Accessibility for People with Hearing and Speech Disabilities

The Minnesota Department of Health & Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division staff provide the following guidance on assisting those who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities.

Suggested resources:

- Understanding hearing loss: A guide for human service providers
- Suggested speech to text apps for hearing loss
- Information about assistive listening devices
- Publications on a wide range of topics

Minnesota Relay Service and internet-based services

- The Minnesota Relay Service enables communication between a person who uses a TTY, captioned phone or speech accessibility service and the Service Provider. The Service Provider may contact a TTY or captioned phone user through this service. An operator relays your words to a TTY user and reads the TTY user’s typed response to you. If you call a captioned telephone user through Minnesota Relay, the operator sends text of what you say to the captioned phone; the person uses their own voice to respond. All calls are confidential.
- If an applicant indicates their phone number is a TTY or captioned telephone number, dial 711 and provide the applicant’s phone number to connect. Other relay services are Internet-based. Internet-based relay services do not go through Minnesota Relay. In most cases, a voice call to a phone number assigned to one of the internet-based services is automatically routed through the appropriate relay service. There is no other number to dial to connect. The most common Internet-based relay services are:
  - Video relay service for videophone users communicating in American Sign Language
  - IP Relay, a text relay service that uses computer software instead of a TTY.
  - App-based captioned phone services.
- Relay users know how to initiate a relay call and will automatically do so via their preferred relay service. The recommended phrase to notify consumers who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or speech disabled about how to contact a Service Provider through relay services is: “Consumers who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing or who have speech disabilities may contact us via their preferred relay service.”

Additional guidance

Additional suggested methods of assisting clients who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing or who have speech disabilities:

- Speech supplemented by gestures and visual aids can be used in some cases.
- A pad and pencil, a phone or tablet app, an electronic writing board or a computer’s word processing software can be used to exchange written notes.
Energy Assistance Program

- Speech-to-text software may be used on a cell phone or tablet.
- A cell phone with TTY software on it.
- Texting via a cell phone or tablet.
- Captioning, or CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) can be useful for people who are late-deafened and do not use sign language.
- An assistive listening system or device to amplify sound can be used when speaking with a person who is hard of hearing.
- A sign language interpreter can be used when speaking with a person who communicates in sign language.
- An oral interpreter can be used when speaking with a person who has been trained to speech read (read lips). People who are deaf and blind and do not use sign language may request a “voiceover interpreter.” In this context, a voiceover interpreter is like an oral interpreter, but with unique skills for working with people with combined hearing and vision loss. **Note:** Do not assume that speech reading will be effective in most situations. On average, only about one third of spoken words can be understood by speech reading.