



Update Council for the Deaf and Hard and Hearing Summary of Accomplishments and Issues

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About the Council:

The Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is a Governor-appointed group of nine members (three deaf, three hard of hearing, one deafblind, two at-large) who represent the interests and issues of this constituency in Wisconsin. The Council addresses policy, legislative, program & service and communication access issues that impact the lives of deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people. It also listens to and receives input from the different communities in Wisconsin in order to implement recommendations to the state and the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing under the Department of Health Services for systematic and service improvements and changes in policy, legislation and programs & services. It also informs the public about its activities and other matters through its website, www.dhhcouncil.state.wi.us.

Council Accomplishments, Past and Present:

- Worked with the Department of Transportation on communication access in highway rest areas. As a result, a majority of rest areas are installed with TTYs in pay phone booths.
- Helped with the implementation of the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening (UNHS) in hospitals;
- Saw to that the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing was implemented.
- Assisted in the passage of Hearing Aid Insurance Bill for children up to age 18 (SB 27) in 2009.
- Assisted in the passage of the Interpreter Licensure Bill (SB 389) in 2010.
- Is now working with the Wisconsin Emergency Management Office/Division and submitted recommendations that will address the needs of the deaf/deafblind/hard of hearing in an emergency situation.

Ongoing Issues of the Council:

- **Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People:** Deaf and hard of hearing people continue not to have access to mental health/substance abuse services statewide. A Mental Health Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Steering Committee was formed jointly by the Bureau of Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is charged with beginning steps to develop a statewide strategic plan to develop and implement a state plan and systematic approaches for accessible, culturally and language appropriate mental health and substance abuse services for deaf and hard of hearing people who need these services. Needed are professionals with specialization and knowledge in deafness and hearing loss; “deaf-friendly” support groups and transitional services; understanding of hard of hearing issues; funding for interpreting, real-time captioning and FM system services in all phases of treatment, meetings and therapy sessions, preventive and educational activity efforts targeted for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals of all ages, races and socioeconomic status and their families.
- **Domestic Violence:** Deaf Unity was formed in 2005 as a statewide organization to address service needs for Deaf victims of abuse and family violence. Since becoming a 501 c 3 organization in 2010, Deaf Unity is now eligible for a wider spectrum of funding opportunities to expand its array of services. Yet, Deaf victims encounter systems that do not foster their well-being, safety and self-sufficiency. Systematic changes are greatly needed, such as community response protocol, provision of interpreting services in courts, enforcement of ADA obligations of programs that provide direct and community based services, to name some.

- **HIV/AIDS Services:** A network of services and education is needed for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people that is communication accessible and culturally and linguistically competent. This includes staff who understands the cultural and language aspects of the Deaf Community and the ramifications of dealing with hearing loss among hard of hearing people in services and systems.
- **Mandated Coverage for Hearing Aids under Primary Medical Insurance:** Many insurance policies do not provide, or provide limited, coverage for hearing aids and related services, and this is a major concern for many deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people, particularly those who struggle with hearing loss on a daily basis and elderly persons. While there are other non-insurance funding sources available, eligibility requirements vary. The Council is interested in pursuing an initiative to require insurance companies to provide coverage for various, related services and devices for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing of all ages.
- **Employment Services and Access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people continue to be underemployed or unemployed, or experience barriers to employment services and opportunities. DVR consumers or not, many individuals encounter barriers in all phases of employment. Many employment service providers and sectors are unaware of or are resistant to ADA and other legal obligations.
- **Accessibility in Public Places, Programs and Services:** The Council is committed to ensuring that all public places, programs and services are communication accessible to deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people. They include, but are not limited to, having assistive listening systems in public places such as libraries and local governmental buildings; realtime captioning services during the State of the State speeches; interpreting services during important town hall meetings; visual emergency notification and information systems in public places.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** After 9-11, the anthrax scare and a series of weather-related disasters all across America, deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people continue not to have ready or immediate access to emergency alert or notification systems. Many local TV stations do not caption emergency announcements nor is there a system in place for local emergency personnel to relay emergencies or evacuation plans. There is a need for systematic and community education efforts for community service providers, including medical and health care facilities and clinics, emergency management and law enforcement personnel about deaf and hard of hearing individuals, especially on communication challenges and strategies in the event of a biological, chemical or nuclear attack or a disaster, natural or man-made.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing People Who are Hispanic, Hmong, Native American or of Other Ethnic Groups:** Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals who are also of Hispanic, Hmong, Native American or other ethnic origins need services that are multi-layered: services that are not only sign language accessible but professionals who understand the identity issue and nuances of the culture, and experiences of barriers to the mainstream culture and systems.
- **Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Birth-to-3 Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children:** Universal newborn hearing testing is provided in hospitals in Wisconsin and is proving to be instrumental in helping parents and families of newly diagnosed deaf and hard of hearing children to receive Birth-to-3 services with specialization in deafness and hearing loss. This early intervention is beneficial in the long run: it will ensure appropriate educational placement and contribute to the well-being of the individual and the family.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Inmates in Wisconsin's Correctional Systems:** There continues a lack of provision of basic equal access to deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals in prisons and correctional centers (e.g., visual and auditory-enhanced wake up calls; TVs equipped with close captioning; interpreted or sign language appropriate treatment or therapy sessions; ASL-signed instructional videotapes; videophone booths).