

General Information

Access Issues for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Lighting

Deaf and hard of hearing people need to see other people clearly when communicating. Ensure that any lighting is on the staff member's face and not from behind. Lighting behind the speaker will create glare and make it harder for the person to gain visual cues. Avoid shadows across your face.

Clear Line of Vision

Counter design and staff member's behaviour should be such that the staff member's face is always visible. Don't talk with your face down or averted. Glass barriers and elevated or very wide counters should be avoided.

Background Noise

Most people who use a hearing aid prefer a quiet communication environment. This applies equally to the many hard of hearing people who do not use hearing aids.

For a hard of hearing person, back ground noise such as music in shops, sound from the kitchen or conversations of other diners in restaurants can reduce hearing by up to 90 per cent. Even people with normal hearing may miss 25 per cent of conversation in noisy environments and rely more on visual cues and context.

Carpet, soft furnishings and fabric drapes absorb some sound and reduce background noise. Designate quieter tables in areas of restaurants and ensure it is easy to adjust music volume in shops when necessary.

Allow for Cultural Differences

Sign language users need more personal space than hearing people.

Signage and Printed Information

Well placed and informative signage is part of good practice for organisations generally. Up to date handouts including consumer information are important. Use of captions on videos can help to convey messages. Anything available through sound should be available in signage, print, caption and/or diagram.

Some people prefer writing notes. It is important to be flexible to each individual's needs and to have pen and paper available.

Emergency Signals and Procedures

Smoke detectors and fire alarms that rely on sound may not be adequate. Alarms that work on modified sound, light or vibration are available. Evacuation procedures and signage also need to take hearing loss into account.

Enquiry Counter Audio Loop

Assistive listening devices such as audio loops in public places are of great value. They are connected to a microphone and are "driven" by an amplifier just as loud speakers are. However the signal is sent via wires that surround a designated place at an inquiries counter, room or meeting hall. A component in a person's hearing aid picks up this signal, greatly improving reception. A special "T" switch on the hearing aid is required to use such a system. The person hears only what goes through the microphone, not all the background noise.



The International Deaf Symbol

The International Deafness Symbol is displayed in venues that have loop systems installed. Loops can be easily retrofitted in existing venues. Other systems are available that utilize radio frequency or infrared transmission.

Telephones

A Deaf or hard of hearing person may need a special visual text telephone such as a Telephone Typewriter (TTY). A TTY connects with a phone line directly or via an ordinary phone, so that messages can be typed/read instead of spoken/heard. Many organisations have a TTY line and unit so they can make these calls directly.

Mobile phone SMS is a convenient visual method of communication for hearing, Deaf and hard of hearing people. Many organisations now use SMS alerts to notify clients of appointments.

The **National Relay Service** (NRS) is a national telephone service that provides operators to facilitate phone calls between people who are hearing, Deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech impairment. This confidential and free service operates 24 hours a day and is available to everyone.

Website: www.relayservice.gov.au

Phone: 1800 555 660

Hearing and Deafness Awareness

Vicdeaf provides education on Deaf and hard of hearing issues for employers, learning institutions and interested community groups. Bookings can be made by phoning Vicdeaf on (03) 9473 1111

Access Checklist

Is there:

- Clear internal & external signage
- Good lighting
- Minimal background noise
- TTY phone line, SMS service or familiarity with NRS service
- Alternatives to auditory information (print, subtitles)
- Staff have pen and paper
- Display of International Deafness Symbol where a hearing loop exists
- Staff who have attended Hearing and Deaf Awareness Training
- Certification as a Deaf Friendly Venue
- Australian Sign Language (Auslan)
- Interpreters at public events

Vicdeaf regularly updates our fact sheets. To ensure that your information is current, or for further information about Vicdeaf and the services offered, please visit our website or contact us.

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