



Falling on deaf ears.....

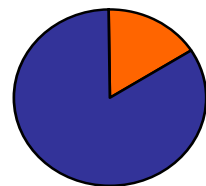
Repeated recommendations from governmental bodies since 2004* regarding the accessibility needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind continue to be ignored while millions of Floridians with hearing loss fall through the cracks.

*Ref.: ADAWG, FCCDHH, GCD reports, 2004—2008



Who are the deaf and hard of hearing?

- Deaf from birth using American Sign Language
- Deaf or hard of hearing from birth using cochlear implants and spoken language
- Hard of hearing children using hearing aids
- Workforce age individuals who have lost some or all of their hearing and who may use sign language, hearing aids or cochlear implants (late-deafened)
- Senior citizens who have lost their hearing as a part of the aging process and who may or may not use hearing technology (hard of hearing or late-deafened)
- Individuals with hearing loss and other disabilities
- Deaf-blind, either from birth or over time



Approximately 1/6 of Florida's citizens are affected by hearing loss.



A Common Misperception

Some people assume that the needs of Florida's deaf and hard of hearing citizens are met through existing agencies serving individuals with a variety of different disabilities. This is not true because the communication access needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing are unique and ongoing. You cannot simply build a ramp or widen a doorway and solve the communication problems faced by Floridians with hearing loss.

Others believe that there is state funding for hearing loss issues through the Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (FCCDHH). The FCCDHH has 13 Governor appointed volunteer members and has four state agency designees. It is mandated by statute to serve as an *advisory and coordinating body which recommends policies that address the needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind, as well as methods that improve the coordination of services among public and private entities and to provide technical assistance, advocacy and education.* It is not permitted to provide direct services and relies on a very limited annual budget (\$240,000).

The **Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing** alone cannot adequately address the issues that have clearly been identified as occurring within Florida.

Report by: **The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**
For more information about the Council, refer to: <http://www.fccdhh.org/>
or 850-245-4913 (voice); 850-245-4914 (TTY);
866-602-3275 (voice toll-free); 866-602-3276 (TTY toll-free).



ANNUAL REPORT
TO THE FLORIDA
GOVERNOR AND
LEGISLATURE

2009 Report

Status report: 3 million Floridians at risk.

Nearly 3 million Floridians are deaf or hard of hearing... impacting countless others whose lives are affected by family members with hearing loss.

There is a prevailing assumption that agencies serving people with all disabilities equally serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Hearing loss is an invisible disability, and the needs of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and deaf-blind are not being recognized or adequately addressed within the State of Florida.

Lack of communication access by persons with hearing loss is a growing concern.



Key issues remain unaddressed:

1. Legal Accessibility - Lack of communication access throughout the legal system has adversely, unfairly and illegally denied the rights of persons with hearing loss. Accommodations that allow them to fully understand the issues and recommendations of attorneys and other professionals are commonly not provided.

2. Medical Accessibility - It is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of deaf and hard of hearing patients who are receiving inadequate healthcare because they are struggling to communicate with healthcare professionals. There is a basic lack of deaf awareness and appropriate communication supports provided as required by law.

3. Education - Children who cannot access instruction effectively will not achieve to their potential. The benefits of early identification of hearing loss erode as children fail to receive necessary communication accommodations. The median reading achievement level for deaf 17 and 18 year olds is at the 4th grade level. Of those who are accepted into higher education, 70 percent withdraw before earning college degrees.



4. Employment - Approximately half of persons with significant hearing loss are of workforce age. Recent changes to Florida's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation have made vocational services unattainable for most Floridians with hearing loss. The unemployment rate for adults who are deaf or hard of hearing is 40% and rising with an additional 40% being underemployed.

REQUIRED ADA ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

Hospital Accessibility



Medical Office Accessibility



Workplace Accessibility



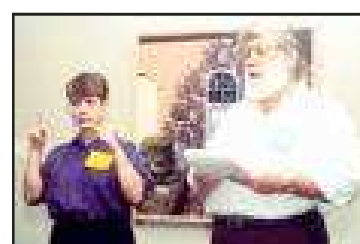
Law Enforcement Accessibility



Courtroom Accessibility



Education Accessibility



Emergency Accessibility



Numerous state and federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (or ADA) have been passed which seek to minimize bias against persons with disabilities and give such persons equal opportunities to enjoy the same rights, privileges, and access to services as all other citizens.

People with hearing loss have the right under these laws to be free from discrimination in employment, education, entertainment, medical treatment, hotels & motels, transportation, law enforcement encounters, emergency shelter, and in dealings with attorneys and the courts.

Minimum standards for reasonable accommodation have been clearly identified by both Federal and State statutes. Some commonly used accommodations include (but are not limited to):

- Substituting computer technologies such as email, instant messaging, or voice recognition software for communication requiring the ability to hear;
- Providing access to hearing aids, cochlear implants, or other assistive listening devices that enable an individual to focus directly on the sound source, reducing distractions from background noise;
- Providing sign language interpreters or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) stenography;
- Training service providers in basic sign language;
- Providing phone amplification technology, headsets, or TTY; and
- Considering environmental factors in meetings or other communication barriers such as poor acoustics, including excess reverberation and background noise, seating and positioning.

At the heart of this issue is communication accessibility. The person with the hearing loss is the expert on what constitutes accessible communication. His or her preferences must be considered when determining which accommodations will make communication accessible for that particular person.

A HARSH CONTRAST Current Year Budget 2008-09*

Persons with Developmental Disabilities	Persons who are Blind/Visually Impaired	Persons who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing
General revenue \$476,668,614	General revenue \$14,108,160	General revenue \$0
Trust Funds \$580,306,940	Federal Funding Sources \$38,214,088	Funds from Department of Health budget \$240,000
Total of funds included \$1,056,975,554	Total of funds included \$52,322,248	Total of funds included \$240,000
Approximate per person funding (~44,000) \$24,022	Approximate per person funding (~53,000) \$987	Approximate per person funding (~3,000,000) \$ 0.08
Salaried positions 3,541 FTEs	Salaried positions 300 FTEs	3 partially funded positions from Council budget equaling 1.6 FTE

*SOURCE: <http://www.ebudget.state.fl.us/bdservices.aspx?sf=1>; Amounts in each column do not include funding expended by public schools, Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind or by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The communication access needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing are unique and ongoing. Building a ramp or widening a doorway are lasting accommodations, while the need to communicate effectively should be considered for each critical interaction.

NEEDED ACTIONS ARE:

Establish a single line of responsibility within state government with oversight and policymaking authority to address the needs of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and deaf-blind. At the discretion of the Governor, the functions of this oversight body could be:

- Set standards for and have the authority to monitor implementation of standards for accessibility accommodations
- Facilitate accessibility to medical services
- Facilitate accessibility to law enforcement and legal services
- Expand and improve the delivery of services and supports by establishing a network of statewide one-stop resource centers
- Encourage recruitment of sign and oral interpreters
- Facilitate training of Communication Access Realtime Translators (CART) for the deaf or hard of hearing and Support Service Providers (SSPs) for persons who are deaf-blind
- Regulate credentialing of accessibility providers as necessary to maintain appropriate quality of services

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing was initiated by the 2004 Legislature, § 413.271, Florida Statutes. The Council is dedicated to its charge to provide technical assistance, advocacy, and education.

The Survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities had responses representing more than 2.4 million companies nationwide. The survey revealed that a majority of large businesses hiring people with disabilities are discovering that costs for accommodations differ very little from those of the general employee population. Additionally, the survey showed that once an employer hires someone with a disability, they are much more likely to hire other people with disabilities.

The National Center for Health Statistics estimate that there are 32.7 million Americans with hearing difficulty—or 17 percent of the total U.S. population.

The success of the Council lies solely in the dedication of all its members to the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which mandates effective communication access for all.

For more information, please refer to previous reports of the Council:

http://www.fccdhh.org/files/1/File/2005_reporttogovernor.pdf

http://www.fccdhh.org/files/1/File/2006_reporttogovernor.pdf

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