

Resources for Supporting Individuals Who Identify as Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind

Face masks and physical distancing during the COVID-19 response have added to existing barriers faced by individuals who identify as deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing when accessing public services. This document provides tips, general resources and COVID-19-related resources to help providers support deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals.

Providing a Reasonable Accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)¹ requires that state and local governments and organizations providing services to the public provide reasonable accommodations to people with communication disabilities (people who have vision, hearing and speech disabilities) to ensure equally effective communication among people of all abilities. Under the ADA, a covered organization that offers any goods, services or opportunities to the public must provide reasonable accommodations to make such goods or services accessible to all individuals.

At a more local level, New York City (NYC) Human Rights Law² prohibits discrimination based on a person's disability and promotes independent and equal access for people with disabilities in New York City by providing reasonable accommodations. A reasonable accommodation for an individual who identifies as deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing may include sign language interpretation or assistive listening technology to enable effective communication between the individual seeking services and the provider. It is important to determine which type of accommodation will best support the needs of the individual because one size does **not** fit all. Ask the individual which type of accommodation they would prefer. Types of reasonable accommodations for individuals who identify as deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing may include:

- **American Sign Language (ASL):** ASL is the most widely used language by individuals who identify as Deaf in North America. ASL is communicated through body, face and hand movements. ASL has similar linguistic properties as other spoken languages; however, ASL grammar differs from English grammar. Visit nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language for more information.
- **Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART):** CART is a form of translation that transcribes and translates text that is spoken and sound into words. The text will appear as the words are spoken or played onto the screen of a mobile device or laptop and can be projected onto screens at larger public events. Visit hearingloss.org and search for **captioning and CART** for more information.
- **Induction Loop:** Also called hearing loops, induction loops are special type of sound system installed in public spaces that amplify the spoken word and cut out unwanted background noise for use by people with hearing aids. Visit hearinglink.org and search for **induction loop** for more information.

¹ For more information, visit ada.gov/effective-comm.htm.

² For more information, visit nyc.gov and search for **disability protections under the NYC Human Rights law**.

- **Open and Closed Captioning:** Captions are words displayed on a television, computer, mobile device, or movie screen, providing the speech or sound portion of a program or video via text. Open captions are always in view and cannot be turned off by the user, whereas closed captions can be turned on and off by the user. Visit hearingloss.org and search for **captioning and CART** for more information.
- **Tactile Fingerspelling:** Tactile fingerspelling or tactile signing is a means of communication for individuals who are deafblind. One form of tactile fingerspelling is hand-over-hand sign language. With this form of sign language, the person who is deafblind would put their hands over the signer's hands and feel the movement, shape and location of the signs. Visit annesullivan.ie and click on **Communicating with people who are deafblind** under Advice & Information to learn more.

Tips for Effective Communication

- A person with hearing loss may refer to themselves as Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or Deafblind or may not associate themselves with any label. Always ask an individual how they would prefer to communicate.
- Offensive terminology can include “hearing impaired,” “deaf and dumb,” “vision disability or blind/low vision and “mute.” Note that “mute” refers to the inability to produce speech and does not describe hearing ability.
 - Put the person first:
 - **Do not say:** “handicapped,” “crippled,” “the blind,” “lame,” “suffers from hearing loss” or “mute”
 - **Do say:** “person with a disability,” “person who is hard of hearing,” “people with disabilities” or “individuals who identify as...”
- Understand that:
 - The experience of people who are deaf or hard of hearing is diverse and differs from person to person.
 - People are not simply either deaf or hearing — there are varying degrees in between.
 - When a deaf person is using sign language or otherwise communicating via gestures, they may or may not also use vocalizations.
 - Sign language has a different grammar and syntax from spoken and written language.
 - ASL is not the only type of sign language. There are sign languages from other parts of the world (such as British Sign Language and Russian Sign Language), each with their own structure and customs.
 - A person's comprehension of written English may be limited.
 - Lip reading enables a person to receive information from a speaker by watching the speaker's face to identify their speech patterns, movements, gestures and expressions in context. This is a highly involved process and the person will be focused on the mouth but take in a full face and upper body view. On average, only 30% of English is discernible through lip reading.
 - If a person is wearing a hearing aid or a cochlear implant, do not assume the individual can fully hear you.

New York City (NYC) Resources

- **NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD):** MOPD offers resources for providers and individuals who identify as deaf and hard of hearing. Visit nyc.gov/mopd and search for **deaf hard of hearing**. On the Deaf/Hard of Hearing webpage, you can find lists of **NYC locations with assistive listening systems** and **CART services**.
 - To learn more about the laws that govern accommodations for the public, visit nyc.gov/mopd, click the **Laws** tab and select **Federal Laws**.
 - View the MOPD’s Inclusive Terminology Guide for People with Disabilities by visiting nyc.gov/mopd and searching for **inclusive terminology**.
 - To learn how to ensure that your slide decks, virtual meetings, social media posts and other digital spaces are accessible, visit nyc.gov/mopd and search for **digital accessibility resources**.
 - All City agencies have a Disability Service Facilitator (DSF), which you can learn more about by visiting nyc.gov/mopd, clicking the Initiatives tab, then clicking **Disability Service Facilitators (DSF)** on the left side of the page. For the NYC Health Department DSF’s contact information, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **disability service facilitator**.
- **ASL Direct:** ASL Direct is a video calling system that provides an inclusive, accessible means to City services. Individuals who identify as deaf and hard of hearing can use this service to contact MOPD to get information and resources in ASL. Visit nyc.gov/mopd and search for **ASL Direct** for more information.
- **NYC Black Deaf Advocates (NYCBDA):** NYCBDA is a membership organization that promotes the leadership development, economic and educational opportunities and social equality of individuals who identify as Black and deaf or hard of hearing. Visit nycbda.weebly.com for more information.
- **Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) NYC Chapter:** The HLAA NYC chapter provides information, education, support and advocacy for individuals living with hearing loss, including discounts on hearing aids and cell phone data plans. Visit hearinglossnyc.org for more information.
 - **NYC locations with hearing loops:** The HLAA NYC chapter provides a list of NYC institutions with hearing loops, an assistive listening technology for individuals with reduced ranges of hearing. Visit hearinglossnyc.org and click on **Local Looped Venues** under Resources. For information about hearing loops in NYC or to add a location, email info@hearinglossnyc.org.
- **Metropolitan Asian Deaf Association:** This NYC metropolitan area-based Facebook group is made up of individuals who identify as Asian and deaf or hard of hearing who organize events and share resources. Visit fb.com/MADANYCNJ for more information.

Other Resources

- **National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC):** NDC provides tailored resources, events and tips for individuals who are deaf and family members and professionals who support them. Visit nationaldeafcenter.org/covid-19-information for more information.

- Read the NDC guide **How to Host Effective and Accessible Online Meetings with Deaf Participants**. Visit nationaldeafcenter.org/covid-19-information and look under COVID-19 Resources for Disability Services Professionals, VR Counselors, and Employers to access it.
- **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)**: NAD addresses ASL, mask communication, medical and employment needs related to COVID-19 as well as general resources. Visit nad.org/coronavirus for more information.
- **Helen Keller National Center for Deafblind Youth and Adults (HKNC)**: HKNC provides training and resources to people ages 16 and over who have combined vision and hearing loss. Visit helenkeller.org/hknc to learn more.
- **Working with an ASL Interpreter: the Dos and Don'ts**: SignNexus, a provider of sign language interpreters and captioning services, lists guidelines to follow when working with an interpreter. Visit signnexus.com/resources and look for **Working with an ASL Interpreter: the DOs and DON'Ts** for more information.

Resources for Learning ASL

- **ASL Classes**: The Sign Language Center offers online group classes for all levels of learning, one-on-one tutoring sessions, on-site sessions for corporations and large groups and a variety of workshops. Visit signlanguagecenter.com for more information.
- **Free ASL resources**: Mashable has compiled a list of online courses, video tutorials and apps for learning ASL at no cost. Visit mashable.com and search for **how to learn sign language** for more information.

Resources for Technical Assistance and Training

- **Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre (DHCC)**: The DHCC offers training and on-site educational workshops to promote effective communication between individuals who are hearing and individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. Visit dhcc.org/resources/training-workshops for more information.
- **New York Deaf-Blind Collaborative (NYDBC)**: NYDBC offers technical assistance and training for providers and family members of children and youth from newborn to age 21 who identify as deafblind. Visit nydeafblind.org for more information.

COVID-19 and Emergency-specific Resources

- **Temporary Recommendations for Hospitals and Medical Facilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic**: The HLAA issued recommendations for hospitals and health care facilities about maximizing communication and preserving autonomy in medical decision making during an emergency. This resource includes separate lists of technology tools for individuals who use sign language, who speak, listen and/or lip-read, or who identify as deafblind. Visit hearingloss.org and search for **communications & medical access COVID-19**.

Appendix - Vendors That Provide ASL Translation Services

Below is a list of vendors that provide ASL translation services. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is providing this information to assist congregate residential settings, providers, and other partners to locate services but does not make any representation or warranty concerning the quality or accuracy of the services provided by these identified establishments.

Company	Contact Information	Website
Sign Talk	718-382-2020 sign@signtalk.com	signtalk.org
All Hands in Motion	718-997-0472 interpreting@allhandsinmotion.co	allhandsinmotion.com
ASLI Interpreting Solutions	855-634-2754 interpreters@asli.com	asli.alliancebizsolutions.com
Lime Interpreting	877-709-5463 info@limeinterpreting.com	limeinterpreting.com
Sign Language Resources	888-964-5553 SLR@SLRconnect.com	slrconnect.com
SignNexus*	917-210-5804 info@signnexus.com	signnexus.com
Silan	917-426-2404 info@silan.co	silan.co
Deaf & Hard of Hearing Interpreting Services, Inc	212-647-1092 info@dhisnyc.com	dhisnyc.com
Millneck Interpreting Services	516-922-4100 info@millneck.org	millneck.org
Choice Interpreters	646-254-4351 interpreters@choiceco.com	choiceinterpreters.com
aLanguageBank Interpreters	(212) 653-9131 peiwens@alanguagebank.com	alanguagebank.com
Language Line Solutions	(800) 752-6096 CustomerCare@LanguageLine.com	languageline.com

*Preferred MOPD vendor

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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