist the many people who need to purchase them or other assistive listening devices.

RESOLUTIONS ACHIEVED:

- Educational outreach efforts continue to train health care workers to communicate effectively with people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- The Coordinating Council provides a resource list of organizations that may provide limited financial assistance for purchasing hearing aids and other assistive listening devices.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND POTENTIAL RESOLUTIONS:

- Provision of public service announcements to inform people who are deaf or hard of hearing about how to advocate for themselves in health care situations.
- Continue to provide training and information to health care workers on the legal requirements for providing effective communication for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Find ways to provide hearing aids to a wider base of clients.
- Inform providers that Deaf-Blind individuals who utilize an SSP for appointments or emergency medical treatment must also have an appropriate communication access provider (tactile interpreter or CART Captioner, based on language used) available for effective communication.
- Work with state health insurance companies and agencies to amend policies to allow for coverage for purchase of hearing aids every five years.
- Work with hospitals, clinics and health care providers on when it is appropriate and not appropriate to provide Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).

WHOM WE HELP

The Coordinating Council has assisted people who are deaf or hard of hearing in almost every aspect of life.

We have provided assistance ranging from local and state issues such as emergency preparedness, to finding physicians who provide effective communication, to navigating the state offices for information and referrals, to planning accessible destination vacations for Florida tourists. On the state level, we have assisted the Governor's Hurricane Conference, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Florida Department of Children and Families, the Florida Department of Education and the Florida Department of Health. In several Florida communities, we have assisted with neighborhood watch associations and worked with people relocating to Florida who needed local resources and information.

■ We have assisted all age groups, from parents of deaf children to senior citizens.

■ Coordinating Council members assisted with the formation of the initial advisory committee that worked with the Department of Children and Families to address compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

■ Provide reports and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on the needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing living in Florida.

■ Create and distribute public service announcements and brochures regarding hearing health and the rights of Floridians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

■ Provide training to consumer groups on overcoming communication barriers and improving accessibility.

- Provide training to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing about emergency preparedness.

- Provide training to emergency management and first responder agencies about the needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- Provide education and training curricula to law enforcement agencies, associations, and commissions.

- Work with the Department of Children and Families Advisory Committee to provide education and training.

■ Develop and provide a comprehensive training manual and video used to address the provision of medical services to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

■ Deliver medical communication trainings and in-services to hospitals, palliative care facilities, and children's medical groups.

■ Maintain a comprehensive website (www.fccdhh.org) for information, education and referral.

■ Travel across Florida on a quarterly schedule in order to meet with individuals/groups impacted by hearing loss, to provide them with current information about hearing loss and give them a forum to register their thoughts and concerns.

WHAT WE DO

■ Provide information and referral services to Floridians in the form of:

- Daily email communication
- Daily phone communication
- Comprehensive 24-hour website with frequent and timely updates

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Association of Late-Deafened Adults:
Council Chair Chris Littlewood, M.Ed.

Hearing Loss Association of Florida:
Vice-Chair Judy G. Martin

Hearing Loss Association of Florida:
Richard N. Williams, Esq.
-serving until new appointment

Florida Association of the Deaf:
Donna Drake

Florida Association of the Deaf:
Glenna R. Ashton, Ph.D., RSA
ASLTA-professional

Persons Who are Deaf-Blind:
Darlene Laibl-Crowe

Deaf Service Center Association:
Julie Church, MS

Alexander Graham Bell Association of Florida:
Sherilyn M. Adler, Ph.D.

Communication Access Realtime Translation Captioner:
Patricia Gayl Hardeman

Licensed Audiologist:
Cindy Simon, Au.D.

Licensed Hearing Aid Specialist
Jeffrey Paul Caine

Parent of a Child with Hearing Loss:
position vacant

Florida Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: *position vacant*

Florida Department of Children and Families:
John M. Jackson, Esq.

Florida Department of Education:
Cecil F. Bradley, Ph.D.

Florida Department of Elder Affairs:
Eloise Williams

Florida Department of Health:
Trina Thompson, MA

STAFF

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John Escoto

Outreach Coordinator:
Allysse Rasmussen, Ph.D.
in memoriam