

GUIDANCE FOR HOSPITALS AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

SERVING DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

1. Equal Access:

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals must have equitable access to communication as those who do not have hearing loss. Equal access is pivotal to reducing the risk of misdiagnosis, delay in treatment, and inadequate patient care.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, entities are responsible for coverage of communication access.

2. Individualized Approach:

Providing access may include, but is not limited to, American Sign Language, Certified ASL Interpreters, Certified Deaf Interpreters, Video Relay Services, Communication Access Real-time Transcription, Hearing Induction Loops, or Speech-to-Text. Recognizing that access looks different for everyone, it is best to confirm the preferred method of communication with each individual.

DID YOU KNOW?

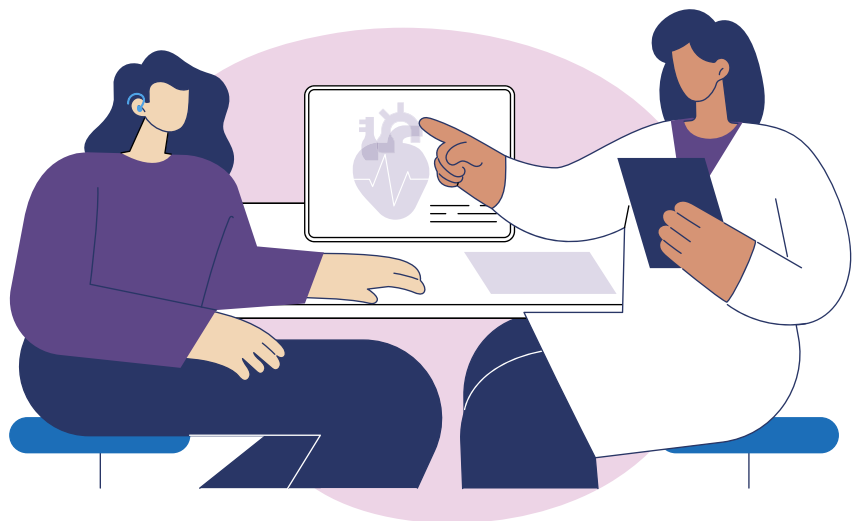
Individuals may require different forms of communication access at different times. For brief, straightforward communication, a written note can be an appropriate method of communication while it would be more appropriate to provide an interpreter for complex, interactive communications.

3. Communicate Directly:

Maintain eye contact, speaking slowly and clearly regardless of the method of communication.

4. Ensure Understanding:

Additional communication accommodations may be necessary to ensure understanding and informed decision making. Providing a detailed patient summary is one measure, among others, that can be taken to confirm information and reduce the risk of



misunderstanding that could impact patient care and outcomes.

5. Beyond the Patient:

Parents or guardians, spouses, or caretakers of the patient may be deaf or hard of hearing and require communication access. It is important that access extends beyond the patient, to those involved in the patients' care.

6. Easily Accessible Policies:

It is encouraged that hospitals have established communication access policies and procedures that are readily available and easily accessible for providers, patients, and visitors. Making these policies and procedures available through a portal ensures clear guidelines, enhancing communication standards within the healthcare environment.

7. Accommodations in Advance:

Creating a space where individuals can identify their need for accommodation and request the accommodation of their choice before appointments ensures services are accessible to all patients. By proactively addressing accommodation needs health care providers can make necessary arrangements reducing delay in treatment. Communication may require additional time. It is good practice to allot extra time for appointments to factor in such accommodations.

8. Visual Communication:

A combination of written and photo signage made available in common spaces, or within a provider's portal, can serve as an alternative means of relaying essential directions, instructions, warnings, and other important information.

9. Appropriate Interpreters:

Certified interpreters are trained professionals equipped with the necessary skills to effectively facilitate communication in healthcare settings and reduce the risk of adverse outcomes that can result from inaccurate or incomplete communication.



DID YOU KNOW?

Children should never be relied upon to interpret, regardless of the situation. Due to a variety of reasons, it is not encouraged for family members to interpret. Family members are generally not trained interpreters and may inadvertently misinterpret or misunderstand medical information increasing miscommunication between healthcare providers and patients.¹

10. Preserving Cues:

Providing clear masks demonstrates an understanding to the communication preferences and accessibility needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

DID YOU KNOW?

Clear masks retain important visual and communication cues, such as facial expressions and mouth movements which are essential to conveying tone, emotion, and emphasis in communication.

11. Internet Connectivity:

Strong, high speed internet ensures seamless real-time communication², which can be critical in emergency situations or when urgent medical attention is needed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many assistive technologies rely on internet connectivity to function optimally, such as captioning services, speech-to-text software, and remote interpreting services.

12. Maintenance and Training:

Regular maintenance assessments and ongoing training on assistive communication technologies allows healthcare providers to promptly address patient needs, especially during emergencies. Quick access to instructional resources maximizes the effectiveness of technologies, fostering efficiency and accessibility.

13. Professional Development:

Integrating annual Deaf and Hard of Hearing Sensitivity Training into healthcare education and professional development improves the overall effectiveness of healthcare providers in serving diverse patient communities. DDHH is available to provide training at no cost.



² NAD - Minimum Standards for Video Remote Interpreting Services in Medical Settings

