



# **Toolkit for Working with the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing**

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## Introduction

This *Toolkit for Working with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* is designed to help professionals and counselors when someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing needs assistance. This toolkit contains information about the following topics:

- What is Hearing Loss?
- Communicating In Person with Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- A Deaf Person Walks Into Your Office, Now What?
- Sign Language Interpretation Options
- Telecommunication Relay Services
- Planning an Accessible Event
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requirements
- Resources
- User guides for TTY, Video Relay Services and Video Remote Interpreting
- Interpreter Request Form Template

## Make Medicare Work Coalition

This toolkit was created by the Make Medicare Work Coalition (MMW) with assistance from the MMW's Deaf Community Advisory Group and JulieAnn & Associates. MMW is co-led by AgeOptions, Progress Center for Independent Living and Health & Disability Advocates. MMW's goal is to improve the quality of life, health and economic security of older adults and people with disabilities in Illinois.

The Make Medicare Work Coalition (MMW) is one of the first coalitions to combine education, outreach and advocacy for seniors and people with disabilities and to successfully reach under-served vulnerable populations with unbiased information on health care and prescription drug programs.

The MMW's Deaf Community Advisory Group is composed of consumers and professionals who work with Deaf consumers. The Advisory Group advocates for the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumer and educates professionals about how to provide accessible services.

## Hard of Hearing: What is a Hearing Loss?

Hearing loss prevents a person from receiving sounds through the ear. Hearing loss is measured in decibels, or levels of sound someone is unable to hear. Hearing loss can range from mild to profound. Depending on the person's degree of hearing loss and his preferred communication mode, he may choose to label himself as Deaf or as Hard of Hearing.

**Mild:** Person may miss 25% to 40% of speech sounds. The person has difficulty understanding someone with a soft voice and/or difficulty following conversations in a noisy environment.

**Moderate:** Person may miss 50% to 75% of speech sounds. The person has difficulty hearing normal conversations and hearing consonants in words.

**Severe:** Person may miss up to 100% of speech sounds. Conversations may be extremely difficult except one-on-one in a quiet setting.

**Profound loss:** Person may not hear at all. At this level, hearing aids may or may not help and cochlear implants are an option.

## Communicating In Person with Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

There are different modes of communication that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals use. American Sign Language (ASL) is the dominant form of communication by many within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Other alternate methods of communicating include, but are not limited to, lip reading, utilizing a notepad and pencil, and texting.

Below are some helpful tips when working with an individual with hearing loss.

- Ask the person what is the best way to communicate with him or her.
- Face the person.
- Get the person's attention before speaking to them.
- Speak slowly and distinctly. Do not over-exaggerate mouth movements.
- Do not chew gum, eat, smoke, or cover your mouth when speaking.
- Do not yell. If the listener wears a hearing aid, it will only distort your voice.
- When speaking, position yourself within 3 feet of the listener.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting in the room.
- If the lighting is bright, make sure the lighting faces you, not behind you. It is very difficult for the person to see you if the lighting is shining behind you.
- Eliminate distracting background noise (TV, radio, dishwasher, etc.).
- When in public, attempt to sit away from noise and sit facing each other.
- Rephrase rather than repeat if you are not understood. Write down key words if necessary.
- Use facial expressions and gestures to get your meaning across.
- Avoid dropping your voice at the end of your sentences.
- For a person who is Hard of Hearing, a computer or texting on a phone may be useful communication tools. Enlarge the font to allow ease of reading.
- Respect Deaf individuals if they request a sign language interpreter. People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing must work harder to communicate and it can be tiring. Be aware of their fatigue.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes! Your efforts to communicate are appreciated.

## A Deaf Person Walks Into Your Office, Now What?

- Don't panic. Look at the person directly and speak. If the Deaf person does not understand, he or she will ask for paper and pen.
- Do not assume the accommodation requirements of the Deaf person. Ask the individual what accommodation he or she requires for the appointment. The person knows what communication method works best for him or her. If an interpreter is requested, schedule the appointment for 2 weeks to allow ample time to secure an interpreter. (See Sign Language Interpretation section of the Toolkit for more information.)
- If the person states he requires an interpreter, have him fill out an Interpreter Request Form. (A template is provided in this toolkit.) Hint: do not schedule an interpreter in 48 hours or less because it will cost you more.
- If the person needs immediate assistance, you may need to resort to pen and paper or using a Word document on your computer to type your responses.
- If communication via pen and paper or computer is not effective, contact your local interpreter agency or certified freelance interpreter to provide interpreting services. If that fails, contact your local Center for Independent Living for assistance.

## Sign Language Interpretation Options

Sign language interpreters are professionals who facilitate communication between Deaf/Hard of Hearing people and people who can hear. Their job is to interpret every word that is being said between two parties.

There are different types of interpreting services you might want to consider when hiring an interpreter. You can use an agency interpreter, contractual interpreter, or video remote interpreting, commonly known as VRI.

**Agency Interpreters:** Employed or contracted through an interpreting referral services. You pay additional fees for the agency to search for an interpreter.

**Contractual interpreters:** Self-employed interpreters who provide their services. They usually charge less than the agency interpreters but you will be responsible to secure their time for your clients.

**VRI:** Video or web cameras and internet to provide sign language interpreting services remotely. (See VRI Guide in the Toolkit for more information.)

If you need assistance in determining the best type of interpreting services that are suited to your needs or finding an interpreter, you can contact either your local State Deaf Commission or Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). (See Resources section in the Toolkit for contact information.)

Below are some helpful tips for when someone requests a Sign Language Interpreter.

- Always ask. Ask the individual if he or she needs accommodation, if so, collaborate with the individual to ensure accessibility.
- Do not ask an individual who is Deaf to bring a family member or friend to interpret for them. It's against the law!
- Always hire certified/ licensed interpreters (certification and licensing vary by state).
- Schedule client appointments two weeks in advance to allow ample time to obtain a sign language interpreter.
- Once an interpreter is assigned, call the Deaf individual to confirm the appointment and to inform him/her that an interpreter is secured.

- If you cannot locate an interpreter, notify the Deaf individual immediately and reschedule.
- When using an interpreter with a Deaf individual, speak directly to the individual, not at the interpreter. Direct your questions to Deaf individual. Use first person pronouns to speak to Deaf person. Do not use third person pronouns. For example, say “do you want” rather than “ask her if she wants”.
- Do not ask the interpreter for his opinions or advice regarding the Deaf individual.
- Make sure there is adequate lighting in the room.
- Make sure there is room for you, the Deaf individual and the interpreter. Everyone needs to be comfortable.

## Telecommunication Relay Services: Don't Hang Up!

Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) use operators or communication assistants to facilitate calls between individuals with hearing loss or speech disability and other parties on the telephone. If you have ever hung up the phone after hearing silence on the other end, you may have disconnected a caller with hearing loss or a speech disability who utilizes TRS to make calls.

There are different kinds of TRS: such as text to voice TTY, Voice Carry Over, video relay services. (See Guides in this Toolkit for more information on these options.)

Teletypewriter (TTY) is device that operates like a typewriter for a Deaf caller. TTY machines can be used in multiple ways.

- Two callers on separate TTY machines can type messages to each other (similar to email, but through the phone system).
- The Deaf caller types his message to a relay operator. The operator reads the message to the hearing person on the other end. The hearing person responds and the operator types the message to the Deaf caller using the TTY machine.
- The Deaf caller speaks directly to the hearing caller. The hearing person responds and the operator types the message to the Deaf caller using the TTY machine. This is called Voice Carry Over.

Video Relay Services (VRS) uses an onscreen American Sign Language interpreter to relay the messages between a Deaf caller and hearing caller. This method of placing calls requires an internet connection and a webcam/videophone. The Deaf caller sees the interpreter on the screen and signs to her. The interpreter then speaks to the hearing caller and signs the hearing caller's response back to the Deaf caller. Just like the TTY phone, the Deaf caller can use Voice Carry Over if he chooses to speak for himself.

Below are some helpful tips if you receive a TRS call.

- Do not hang up. Be patient and wait for a response.
- The relay operator will copy exactly what you say, so direct your conversation to the caller, not the interpreter.
- Do not talk too fast, chew gum or eat while on a relay call. This is a distraction to the relay operator.



- Turn off background music/noises so that the relay operator can relay the conversation with ease.
- If the caller utilizing TRS is not home and relay operator asks if you would like to leave a message, please do leave a detailed message as you would with anyone who has voicemail; the only difference is the TRS user will receive their messages in American Sign Language (ASL) or by text if they are a TTY user.

## Planning an Accessible Event

Ensuring that your next meeting is accessible not only benefits those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, but can also enrich the entire meeting. Federal and state laws require equal access for people with disabilities; this means you must provide an interpreter or other reasonable accommodations. Unfortunately, many people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing have grown accustomed to not being accommodated and some may not attend events they anticipate will be inaccessible. It is essential to let people know that accommodations are available.

Below are some tips for the meeting room/space.

- Have printed materials available. All important written materials should be announced during the meeting.
- The room should be free of background noise. When not using a microphone, repeat the question before answering it.
- Have good quality sound systems. Check the sound system for loudness and clarity.
- Speakers should be treated equally (e.g. if one speaker uses a wheelchair and an adjustable podium is not available, all participants should speak from the panelists' table).
- Have assistive listening devices available. The audio-visual company that provides other electronic equipment for the meeting may have the assistive listening devices available. Another option is to contact a local Center for Independent Living or state Deaf Commission to get information about how to rent these devices.
- Have sign-language interpreters and/or CART available. Make sure the presentation area is well lit and ask Deaf participants and interpreters which positions within the room would be best to facilitate communication. Communication Access Real Time Translation (CART) is instant captioning of the spoken word by a "live" speaker/presenter. Captioning can be displayed on a computer or a screen for the user.
- When advertising meetings, provide contact information for participants to request accommodations. It would be helpful if a disability access symbol is inserted in the meeting flyer. (See the Graphic Resources section of this toolkit for more information).

## Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Requirements: It's the Law

The Federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that accommodations are made for people with disabilities so they are able to access public services.

The ADA states that auxiliary aids and services are required to ensure effective communication with individuals with hearing impairments. These may include services and devices such as qualified interpreters, assistive listening devices, notetakers, and written materials for individuals with hearing impairments.

There are limitations to the ADA requirements. For example, the ADA does not require the provision of any auxiliary aid or service that would result in an undue burden to the organization making the accommodation. An “undue burden” usually relates to the nature and cost of the accommodation in relation to the size, resources, and structure of the organization. Undue burden is determined on a case-by-case basis. In general, a larger organization with greater resources would be expected to make accommodations requiring greater effort or expense than would be required of a smaller organization with fewer resources.

However, accommodations are still the law and therefore the organization still has the duty to make an accommodation, if available, that would not result in an undue burden.

Visit the Federal ADA website at [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) for more information.

## Resources

### National Resources

*Centers for Independent Living (CIL):*

[www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html](http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html) and click on your respective state for a complete listing of CIL in your area.

*Americans with Disabilities Act information:*

[www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

*ADA National Network:*

[www.adata.org/Static/Home.aspx](http://www.adata.org/Static/Home.aspx)

*State Commissions/Office on Deafness:*

[http://www.gallaudet.edu/clerc\\_center/information\\_and\\_resources/info\\_to\\_go/resources/statwide\\_services\\_for\\_deaf\\_and\\_hard\\_of\\_hearing\\_people.html](http://www.gallaudet.edu/clerc_center/information_and_resources/info_to_go/resources/statwide_services_for_deaf_and_hard_of_hearing_people.html)

*National Association of the Deaf (NAD):*

[www.nad.org](http://www.nad.org)

*National Disability Rights Network*

<http://www.napas.org>

### Other Resources

*Accessibility:*

<http://www.access-board.gov/adaag/html/adaag.htm>

*Communication Access Real-Time Translation CART:*

[www.jan.wvu.edu/soar/hearing/commgroup.html](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/soar/hearing/commgroup.html)

*Sign Language Interpreters:*

[www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org)

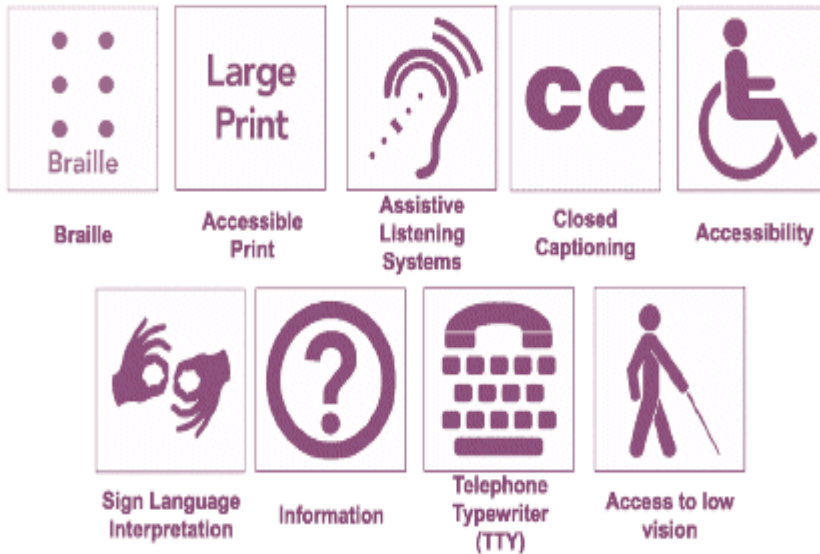
You may also contact the following for referrals to Accessibility, CART, and Sign Language Interpreters:

Centers for Independent Living

State Commissions/Office on Deafness

## Graphic Resources

The Graphic Artists Guild, with assistance from the Society for Environmental Graphic Design, has made available a collection of disability access symbols that may be used to make people aware of accessibility accommodations. Disability access symbols can be found at: <https://www.graphicartistsguild.org/resources/disability-access-symbols/>





## Teletypewriter (TTY) Relay Service Guide

### What is a TTY?

Teletypewriter (TTY) is a device that operates like a typewriter for the Deaf caller to make calls. The Deaf person types and receives written messages from the hearing person on the line.

### How does TTY work?

TTY uses relay operators, also known as communication assistants (CA), to make calls between a Deaf person and a hearing person. The TTY user types a message and the CA will read the message to the hearing person. The hearing person speaks his/her response and the CA will type the message to the TTY user. Using TTY relay, both TTY user and hearing person will use code words to alert one another when it is their turn to speak. “Go Ahead” (or GA) means you are finished with your response and it is the other person’s turn to speak.

In some cases, a TTY user may use Voice Carry Over (VCO). Voice Carry Over means the TTY user chooses to speak on his/her own behalf but relies on the TTY communications assistant to read the message from the hearing caller. Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing with good speech skills may use Voice Carry Over.

Persons with some hearing loss who can hear on the phone and those with speech disorders may opt to use Hearing Carry Over (HCO). In Hearing Carry Over, the Hard of Hearing person will listen to the caller’s message and respond by typing their message. The CA will then read the message to the hearing caller.

### Photo of TTY machine



## **What if I do not have a TTY machine?**

In order for a Deaf person to call a hearing person without a TTY machine or for a hearing person to call a deaf person from his/her standard phone, the caller must call a Relay Service. The Relay Service provides the communications assistants. Relay Services are provided in each state. One option to call a TTY user is to dial 7-1-1 and the communications assistant will ask for the phone number and connect you with the user. Other options include applications for smartphones, and services through specific providers, such as AT&T or AOL.

## **What about privacy and confidentiality?**

Communication Assistants have been trained to abide by the Code of Ethics regarding consumer rights to privacy and confidentiality. Communication Assistants also are monitored for compliance toward the provider's policy of confidentiality.



## Video Relay Service (VRS)

### What is the Video Relay Service (VRS)?

VRS allows you to place and receive calls from someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing who uses sign language as his or her primary language. VRS enables anyone to conduct video relay calls through a certified sign language interpreter via a computer with high-speed Internet connection and a webcam or a videophone and a TV. The Deaf user sees an interpreter on his or her screen and signs to the interpreter. The interpreter then places a call to the hearing person via a standard phone line and relays the conversation between both parties. Communication using VRS is instantaneous and natural.



The hearing user can dial the person's videophone number and speak directly to the deaf user.



Video Relay Service operator (on videophone) signs a message to Deaf user as the hearing caller speaks (pictured above). The Deaf user can respond using sign language and the relay operator speaks to the hearing user. A Deaf or Hard of Hearing user may speak on his own behalf and the hearing caller will hear him over the line. This is called Voice Carry Over (VCO).



## **What equipment is needed to place a VRS call?**

There is no special equipment needed by the organization.

## **Can I leave a voicemail?**

If you call a Deaf person's videophone number, you can often leave a message if he does not answer. Many VRS companies offer "Signmail" which allows the interpreter to leave a message in sign language for the person via a webcam. The Deaf user retrieves the message just as a hearing person would retrieve voice mail.

## **What about privacy/confidentiality?**

Interpreters have been trained to abide by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf/National Association of the Deaf Code of Ethics and the Federal Communication Commission's regulations regarding consumer rights to privacy and confidentiality. Interpreters also are monitored for compliance toward the VRS provider's policy of confidentiality. With these precautions taken, video relay service may be even more private and secure than e-mail.



## Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) Guide

### What is Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)?

VRI is a telecommunication service for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals who use sign language as their primary language. VRI is used in person with the Deaf client to provide instantaneous translation services.

VRI enables communication through a certified sign language interpreter via a computer with high-speed Internet connection and a webcam or a videophone (VP). The Deaf user sees an interpreter on their screen and signs to the interpreter, who then speaks to the hearing person.

Some Deaf people can speak for themselves but still use VRI to sign what the hearing person is saying because they cannot hear well enough to understand what is being said.

Communication using VRI is instantaneous and natural, and in the right situation, can replace the need for an onsite interpreter. It can be a lower cost alternative than an onsite interpreter. VRI is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is accessible and widely used by the Deaf population.

### How does VRI work?

To use a VRI system, you must first choose a VRI provider company. The VRI provider will give you software that you download onto an iPad, laptop, computer, or video phone. Billing is calculated on a per minute basis, which is prearranged in advance. You only pay for the minutes interpreted, unlike onsite interpreters who can bill for a two hour minimum, travel, parking, etc.

### Photos of using VRI



Remote Interpreter (on computer screen) signs message to Deaf User (on the left) as the hearing user speaks (on the right).



Remote Interpreter (on computer screen) voices message from the deaf user (on the left) to hearing user on the right.

**What about privacy and confidentiality?**

Interpreters have been trained to abide by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and National Association of the Deaf Code of Ethics regarding consumer rights to privacy and confidentiality. Interpreters also are monitored for compliance toward the VRI provider’s policy of confidentiality.



# Sign Language Interpreter Form

Do you need a Sign Language Interpreter? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**If you answered yes, please fill out the information:**

Please, give us TWO WEEKS to look for an interpreter before your appointment. When we get an interpreter, we will call you. If we cannot find an interpreter, we will call you to change your appointment time.

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Where can we reach you?**

VideoPhone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Text: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

**When is your appointment?**

Appointment Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name

Date