



Making Senior Centers Deaf and Hard of Hearing-Friendly

New Jersey Department of Human Services'
Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



DDHH's Mission

The New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is the principal state agency established by New Jersey Law (PL 1977, C. 166) on behalf of people of all ages who are deaf and hard of hearing. The division provides education, advocacy and direct services to eliminate barriers and promote increased accessibility to programs, services, and information routinely available to the state's general population.





Creating Access: Key Areas of Focus

- Environment
- Safety and emergency access
- Communication and practice
- Inclusive programs and activities
- Accommodations and communication access

The New Jersey Department of Human Services' Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) is a resource for information, training, referrals, and communication access.



Hearing Loss is Common Among Older Adults

- Hearing loss is common
- Approximately forty-eight (48) million Americans are deaf or hard of hearing
- Higher risk:
 - Social isolation
 - Missed announcements
 - Safety gaps
- Accessible programming is core





Understanding Deafness and Hearing Loss

- Deaf, culturally Deaf
 - May use sign language as a primary language
 - May identify with Deaf culture
 - May need sign language interpreters for full access
- Hard of hearing
 - May have some functional hearing
 - Often uses hearing aids, speech-reading, residual hearing
 - Benefits from clear speech, quiet settings, assistive listening technology





Understanding Deafness and Hearing Loss

- Late-deafened
 - Lost hearing later in life
 - Typically, communicates through spoken language, speech-reading, captioning
 - Increased risk of isolation, depression, cognitive decline
- Deafblind
 - Combined vision and hearing loss
 - May need tactile interpreting, close-vision signing, or additional lighting and orientation support





Primary Consideration: Asking Members

- Some individuals:
 - Primarily use spoken language;
 - Prefer sign language;
 - Use hearing aids or cochlear implants;
 - Rely on captioning;
 - Use a combination of communication methods
- Guide to Communication Access: [English](#)/ [Español](#)





Primary Consideration: Asking Members

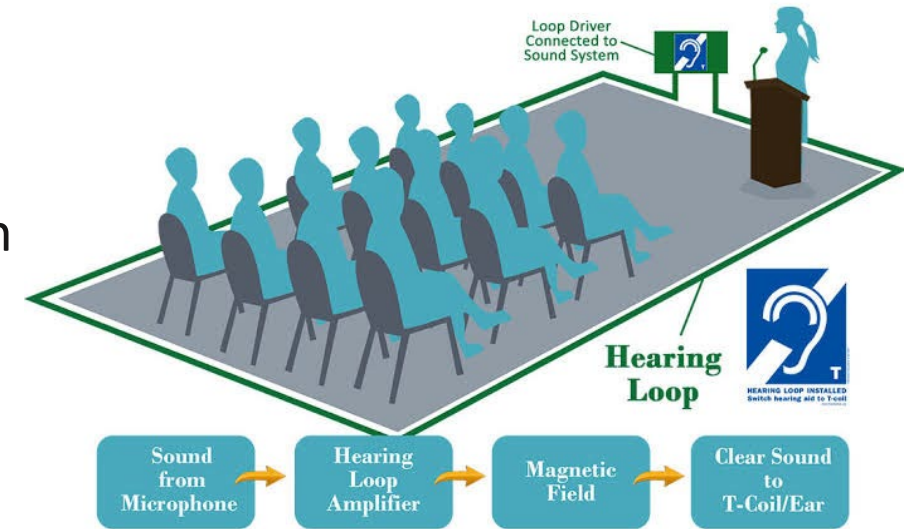
- Communication preferences and needs may change:
 - Setting
 - Activity
 - Hearing level
 - Language
 - Technology
 - Fatigue





Accessible Environments: Assistive Technology

- Visual and strobe emergency alerts
 - Fire alarms, doorbells, and announcement systems
- Assistive listening devices
 - Install or offer portable **hearing loops** or FM systems in meeting rooms and main halls
- Captioned phones and TVs
 - Provide amplified or captioned phones
 - Turn captions on for TVs and videos





Accessible Environments: Acoustics and Lighting

- Add acoustic panels, carpeting, and curtains
 - Soft fabrics absorb sounds
 - Reduces echo off hard walls and floors
- Reduce background noise at the source
 - Reduces echo and makes speech easier to follow
 - Dining halls and activity rooms
- Bright, even, glare-free lighting
 - Clear faces and gestures
 - Avoid backlighting speakers against windows





Accessible Navigation

- Clear, directional
 - Guides to specific areas
 - Availability of sign language interpretation or captioning
- Bold, high contrast text
 - Easy to spot and read immediately
- Pictograms and universal icons
 - Recognizable symbols convey key information
 - Restrooms, exits, services
- Visual diagrams and maps

Good High Contrasting Colors



Poor Low Contrasting Colors





Communication Best Practices

- Maintain eye contact
- Speak clearly, moderate pace
- Rephrase instead of repeat
- In writing
 - Printed announcements, schedules, and instructions
 - Large-text materials
- Plan for communication access in advance
 - Interpreters or captioners
 - Meetings, classes, or events





Access In Practice

- Build awareness and communication competence
 - Revisit communication access at meetings
- Become familiar with technology
- Speech-to-text apps
 - Add to staff tablets or phones
- Instructional signage
 - Step-by-step visual instructions for classes





Building Programming for Members

- Recruit sign language fluent volunteers to support inclusive programming and social activities
 - Build informational peer support
- Promote accessibility
 - Share flyers in plain language, large print
 - Include interpreter and captioning availability on event listings



Making Inclusion Visible and Accessible

- Add inclusion statements to promotions
 - Feature disability-inclusion language
 - Flyers, newsletters, website
 - How to request accommodations for activities and events
- Name an accommodations contact
 - Include the coordinator's name and contact information
- Request deadlines
 - Encourage advance requests, ideally two (2) weeks





Connecting Members to Support

- Hearing Aid Assistance for the Aged and Disabled (HAAAD)
- New Jersey Hearing Aid Project (NJHAP)
- Equipment Distribution Program (EDP)
- Offer assistance with applications





Equipment Distribution Program (EDP)

- Ensures access:
 - Critical telecommunications
 - Visual safety technology
- Eligibility:
 - Must have hearing loss
 - Must be a New Jersey resident
 - Must meet current income guidelines
- If eligible, receive technology at no cost





ADA Maxi Pro Personal Amplifier

- Bluetooth, digital personal sound amplifier, for conversation and cell phone amplification
- Rechargeable and user friendly
- Includes stereo headphone and internal microphone
- Easy volume adjustments, clear and noise free sound





ADA Maxi Pro TV Listening System

- Three (3) in one (1) Bluetooth listening system
- Digital, amplification
- Includes stereo headphones with mic





Pocketalker Ultra Personal Amplifier

- Amplifies speech while reducing background noise
- Lightweight
- Volume and tone controls
- Works with headphones or hearing aids (neck loop compatible)
- Includes microphone and TV listening cord





Hearing Loops

Comfort Audio Neck Loops

- Lightweight and easy to use neck loop
- Equipped with T-coil
- Amplification and focus for conversations



Contacta LA-Loop Pad

- Inductive hearing loop pad
- Listen wirelessly and directly from source
- Audio streaming from televisions, music systems, and other audio devices
- Integrated clear audio processing



Staying Connected

Clarity D714

- Amplified cordless phone
- Incoming sound up to 40db
- Large backlit display with caller ID
- Hearing aid compatible
- Includes speakerphone and answering machine

- Minicom IV Teletypewriter (TTY)
- Videophone





Visual Safety Alerts

- Fire alarms with visual alerts
- Carbon Monoxide Detectors with visual alerts
- Text-based announcement systems





Getting Started: Next Steps

- Request preferred communication method
- Turn captions on
- Label relay-service numbers and process at center phones
- Add a request line for interpreters or captioning to event planning forms
- Stock large print emergency instructions
- Stock state program applications





Getting Started: Next Steps

- Review and update visual emergency alerts
 - Pair audible alarms with visual or strobe alerts
- Contact DDHH:
 - Deaf and Hard of Hearing Sensitivity Training
 - Assistive technology demonstrations
 - Technical assistance





Contact DDHH

Phone: (609) 588-2648

Videophone: (609) 503-4862

Fax: (609) 588-2528

Office Hours

8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Monday – Friday

E-mail: DDHH.communications2@dhs.nj.gov

Website: <https://www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/>

