



The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing hereinafter referred to a “FCCDHH”, was initially mandated by F.S. Statute 413.271 in 2004 to serve as an advisory and coordinating body which recommends policies that address the needs of Florida’s community who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, or Deaf-Blind and continues to do so today.

Images retrieved from: <https://www.google.com/images>

Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing 2021 BIENNIAL REPORT

2021 FCCDHH Biennial Report to Governor Ron DeSantis, the Florida Legislature & the Florida Supreme Court

INTRODUCTION

Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH) is a resource for persons with hearing loss who need assistance with everyday needs including education, employment, healthcare, legal, public safety and emergencies, communication technology and services, and other areas via communication access and accommodations. Although this report is mostly highlighting healthcare, public safety, and COVID-19 issues there are other important concerns that FCCDHH continues to address. Other important issues include hearing aids, equivalent education for Floridians who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind, legal systems issues, access to technology, and access to accommodations such as qualified sign language interpreters and captioning as needed for effective communication in all areas.

FCCDHH benefits from Department of Health funding, staffed positions, and state laws, regulations, and rules to effectively follow best practices and provide appropriate representation. We have listed our accomplishments in previous biennial reports and the following is an update of some of the things we have done since the last report:

- Continues to meet face-to-face quarterly throughout different areas in Florida to maximize outreach and during 2020 met online.
- Continually invites guests to present on pertinent issues facing Florida’s Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and Deaf-Blind communities.
- Continues to be open to the public at all meetings encouraging members of the community to share their thoughts, experiences, and concerns whether face-to-face or online.
- Continues to provide resources and referrals to the public as well as government agencies to maximize support for the Florida’s Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and Deaf-Blind communities.
- Has a full-time program coordinator who serves as a liaison between the public and the Council between meetings, answer calls and return emails, maintain the website and organizes the quarterly meetings.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION – COVID-19

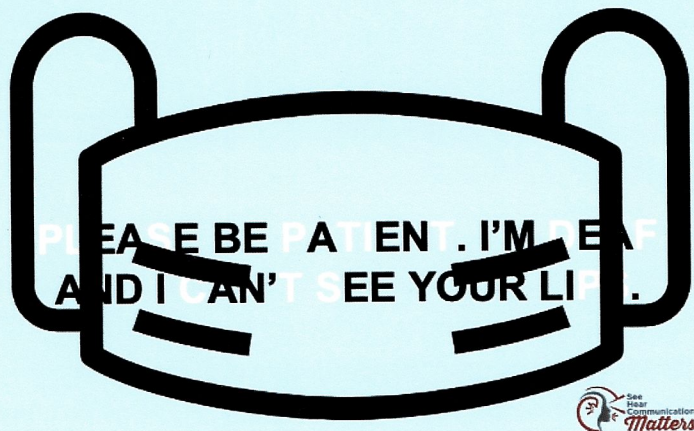


Image retrieved from: <https://tinachildressaud.com/2020/11/01/shifting-the-communication-burden/>

***PLEASE BE PATIENT.
I'M DEAF AND I CAN'T
SEE YOUR LIPS.***

With the advent of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, efforts to provide full access through English captioning and American Sign Language interpreters has varied from nonexistent to sporadic on state, county, and local levels leading to outcries and lawsuits in Florida and nationally. Continuing into 2021 requires sustained communication access on community measures such as masking and social distancing, vaccine distribution and appointments, and any other similar efforts. National Association of the Deaf (NAD) has many position statement papers including accessible emergency management and communicating while wearing masks applicable to Florida. Interestingly, with the wearing of masks and social distancing, people are realizing the extent of their own or others' hearing loss more keenly, thus the number of people identified as having a significant hearing loss will increase.

There are existing federal laws that are even more important during crisis including the following: Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (updated 1998 and 2014), especially Section 504 and 508, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 255 of the Communications Act, Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act. The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act is particularly applicable as it requires FEMA and states to provide accessible information, set aside disability accommodation funds within the emergency budget, and include representatives from the deaf and hard of hearing community in meetings, policies and procedures.

A few of NAD's recommendations most relevant to Florida include the following:

1. Establish protocol for immediate securing of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters during all emergency situation press conferences.
2. Ensure that the ASL interpreter secured for the emergency press conference is visible on television at all times during the broadcast.
3. Ensure that Broadcasters are able to provide quality live captioning for all broadcasts of emergency information.
4. Ensure that emergency information provided online are fully accessible including with captioning and ASL interpreting.
5. Provide ongoing inclusive and accessible training to the deaf and hard of hearing community and affected emergency and health personnel.
6. Incorporate texting capability with all N-1-1 services.
7. When warranted, provide clear masks and/or clear face shields.
8. Use additional communication strategies with cloth or surgical masks such as using separate text devices or paper and pen, personal amplification tools, or speech-to-text tools, and as a last resort pulling down mask to allow for lipreading.

HEALTHCARE

For the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and Deaf-Blind populations within Florida, inadequate communication causes medical errors leading to patient morbidity and mortality as well as an increase in overall health care costs. Floridians with hearing loss are protected under the Americans with Disabilities act (ADA) and have the right to full access to communication with their healthcare providers.

According to the National Association of the Deaf's (NAD) position statement on health care access for Deaf patients, providers, and staff should ensure the right of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and Deaf-Blind individuals to determine for themselves the appropriate communication mode in the healthcare setting. This means that the patient has the right to use of qualified sign language interpreter (American Sign Language, Signed English, oral, Cued Speech), qualified Deaf Interpreter (DI), communication access real-time translation (CART), or tactile sign language interpreter for Deaf-Blind.

The same issues of quality communication and properly functioning technology also applies to the use of Virtual Remote Interpreting (VRI). The US Department of Health and Human Services has developed the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in health and healthcare. The national CLAS standards are intended to advance health equity, improve quality and eliminate healthcare disparities. CLAS is about respect and responsiveness: Respect the whole individual and respond to the individual's health needs and preference. In addition, health insurance, private or government, often do not address the financial issues with obtaining appropriate hearing devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, personal amplifiers (pocket talkers, etc.).

National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Position Statement on Healthcare Access for Deaf Patients. Accessed online from <https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-health-care-access-for-deaf-patients/>

HHS.gov, National Standards for culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care. Accessed online from <https://www.thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas>



Image retrieved from: <http://www.usforacle.com/2020/07/16/usf-audiology-clinic-implements-clear-masks-for-hearing-impaired-patients/>

Hearing Loss Association of America, (HLAA), also had two recommendations for work and home health situations:

1. All online video call and conferencing platforms are to offer free access to automatic captioning technology to people with hearing loss.
2. Telehealth video-based platforms still must provide access to captioning or interpreting, ideally on the same screen.

Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), Communicate with Healthcare providers during COVID-19. Accessed online from <https://www.hearingloss.org/communicate-with-healthcare-providers-covid-19>.

A May 8, 2020 article on COVID-19 hospital and healthcare access by HLAA was developed with a consensus by deaf and hard of hearing Consumer Groups, deaf healthcare providers and other subject matter experts listed several communication tools depending on the preference of the deaf and hard of hearing person. This might include in-person sign language interpreters, Video Remote Interpreting (VRI), lip-reading (including the use of transparent face masks), written communications, captioning or CART, or speech-to-text apps. Technology tools include Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) equipment, Video Relay systems (VRS) equipment, speech-to-text apps, typing back apps, text relay systems, captioned phones, and large print apps.

National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Accessible Emergency management for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People. Accessed online from <https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-accessible-emergency-management-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-people/>



Image retrieved from: <https://www.signlanguagenyc.com/frequently-asked-questions-about-certified-deaf-interpreters/certified-medical-deaf-interpreter-nyc-faq-03/>

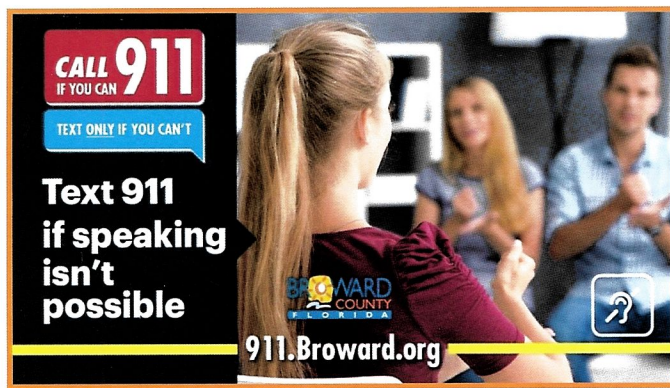


Image retrieved from: www.westonfl.org

PUBLIC SAFETY & EMERGENCIES

Effective communication in public safety and emergency situations is a civil right under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal laws. FCCDHH is working diligently to provide information about public safety issues impacting Florida's Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and Deaf-Blind communities. FCCDHH has provided information about the importance of using qualified interpreters, captioning, and other necessary communication strategies throughout the state, county, and local level during times of emergencies including COVID-19 pandemic.

In the past several years, Florida has been impacted by major hurricanes, natural disasters, COVID-19, and public safety incidents, which have affected the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community as much as or more than it has everyone else in the state. There have been several well publicized communication barriers negatively impacting the safety of Florida's Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens. This includes the lack of or use of unqualified interpreters, poor captioning services, and inability to access law enforcement in times of emergencies such as medical crisis, domestic violence, pandemic information, etc.

FCCDHH works with public safety officials through educating about the needs of Florida's citizens who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind regarding effective communication strategies. FCCDHH supports the implementation of the Communication Video and Accessibility Act of 2010 by moving from legacy or E-911 to next generation or NG-911 that allows more advanced methods of communication to a public safety access point (PSAP). Generally, the majority of Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens have no direct access to 911 through voice calls, however part of the implementation of NG-911 can allow texting to 911.

Text to 911 is implemented locally at the county or municipal level in the state of Florida. By the end of February 2021 almost 34 out of 67 counties in Florida have incorporated text to 911 in some capacity. There are still many counties in Florida that still have NOT implemented text to 911. While text to 911 benefits people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, it is also beneficial to ALL Floridians for direct access to emergency services (this is known as "Deaf Gain": when a service that benefits the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community also benefits the community as a whole).

Federal Communication Commission (FCC), (2017), 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA). Accessed online from <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/21st-century-communications-and-video-accessibility-act-cvaa>

Federal Communication Commission (FCC), (2018), Text to 911, What You Need to Know. Accessed online from <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/what-you-need-know-about-text-to-911>

MyFlorida.com. Accessed online from https://www.dms.myflorida.com/business_operations/telecommunications/public_safety_communications/florida_911/statewide_text_to_911-initiative

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Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH) is composed of seventeen members appointed by the Governor. Appointment of members representing organizations is made by the Governor in consultation with the organizations.

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