



# FLORIDA COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

# BIENNIAL REPORT

## 2023





# INTRODUCTION

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of hearing (FCCDHH) is overseen by the Florida Department of Health (FDOH), under section 413.271, Florida Statutes. The FCCDHH comprises 17 members representing various organizations. FCCDHH is a resource for persons with hearing loss who need assistance to overcome challenges in areas such as hearing devices, education, employment, health care, legal services, public safety and emergencies, communication technologies, communication access, and accommodations.

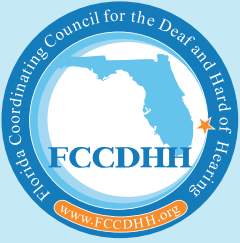
This report highlights statistics such as over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids, issues for senior citizens, health care, and public safety and emergencies.

Florida law authorizes the FCCDHH to provide technical assistance, education, and advocacy regarding the needs of deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind persons. The following is an update of some activities since the last report:

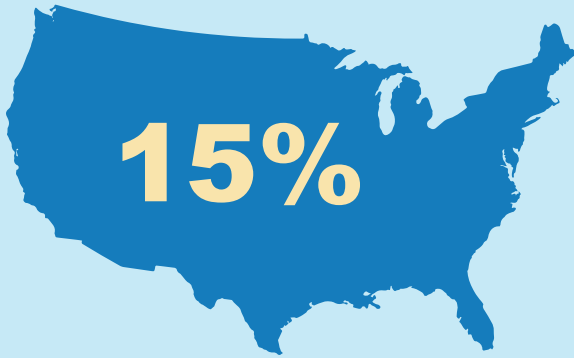
- Conducted in-person quarterly meetings (St. Augustine, Ft. Myers, Orlando) to maximize outreach. During 2021 and 2022, the council met via online conferencing, as needed.
- Participated in meetings with community partners and others presenting on pertinent issues facing Florida's deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind communities.
- Published announcements of public meetings and encouraged individuals to share their thoughts, experiences, and concerns.
- Exhibited at various statewide events related to people with hearing loss to gather feedback and promote awareness of the FCCDHH.
- Provided resources and referrals to state and public stakeholders to maximize support for Florida's deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind communities.
- Provided technical assistance on information gathered from public inquiries to FDOH regarding issues that impact individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, or deafblind.

FDOH has a full-time program coordinator who serves as a liaison between the public and FCCDHH. The coordinator responds to correspondence, inquiries through the main telephone line, updates website content, and facilitates the scheduling of quarterly meetings.





# Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing **STATISTICS AT A GLANCE**



**15%** of the population is  
considered to have a significant  
hearing loss.

Due to a higher concentration  
of older adults in Florida,  
it is estimated that at least

**3 to 4 million**

Floridians have  
significant  
hearing  
loss.



In **K–12** education programs, there is a  
growing number of students identified  
with hearing loss.

**Florida School for the Deaf  
and Blind** is one of the largest  
state schools in the nation with  
**500** deaf and hard of hearing  
students, in addition to more  
than **500** served through  
outreach programs.



County school districts  
serve approximately

**54,000**

children who  
have hearing  
loss with  
specialized  
programs.

**2-3** out of every 1,000 children  
born in Florida have a detected hearing loss.



# OVER-THE-COUNTER HEARING AIDS

There are studies on how untreated hearing loss in older individuals leads to loneliness, depression, embarrassment, distress, and cognitive decline. Most individuals who could benefit from using hearing aids do not get them due to the cost and, in most cases, they are not covered by insurance.

Recently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a rule that established access to OTC hearing aids. The rule was intended to improve access to affordable hearing aids for millions of Americans. OTC hearing aids are defined by the FDA as medical devices designed to treat mild to moderate hearing loss in adults 18 years and older. Hearing aids that are fitted by hearing health care professionals are now classified as prescription aids. OTC hearing aids are classified separately from prescription hearing aids, with each having its own set of regulations for safety and efficacy. It allows individuals to purchase a hearing aid without a medical examination, audiological examination, or professional fitting and counseling.

OTC hearing aids may not be the best choice for everyone. Personalized programming, care, and training for OTC hearing aids is not available. Instructions and links to video tutorials may be provided from the manufacturers to educate users how to operate these devices. Deaf and hard of hearing users can find this difficult to navigate. A large population of users are older adults. The phone applications required to use the devices should be user friendly for all users.

One size does not fit all. Those with more severe hearing loss may experience no benefit from OTC hearing aids and may incorrectly conclude hearing aids would not work for them. Here is a brief list of pros and cons:

## PROS

- Lower average cost.
- May have a smartphone app that allows users to adjust the volume.
- No multiple visits to a hearing health care professional for adjustment.
- No additional travel is needed for fitting and adjustments.
- Proximity to a hearing health care professional is not a factor in receiving the hearing aid.
- No need to take off time from work for office visits.

## CONS

- Do not work well for individuals who have extensive hearing loss.
- Require self-fitting and are not customized for the individual.
- Offer fewer features than prescription hearing aids.
- No in-person training.
- Shorter warranty period than prescription hearing aids.
- May not be returnable if they do not work for the individual's needs.

An exam by a licensed medical professional is recommended for individuals experiencing:

- Injury to or deformity of the ear.
- Fluid, pus, or blood coming from one or both ears.
- Sudden or fluctuating hearing loss.
- Better hearing in one ear than the other.
- Difficulty understanding conversations.
- Ringing or buzzing in one or both ears.
- Constant pain in one or both ears.
- Vertigo or dizziness.
- Full or plugged feeling in the ear.
- Excess ear wax or possible tumors.

Education on OTC and prescription hearing aids is needed for individuals to make an informed decision to ensure they receive the correct treatment to address their hearing loss.



*U.S. Food and Drug Administration:  
[FDA Finalizes Historic Rule Enabling Access to Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids for Millions of Americans.](#)*



# OLDER ADULTS

According to the NIDCD Epidemiology and Statistics Program, nearly 25 percent of those aged 65 to 74, and 50 percent of those who are 75 and older, have disabling hearing loss. The Hearing Loss Association of America reports that people with hearing loss wait an average of seven years before seeking help. Less than 1 out of 5 people (16%) who would benefit from a hearing aid use one ([hearingloss.org](https://hearingloss.org)). Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic health condition facing older adults in the U.S.

Hearing loss in older populations has a far-reaching effect beyond not hearing well. It impacts brain health, mental health, memory, balance, and energy levels. These individuals need to incorporate strategies, therapies, support systems, and technology to become adaptive, empowered, and proactive; thereby providing a new way of both social interactions and accessible communication.



The advent of OTC hearing aids may be a cost-savings for some, but it only benefits those with mild to moderate hearing loss. In addition, some individuals may require additional assistance to choose a device properly.

Medicare does not cover routine hearing care or the cost of hearing aids. Medicare will cover an audiologist diagnostic hearing exam if a physician orders it. Medicare Advantage plans may offer coverage on hearing exams and hearing aids. However, the plans vary greatly in the amount of assistance. Medicaid may cover the following hearing services: diagnostic audiological tests, hearing aids, and cochlear implants.

NIDCD National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders: <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/>.

# HEALTH CARE

For the deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind populations in 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 and have the right to full communication access with their health care providers.

The National Association of the Deaf issued a position statement indicating health care access should ensure the rights of deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind individuals to determine for themselves the appropriate communication mode in the health care setting. This means patients have the right to the use of a qualified sign language interpreter (American Sign Language, signed English, oral, cued speech, qualified deaf interpreter, Communication Access Real Time Translation, or tactile sign language interpreter for deafblind). The same issues of quality communication and properly functioning technology apply to the use of Virtual Remote Interpreting and captioning services.



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has developed the national standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in health and health care. The CLAS standards are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and eliminate health care disparities.

Health insurance plans, private or government, are starting to address the financial issues with obtaining appropriate hearing devices such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and personal amplifiers.

In addition to ongoing communication challenges, mental health is a rising issue even within the wide range of the deaf and hard of hearing communities. Accessibility includes direct communication with qualified mental health professionals.

*The National Association of the Deaf:* [Statement on Healthcare Access for Deaf Patients.](#)

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:*

[National standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care.](#)



# PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCIES

Effective communication in public safety and emergency situations is a civil right under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal laws. The FCCDHH is working diligently to provide information about public safety issues impacting Florida's deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deafblind communities. The FCCDHH has provided information about the importance of using qualified interpreters, captioning, and other necessary communication strategies at the state, county, and local level during times of emergencies.

In the past several years, Florida has been impacted by major hurricanes, natural disasters, and public safety incidents, which created communication barriers in the deaf and hard of hearing community. This includes the lack of qualified interpreters, use of unqualified interpreters, poor captioning services, and inability to access law enforcement in times of emergencies such as medical crisis, domestic violence, or others. Recently, there has been increased usage of Certified Deaf Interpreters at briefings, and most importantly, seen clearly and consistently on the screens, along with consistent captioning.

The FCCDHH works with public safety officials to provide education about the needs of Florida's citizens who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind regarding effective communication strategies. The 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. Generally, many deaf and hard of hearing citizens have no direct access to 911 through voice calls. Part of the implementation of NG-911 allows texting to 911.

Text to 911 has been implemented in approximately 60 of Florida's 67 counties. 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 (2017): [21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act \(CVAA\)](#).*

*Federal Communication Commission (2018): [Text to 911, What You Need to Know](#).*

# FCCDHH MEMBERS

Hearing Loss Association of  
America - Florida

**Karen A. Goldberg, M.D.**

**Vacant**

Florida Association of the Deaf  
(FAD)

**Glenna R. Ashton, Ph.D. (Chair)**

**Vacant**

Association of Late-Deafened  
Adults (ALDA)

**Chris Littlewood, M.Ed.**

Florida DeafBlind Association  
(FDBA)

**Vacant**

Florida Registry of Interpreters  
(FRID)

**Eugenia Haliburton**

Licensed Audiologist

**Cindy Simon, Au.D.**

Alexander Graham Bell  
Association (AG Bell)

**Vacant**

Parent of a Child with Hearing Loss  
**Vacant**

Deaf Service Center Association  
**Vacant**

Communication Access Real-Time  
Translation (CART)

**Vacant**

Licensed Hearing Aid Specialist  
**Vacant**

Florida Department of Education  
(FDOE/VR)

**Cory Parker (Vice-Chair)**

Florida Department of Elder Affairs  
**Mary Hodges**

Florida Department of Children and  
Families (DCF)

**John M. Jackson, Esq.**

# CONTACT INFORMATION

**Angie Green**

FCCDHH Liaison

Florida Department of Health

Bureau of Family Health Services

Division of Community Health Promotion

4052 Bald Cypress Way, Bin #B-13

Tallahassee, FL 32399-1721

850-558-9645

[Angela.Green@FLhealth.gov](mailto:Angela.Green@FLhealth.gov)



