



BIENNIAL  
REPORT  
TO THE  
FLORIDA  
GOVERNOR  
AND  
LEGISLATURE

# THE FLORIDA COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

## 2011 Report

### Noteworthy Recognition by State and Federal Agencies

The Coordinating Council's expertise was most recently utilized in 2009 when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights ordered the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) to form an advisory committee to help them become fully compliant with the ADA. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights had found several instances where DCF was not in compliance with the ADA when providing services to Floridians of all ages with hearing loss. This mandated advisory committee is comprised primarily of Coordinating Council members who, along with a consultant and on an ongoing basis, review and revise DCF policies and procedures to more equitably serve persons with hearing loss. In addition, this committee reviews and advises DCF on training issues and materials used by DCF employees who serve this varied and unique population.

### Who We Are

The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, hereafter referred to as the "Coordinating Council," is mandated by F.S. § 413.271 to serve as an advisory and coordinating body which recommends policies that address the needs of Florida's deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind (hereafter referred to collectively as "hearing loss") community. The Coordinating Council serves as a resource for deaf and hard-of-hearing Floridians who need some assistance with everyday needs including employment, education, and access to services. Whether providing technical assistance to individuals, governmental agencies and other private or public organizations, or providing the resources to allow individuals to help themselves, the Coordinating Council is dedicated to assisting the nearly 3 million Floridians affected by hearing loss. The Coordinating Council's technical assistance allows both public and private entities to better and more efficiently serve persons with hearing loss and their families. This information can also help those entities avoid costly litigation resulting from violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws and statutes that provide for protection of civil rights.

### Accomplishments of the Coordinating Council

- Provision of reports and advice to the Governor, Supreme Court, and Legislature of the State of Florida on the needs of persons with hearing loss (see Governor's Reports of 2005, 2007, 2009);
- Creation of a comprehensive website ([www.fccdhh.org](http://www.fccdhh.org)) for information, referral and education purposes;
- Creation and distribution of public service announcements regarding the rights of Floridians who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind;
- Participation in a statewide community roundtable exploring the needs of Floridians with hearing loss and possible solutions;
- Provision of training to consumer groups on overcoming communication barriers and improving accessibility (ongoing);
- Provision of training to emergency management and first responder agencies (ongoing);
- Provision of education and training curricula to law enforcement agencies, associations, and commissions (ongoing);
- Creation and provision of training to the Department of Children and Families Dependency Summit;
- Collaboration with the Florida Hospital Association to develop a training video and guide used to address the provision of medical services to persons with hearing loss;
- Delivery of medical communication trainings and in-services to hospitals, palliative care facilities, and children's medical groups (ongoing);
- Report on licensure of sign language interpreters (2006);
- Provision of content and technical assistance for cross-disability recommendation and implementation reports of the Governor's Commission on Disabilities (2008, 2009, 2010).

# Working to Improve Outcomes for Floridians with Hearing Loss

## Employment:

Every Floridian, including those Floridians impacted by hearing loss, who wants to work should have equal opportunity to secure a job. However, did you know that:

- 48% of working-age (21-64 years old) individuals with hearing loss were unemployed. (*Cornell University 2008 Disability Status Report, Florida—www.disabilitystatistics.org*)
- As a result of the Order of Selection by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), fewer individuals with disabilities (including those with hearing loss) receive services that lead to employment.
- 23% of individuals with a hearing loss report that their hearing loss has affected their success in the workplace. The most common difficulties were hearing and understanding phone calls (64%) and conversations with co-workers (61%). (*October 2006 Clarity study (www.Clarityproducts.com) and the EAR Foundation <http://www.hearinglossweb.com/issues/Identity/boom/surv.htm>*)
- 27% report that their hearing loss has negatively affected their earning potential. (*Ibid.*)



The Coordinating Council continues to work toward increasing access to the workplace for all Floridians impacted by hearing loss in order to *decrease* unemployment and underemployment. To this end, the Coordinating Council consults with and makes ongoing recommendations to a multitude of employer and workforce entities.

## Education:

In our highly technical society, both high quality education and literacy are critical in order to be competitive in the workplace. Nonetheless, the system continually fails our students with hearing loss.



- The median reading comprehension level of 18-year-old deaf and hard of hearing students was reported to be at about a 4.0 grade level as measured by the SAT-9. (*<http://research.gallaudet.edu/Literacy/index.html>*)
- 60-80% of students with hearing loss enrolled in colleges and universities drop out before completion of their degree. (*2003 dissertation by Anne Gray Liversidge, <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/1903/52/1/dissertations.pdf>*)
- Without a quality education, individuals are unprepared to compete effectively in the workforce and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

The Coordinating Council continues to work with educational agencies regarding the needs of students with hearing loss. Underestimating the abilities of these students does them and our society a disservice. We need to develop effective methods to teach these students and enable them to compete equally with their hearing peers.

## Medical Accessibility:

Despite being mandated by the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, persons with hearing loss continue to be denied full and equal access to medical services, programs, and activities because of the unwillingness of healthcare professionals and institutions to provide appropriate assistance and services for effective communication and patient safety.

- Denial of equal access to effective communication happens in both physicians' offices and in healthcare facilities.
- Under the ADA, each individual is entitled to effective and appropriate communications.
- Ineffective communication, when accessing medical services, can lead to incorrect diagnosis and delayed or improper medical treatment. This can result in potentially fatal outcomes as well as increased business and litigation expenses for the medical provider.



The Coordinating Council has collaborated with physicians, hospitals, hospital associations, and other healthcare facilities and providers to improve services while decreasing costs associated with miscommunications and misunderstandings (of patients and providers) and decreasing costs resulting from violations of state and federal laws.

## Legal Accessibility:

Florida has numerous law enforcement agencies, courts, and legal groups and organizations. Although some of these entities communicate effectively with persons who have hearing loss, more often, communication difficulties exist which could potentially lead to dire consequences, as well as violations of an individual's rights.

- All members of the legal system have a responsibility to protect the public's rights when they come into contact with persons who have hearing loss.
- The "need to know" encompasses not only law enforcement, courts and corrections personnel but also any other public or private legal entity.
- The lack of equal communication access for persons with hearing loss represents a serious threat to life, liberty, property, and due process.

As mentioned in the *Accomplishments* section of this report, the Coordinating Council has had a major impact in the alleviation of the aforementioned issues by providing much needed training on legal accessibility.

- The Coordinating Council has been invited to present to many law-enforcement training academies.
- The Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Florida Law Enforcement Academy Directors' Association enthusiastically support this training.

The Coordinating Council is changing the ways officers and legal professionals are trained to interact with citizens who have hearing loss. We are pleased that these trainings have been enthusiastically received and continue to be requested by those involved in every aspect of the legal system.



## Important Statistics About Hearing Loss

- Approximately 1 of every 1,000 infants in Florida are born deaf or hard of hearing (*Florida Department of Health*)
- An estimated 3 million Florida residents have hearing loss (2000 Census Data)
- 93% of deaf children are born into hearing families; only 7% are born into deaf families (*NIDCD*)
- Approximately 17% (36 million) of American adults report some degree of hearing loss (*NIDCD*)
- 50% of all Baby Boomers are expected to have hearing loss (*The Ear Foundation*)
- 1 out of 3 people over age 65 have some degree of hearing loss (*Center for Hearing and Communication*)
- More than 70,000 individuals in the United States (including children and adults) have cochlear implants (*FDA, NIDCD/NIH*)
- Hearing loss is the #1 reported injury among military veterans (*Department of Veterans' Affairs*)
- It is estimated that over 22 million workers are exposed to hazardous noise on the job (*CDC, NIOSH*)
- Only 1 out of every 5 people who would benefit from a hearing aid actually wears one (*NIDCD*)
- Approximately 5% of American children 18 years of age and younger suffer from a hearing loss (*American Speech-Language Hearing Association, quoted on [www.miracle-ear.com/hearinglosschildren](http://www.miracle-ear.com/hearinglosschildren)*)

## The Coordinating Council Continues Its Work To:

- Encourage compliance with early identification of and intervention for newborns to maximize use of the critical period for language and to minimize special education and support costs
- Support education and training to facilitate the use of preferred mode of communication
- Reinforce standards where there is a lack of compliance by employers, businesses, and/or government agencies in providing appropriate accessibility accommodations as defined by federal law and state statutes
- Educate legal and medical professionals about appropriate and effective communication
- Encourage the development of training programs for mental health professionals to address issues unique to people/families impacted by hearing loss
- Advise all emergency service personnel and programs statewide to be trained in inclusive emergency preparedness for persons with hearing loss
- Standardize emergency messaging procedures to ensure equal access and safety for citizens with hearing loss
- Encourage all public transportation systems (land, sea and air) to comply with accessibility standards for persons with hearing loss as required by ADA
- Support one-stop workforce centers throughout Florida to improve access, allowing individuals with hearing loss to use all available services in their search for employment
- Educate consumers on the standard practices, credentials and appropriate use of qualified interpreters
- Increase understanding of and access to CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) services across all age levels for use in educational environments (including professional conferences)
- Support the establishment of an SSP (Support Service Provider) referral service for deaf-blind citizens
- Recommend the captioning of movies, TV, commercials, live theater, streaming video, etc., for equal access to leisure activities
- Educate citizens about toxic sound levels (loud music, firearms, power tools, etc.) and how to prevent noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL)
- Educate healthcare professionals and families about hearing loss associated with military service
- Increase identification of those with unilateral, fluctuating, or minimal hearing loss and encourage the provision of services as needed within the educational system
- Promote awareness of the full spectrum of hearing aid options, cochlear implants, bone conduction implants and middle ear implants
- Increase awareness about assistive technology, including t-coils, loops, and other devices and services
- Encourage the use and development of cell phones accessible to individuals with hearing loss (hearing aid compatible cell phones, video phones, amplified cell phones, etc.)
- Support increased use of ADA-compliance kits by lodging and residential facilities

### The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

For more information about the Coordinating Council or hearing loss, visit:

<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).

