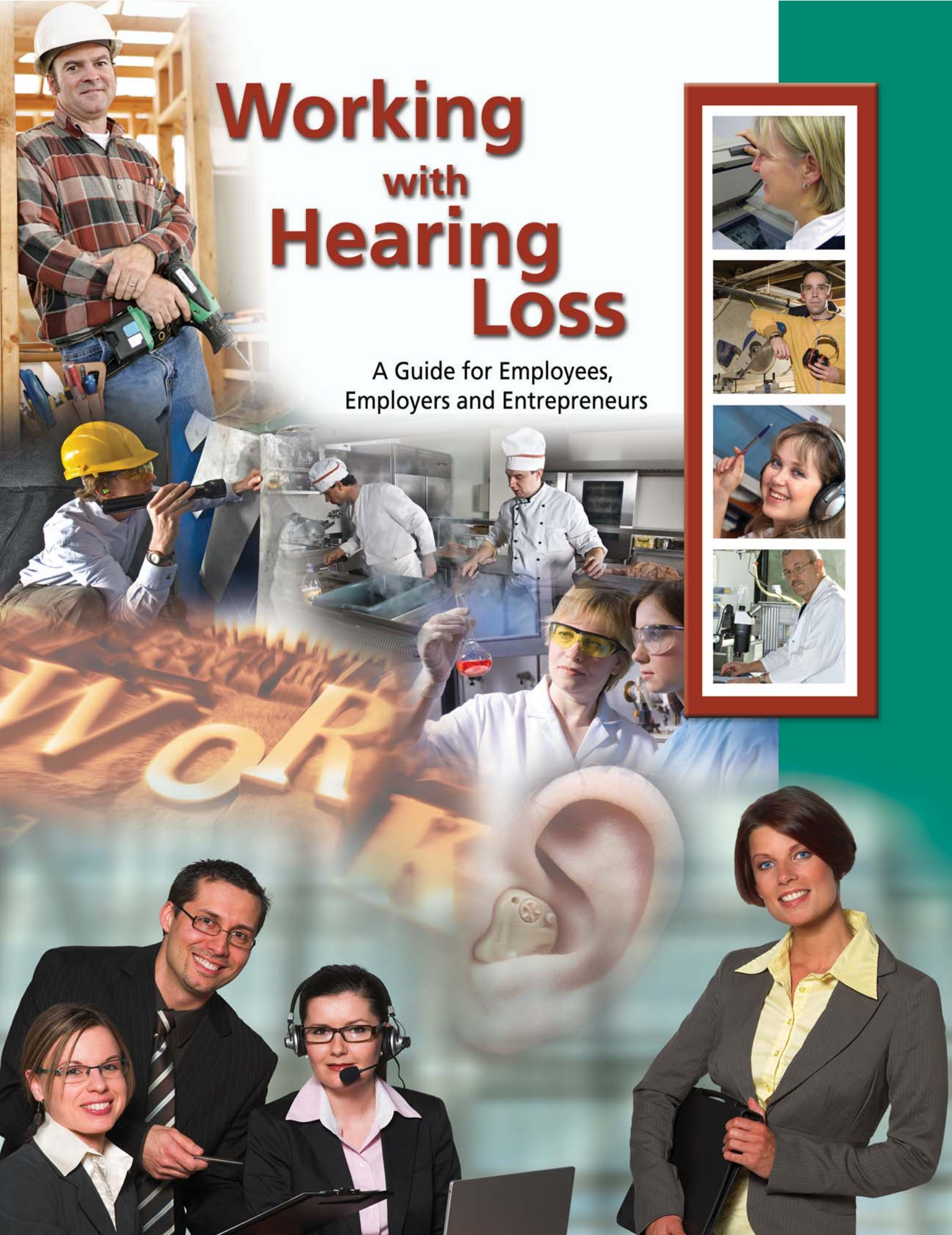


# Working with Hearing Loss

A Guide for Employees,  
Employers and Entrepreneurs



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# Foreword

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association is pleased to present “Working With Hearing Loss”, a guide to successful workplace accommodation for employers, hard of hearing employees and entrepreneurs. This manual provides an overview of hearing loss, information for hard of hearing and deafened job seekers, strategies for making the workplace accessible, and resources for additional information.

“Working With Hearing Loss” aims to help facilitate an environment where people with hearing loss can work to the best of their abilities without fear or anxiety.

To raise awareness of these issues, a poster that can be displayed in the company lunchroom, offices, or distributed among employees is available upon request.

“Working With Hearing Loss” is Phase 3 of “Working & Coping With A Hearing Loss”, an important initiative of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, made possible by a grant from Human Resources Development Canada. Phase 1 of the project was the national Speechreading Teacher Training program, and Phase 2 was the production of the speechreading video “Sound Ideas”. For more information on any of these projects, contact the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association at (800)263-8068.



## The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA)

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association is Canada’s only nation-wide, non-profit consumer organization run by and for hard of hearing and late deafened people. CHHA works co-operatively with professionals, service providers and government bodies, and provides information about hard of hearing issues and solutions.

CHHA aims to produce knowledgeable hard of hearing consumers who understand how to obtain access for their needs. Our mission is to raise public awareness of issues that are important for persons who are hard of hearing and deafened, to promote their integration in Canadian society, to remove any barriers to their participation, and to generally make every community in Canada a better place for persons with hearing loss.

## DEFINITIONS: Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deaf

This manual covers the needs of hard of hearing and late deafened workers. (More information on the mechanics of hearing can be found in “How Hearing Works”.)

**Hard of hearing** people generally have a hearing loss ranging from mild to severe, although it is sometimes profound, and use their voice and residual hearing for communication. Hearing aids and cochlear implants are often used, augmented by assistive listening devices, other technology, and speechreading.

**Late deafened persons**, sometimes referred to as deafened or oral deaf, have lost all hearing at some point after learning to speak, usually as adults. Growing up either hearing or hard of hearing, late deafened people continue to use voice to communicate and rely strongly on visual forms of communication such as speechreading, text, and occasionally sign language.

Many **Deaf** or profoundly hard of hearing people identify with the society and language of Deaf Culture and use sign language as their basis of communication.

## International Hearing Access Symbol

This international sign denotes accessibility or services for persons with hearing loss. The sign appears in some form wherever hearing access is provided: theatres, meeting rooms, hotels, conference centres, professional offices, etc.



# Working with Hearing Loss



## AN INTRODUCTION

Hearing loss is considered the fastest-growing disability in the world. In North America, one in 10 people is thought to have some degree of hearing loss, ranging from mild loss to profound deafness; for those aged 65 and over, the percentage rises to 50%. It is a rare business that has no employees with hearing loss, and most organizations can expect hearing issues to become increasingly common among its workers.

The Canadian Human Rights Act requires federal employers and their contract service providers to accommodate the special needs of employees and clients with disabilities, unless meeting those needs will cause undue hardship. This is a positive move towards recognizing the obligations of employers. Many of the businesses constituted under a provincial statute, the provincial charter or code already contain a duty of accommodation relating to persons with disabilities. For most businesses, meeting the needs of hard of hearing or deafened employees is easily achieved at reasonable cost. The minimal finances involved are far outweighed by the benefit of having the right person in the job.

Many employees try to hide their loss out of fear. The reality of what it is like to be hard of hearing or late deafened is not well understood by the hearing world. A false stigma of waning mental capability is still associated with loss of hearing. For a working person with hearing loss, this translates into a fear of curtailed career advancement, being forced into a more menial position or even dismissal.

But there are side effects of trying to conceal a hearing loss: altered behaviour (withdrawal from social situations, decreased communication), moodiness, and management misinterpretation of the inevitable errors that may result from hearing loss. Many people have been forced into early retirement because their job has become too difficult from lack of understanding and accommodation. Thousands of people who left their jobs due to hearing loss feel that if coping classes, speechreading and more knowledge had been available to them, they would have been able to continue in their jobs.

Providing appropriate accommodation and education will result in a valuable hard of hearing or late deafened worker who has good self-esteem and is assertive about their needs, an understanding employer and co-workers, and a happier, more productive work environment.

## Barriers, Access & Accommodation

People with hearing loss face many barriers in relation to their work:

- Lack of technology: i.e. assistive listening devices, or phone amplifiers for regular work and meetings.
- Lack of, or poor, professional note-takers or real time captioners as needed for job interviews, performance reviews, group meetings, training sessions and other situations.
- Supervisors and co-workers who have misconceptions about hearing loss that can result in communication problems.

The invisible barriers of attitudes and perceptions are more difficult to address. Colleagues may feel that the hard of hearing worker has selective hearing, or that the deafened person has an easier job in not having to answer the phone. (Studies have shown that people with disabilities tend to work harder than other workers.) What makes these invisible barriers difficult is that most people aren't aware of them. By identifying the barriers and creating a workable situation, the workplace environment becomes more open and understanding.

**Accessibility** for hard of hearing and late deafened people means creating an environment where all individuals can communicate and actively participate.

**Accommodation** is an adjustment or modification of the workplace that improves the ability of a hard of hearing or deafened person to perform the required tasks of their position. The needs of persons with hearing loss vary from job to job. The challenges of accommodation may be greater in nursing, for example, than in a profession where less personal interaction is required.

The following chapters examine solutions to working with hearing loss from the perspectives of employees, employers and the hard of hearing or deafened businessperson.

To gain the best possible perspective of working with hearing loss, the entire guide should be read by all parties. The Employee section has valuable information for the employer, and vice versa.

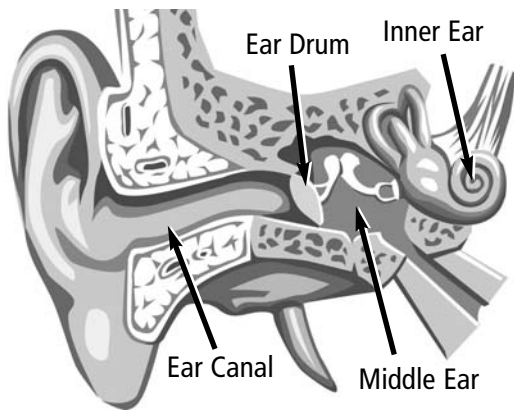
*For me the key is to identify [as hard of hearing]. I work with clients on a drop-in basis, and identifying lets me build relationships with them. When newer clients say things like "she's ignoring me", my regulars explain that "Liz can't hear. You need to talk directly to her."*

# How Hearing Works

Living with hearing loss is a difficult thing to describe. People with typical hearing might perhaps understand what it means to be deaf – to hear no sound at all. But who can truly appreciate the feelings of a late deafened person – the utter desperation, fear and frustration that result when hearing is completely lost, sometimes overnight? How can a hard of hearing person adequately explain what he or she actually hears, how the partial information provided by an imperfect hearing system means poor comprehension and communication?

A brief look at the complex human hearing system may help clarify the challenges of being hard of hearing or late deafened.

## How Our Hearing Works



The outer ear is a funnel that directs sound waves from the air to the tympanic membrane (eardrum), sending vibrations that cause the three bones in the middle ear to move mechanically. These mechanical vibrations move to the inner ear, where the tiny hair cells of the cochlea turn them into electrical energy. These impulses travel the auditory nerve to the brain, where they are translated into useful sound information that we understand – speech, water running, machines, and the sounds of nature.

## Types of Hearing Loss

While hearing loss has many potential causes such as genetic factors, health problems in utero, at birth, or during the mother's pregnancy, ear infections, disease, ototoxic medications, injury to the ear, hearing loss due to ageing (presbycusis), and exposure to noise, there are two main types:

**Conductive (Mechanical):** The outer or middle ear is unable to conduct sound as well as it should. Causes include disease or obstruction in the outer or middle ear and usually affects all frequencies of hearing. Conductive hearing loss can often be corrected medically or surgically, or helped by hearing aids and other technology. Rarely is the loss severe or profound.

**Sensorineural Hearing Loss:** The most common type of hearing loss has many causes and refers to damage or destruction of mechanisms in the inner ear or auditory nerve. Sensorineural hearing loss can cause decreased capacity in one or both of two distinct abilities: *sensitivity* to sounds which is the ability to detect soft sounds; and *discrimination*, the ability to distinguish one sound from another, and to understand speech.

People with both discrimination and sensitivity problems find that even if speech is made loud enough for them to hear, they may still not understand what is being said. This is why background noise interferes with a hard of hearing person's comprehension, and why shouting at a person with hearing loss is usually painful rather than helpful. Speech perception in the presence of background noise declines with age, even in listeners who have normal sensitivity to simple sounds of both high and low frequencies. Hearing loss of this nature often develops so gradually that the person may not even realize that there is something amiss, making them the last person to realize that their hearing is diminishing.

**Tinnitus** is sound in the head that is not perceptible to others, a condition estimated to affect 17% of the population. Tinnitus, which may be constant or intermittent, is described by some people as chirping crickets whistling wind, an airplane taking off, clicking, chattering, etc. While no cure is currently available for tinnitus, various devices to temper it include stress reduction, more sleep, better diet, tinnitus-masking machines or environments that provide some background noise that will override the sounds of tinnitus.



Tinnitus can be an extremely stressful condition. Information on tinnitus support groups can be found in “Where To Get Information”.

## Degree of Hearing Loss

Sensitivity to sound is measured in decibels, a complicated measure of loudness. See Table # 1 for a decibel measurement chart of some common sounds. In Table # 2, a person’s degree of hearing loss in decibels indicates how their communication is affected. For example, a person with a 40dB loss cannot hear sounds that have a loudness of 40dB or less. Note: These figures refer to the volume of sound that can still be heard unaided.

**Table #2:**

Decibel Loss	Hearing Problem
16-25	Slight loss; problems if listening conditions are poor, i.e. a noisy party
26-40	Mild loss; difficulty hearing soft or distant speech in church or theatre; may benefit from a hearing aid
41-55	Moderate hearing loss; conversation heard from 3-5 feet, but understanding speech is a strain, especially in background noise; hearing aids required
56-70	Moderately severe; conversation must be loud and nearby; hearing aids should be complemented by other devices and speechreading instruction
71-90	Severe loss; cannot hear loud speech or understand speech on the telephone; besides hearing aids, other technology and speechreading, counselling and speech therapy may be required
91 or more	Profound hearing loss or deafness; some very loud sounds may be heard or felt through vibration. Speechreading training, speech therapy and counselling are essential. This is the level of hearing loss for a late deafened person.

*(Note: Hearing test results are generally recorded on an audiogram, which is professionally interpreted and explained by an audiologist.)*

**Table #1:** Decibel Levels of Commons sounds at typical distance from source

dB	Source	Effect on Hearing	Maximum Duration Per Day (Hours)
0	weakest sound		
30	whisper	very quiet	
60	normal conversation	comfortable	
70	hair dryer	interferes with phone conversation	
85	vacuum cleaner, electric razor, mini-bike	level at which hearing damage begins	8
91	shouting, lawn mower		2
100	power mower, snowmobile, factory, mp3 players	dangerous	15 minutes
110	music concert, power saw	regular exposure of more than 1 minute risks permanent damage	Under 2 minutes
120	jackhammer, thunderclap nearby, dance clubs	very dangerous	A few seconds
140	shotgun, jet takeoff	threshold of pain	



# How Hearing Works

## Functioning with Hearing Loss

While this information explains the types and levels of loss, it does not accurately describe how a hard of hearing or late deafened person functions. Science and medicine have made great strides, but the complex hearing system is still not completely understood. Many factors influence how a person with hearing loss functions, such as personality, family background, degree of emotional and physical support, ability to focus and concentrate, the time of onset of hearing loss (early or later in life), etc. It is common for two people with similar degrees of hearing loss to function very differently.

Learning to live and work successfully with a hearing loss is not an easy task; it requires determination, persistence, an ability to be assertive about one's needs, a positive attitude and a sense of humour.

## Assistive Technology and Aural Rehabilitation

### Hearing Aids

In most cases, hearing loss can be greatly helped by hearing aids, which essentially amplify sound. Today's advanced digital technology is very powerful and can include multi-directional microphones and programmable aids that adapt to the listening environment (i.e. significantly reducing background noise), and connections to other powerful listening systems.

Hearing loss varies between individuals, as does the suitability of various hearing aid styles and technology. Audiologists can determine which assistive technology will be most beneficial to a person's hearing loss.

Many hearing aids also contain a telecoil or T-switch, which allows them to work with assistive listening devices (ALDs) such as FM and Infrared (IR) systems, which block out background noise and bring the sound directly into the ear. Other technology includes alerting systems, computers, captioning, and computerized note-taking. See "Making It Work" for more information.

### Cochlear Implants

A cochlear implant (CI) is a medical electronic device that acts as an artificial cochlea, directly stimulating the auditory nerve. It is surgically implanted and has three main elements: a battery-operated external speech processor that converts sound waves into digital signals, a magnetically attached connector that transmits signals

to the implant, and the internal implant that links a wire array to the hearing nerve. CI technology, which is constantly improving, has returned a degree of hearing and transformed overall communication for a huge and growing number of people with profound hearing loss.

## Aural Rehabilitation – Hearing Aids Need Help!

Hearing aids, cochlear implants and assistive technology cannot restore perfect hearing in the same way that lenses correct vision. To fill the gap, people with hearing loss must develop other strategies such as speechreading skills and the ability to let others know what they need in order to stay connected to their families, friends and work. Alternative communication strategies are especially important for late-deafened people who have no usable residual hearing.

Speechreading is essential for a person with sensorineural hearing loss or who is late deafened. Consonants such as t, d, s, f, and p are high frequency sounds that are often difficult to hear, rendering some speech incomprehensible. Often referred to as lipreading, speechreading is the ability to understand a spoken message by taking visual cues from a person's lips, jaws, tongue and teeth, as well as facial expressions, gestures and body language. While approximately only half of speech sounds are visible on a speaker's lips, a listener can fill in many "blanks" with these other visual cues and from the context of what is being discussed.

Speechreading and aural rehabilitation classes, offered by many hearing healthcare providers or agencies, are highly beneficial for the person with hearing loss. CHHA offers speechreading materials such as Sound Ideas (see [www.chha.ca](http://www.chha.ca)) to help develop this important skill.

## Noise & Noise-Induced Hearing Loss

Noise is unwanted sound. This may be in the ear of the listener, as in one's preference in music. But when sounds can cause harm to human health, it becomes an important environmental health issue. To an employee with any degree of hearing loss, even the typical office environment is a source of constant frustration and communication difficulties.

In addition to workplace noise, leisure noise assaults our ears from bars, dance clubs, motorcycles, farm and factory equipment, power tools, guns, crowds, personal music players, hand-held appliances and tools, city and airport traffic, movie theatres, etc.





A major problem with noise is that it's not only loud but often *prolonged*. One of the inner ear's worst enemies is this excessive exposure to noise which causes the tiny hair cells to eventually break and die. Because hair cell loss is usually very gradual, most people are unaware of changes in their hearing until the damage begins to affect them socially or vocationally.

At first, a very discreet loss will occur. Because the high frequencies are most often affected first, most people don't notice a change in volume. Rather, as consonants are high frequency (e.g., s, h, t, d), it becomes more difficult to 'catch' what's being said, and hearing problems are incorrectly attributed to inattentiveness, or others' poor speech habits.

**Bad News:** The damage of noise-induced hearing loss to the delicate hearing mechanism is permanent. People with an existing hearing loss are often highly susceptible to noise damage, and must take extra precautions to protect their ears from further harm.

**Good News:** Damage from noise is *preventable*. Workplaces can be modified to minimize noise, and hearing protection must be mandatory in environments where sound level and volumes are dangerous.

### Warning Signs of Noise Exposure

After exposure to loud noise or music, people may experience one or more of the following:

- Ringing or buzzing in the ears
- Slight muffling of sounds
- Difficulty in understanding speech; words are heard, but not understood
- Difficulty in understanding conversation in groups of people when there is background noise, or in rooms with poor acoustics

*A person experiencing any of these early warnings should seek help from their family doctor who may refer them to a specialist. Avoiding excessive noise or wearing earplugs when appropriate can protect hearing. Take breaks from the noise and give your ears a chance to recover.*

### Permissible Noise Exposures

Table #1 includes a sample of permissible hours of noise exposure, regulated by government health and safety guidelines. 85dB (for 8 hours) is considered the safety benchmark, above which listening time should be monitored. As a rule of thumb, for every 3dB increase, the listening time should be cut in half: 4 hours at 88dB, 2 hours at 91dB, etc. Noise overexposure often has temporary physical symptoms (see following warning signs), but a doctor should be consulted for ear problems as many conditions, if left unchecked, could result in permanent damage to the ear. These include earache, ringing or buzzing, pressure, ear discharge, swelling or reddening around the ears or loss of hearing ability.

### Tips for Communicating with People with Hearing Loss

1. Ask the person with hearing loss what you can do to make communication easier and more effective.
2. Get the person's attention before beginning to speak. It's difficult for someone with hearing loss to catch up when tuning in halfway through the first sentence.
3. Ensure the light is on your face and not behind you.
4. Speak clearly and at a normal or even slightly slower pace.
5. Move closer to the person, if necessary.
6. Facial expressions should match your words, helpful when the listener cannot hear your tone of voice.
7. Do not shout or over-emphasize your words as this distorts speech and makes speechreading difficult.
8. Maintain eye contact, minimize head and body movement, don't cover your mouth with hands or other objects, and refrain from chewing gum and smoking. For some people with hearing loss, moustaches and beards make speechreading more difficult.
9. Be aware of and eliminate, if possible, sources of background noise that may interfere with good communication.
10. Writing down key phrases and words may be helpful, especially when changing the conversation topic.
11. Patience and flexibility are important keys to interacting with people with hearing loss, especially those with no usable hearing and who do not use sign language to communicate.
12. Use technology with readable text such as hand-written notes, computers, e-mail, text messaging, realtime captioning in meetings and TTY phones.

# How Hearing Works

## Some Signs of Hearing Loss in a Person

### *Am I Losing My Hearing?*

- Do I tune out from conversations where more than one person is talking?
- Am I letting my family or friends do most of my talking for me?
- After a long conversation, am I usually tired and irritable?
- When I answer questions, do people sometimes appear puzzled or embarrassed by my response?
- Do friends and family seem to avoid conversations with me?
- Do I frequently misunderstand people and ask them to repeat themselves?

### *Yes, You Are!*

- Has problems understanding if not face to face
- Looks intently at a person's face for clues
- Remarks that speakers are mumbling or not speaking clearly
- Difficulty conversing in noisy environment
- Turns television or radio up loud
- Complains of ear ringing, buzzing or other sounds
- Nods in comprehension during conversation, but responds inappropriately
- Has difficulty understanding from a distance or another room
- Avoids group social situations and public gatherings
- Has difficulty following conversations in meetings

## Accepting a Hearing Loss

Many people go through needless emotional suffering because they have not been adequately prepared to cope with the anxieties, emotions and expectations that accompany hearing loss. Anyone experiencing such an emotional or physical loss typically experiences the five recognized stages of grief, a process which for some people may last for years.

- 1. Denial:** *"I don't have a problem."*
- 2. Projection:** *"Other people are mumbling!"*
- 3. Anger:** *"Why me?" Anger will often be directed at the person's closest family members or friends*
- 4. Depression:** *Possible signs are sadness, grief at missing sounds that were once enjoyed, feelings of isolation, embarrassment over past behaviour when hearing loss began, withdrawal from activities*
- 5. Acceptance:** *Occurs when depression is over and replaced with the knowledge that "the problem is with my hearing, not me."*

*S* knew I had hearing

*trouble when I started to get messages wrong, particularly name and phone numbers. I've since found there are many ways to problem-solve at work. One must be polite, pick a quiet time for a talk with the boss, and refer to it as a "situation we must talk about" and not as a problem.*



# THE EMPLOYEE:

## *Dealing with Hearing Loss*



### **DO I TELL THEM?**

*Do I tell them I'm hard of hearing or deafened?  
If so, when?*

*What if I don't understand the interviewer?*

*I'm afraid my hearing problem will make me seem  
uncertain and slow.*

*How do I explain my hearing loss?*

*Will they think I'm too demanding, too expensive, if I ask  
for an amplified phone, a TTY, a desk in a quiet area, a  
flashing fire alarm, captioning in meetings?*

*How can I get them to see beyond my hearing loss to me?*

If applying for a job is stressful for a person with typical hearing, it's doubly so for someone with hearing loss. On top of having the required education and experience, you must decide between disclosing your hearing loss and risk not getting the job, or hiding it and risk not keeping it. And while the frustration and anger of hearing loss are understandable feelings, they are ultimately counter-productive to your career goals.

Success on the job for you, a person with hearing loss, depends on taking responsibility for two important things:

1. Acknowledging your abilities, to yourself and to your employer.
2. Learning what accommodations are necessary to do the job well and working with your employer to make them happen.

As an informed and accepting hard of hearing or late deafened worker, you will be able to:

- Overcome the fear of losing your job due to disclosure.
- Separate your hearing loss from your skills and abilities.
- Provide accurate information about your hearing loss with practical suggestions for easier communication with your employer and co-workers.
- Explain problems to your employer and ask for accommodation that will provide the best working environment.
- Be the solution – not the problem.

### **The Starting Point: 5 Principles for Managing Your Hearing Loss**

To reach this point, you must explore ways to manage your hearing loss. These five basic principles can form the basis for new communication strategies support that support you in your private and working lives.

1. Be open about your hearing loss and take responsibility for improving communication and your quality of life.
2. Create the best possible listening environments for yourself. This includes anticipating what you will need, and making necessary modifications to the lighting, seating, background noise, prepared material, etc.
3. Let others know how to communicate with you. Offering good communication tips such as those on page 7 will make conversations easier and more meaningful. Be assertive about your needs.
4. Make the best use of any hearing you may have. Learn as much as you can about hearing loss and discover what tools will help you: hearing aids, assistive listening devices, visual communication, speechreading classes, support groups, etc.
5. Develop a positive outlook and keep your sense of humour!

### **Get the Support You Need**

Your doctor, audiologist, or hearing aid dispenser may be able to recommend resources to help increase your communication skills, confidence and employability. Most provinces have service agencies that serve people who are hard of hearing, deafened and deaf. These organizations offer a variety of support services such as counseling, classes in speechreading and coping strategies. Many also offer employment and job search support. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association has consumer branches in over 40 communities across Canada, many of which offer support and speechreading programs through their volunteer network. Check "Where To Get Information" for a list of organizations to contact and internet resource websites to explore.

# THE EMPLOYEE: *Dealing with Hearing Loss*

## THE JOB SEARCH

### A New Workplace

The business world is going through a massive shift at very high speed. Today's jobs often tend to be contract, temporary or part-time work, with more clearly defined beginnings and endings. Frequent changes in jobs require a new kind of adaptability from both workers and employers. As a hard of hearing or deafened job seeker, you require both competitive skills and sophisticated job search skills.

Technological changes have greatly accelerated the amount and speed at which information is being made available, which is good news for people with hearing loss. Communication and information is more accessible than ever. Computers, personal communication devices and advanced telephones allow high speed or real-time conversations through the web, e-mail, text messaging, online chats and webcam interactions. Strong communication skills, ongoing education and retraining are necessary for anyone who wants to remain competitive in employment.

### You Are MORE than Your Hearing Loss

Your skills and personal attributes are of primary importance to any job, so don't undermine them by making your hearing loss the focus of who you are. Realistic expectations and self-awareness are critical. Today's jobs are becoming much more project-oriented and less defined by specific duties. Job accommodation will not pose any problem if you are viewed foremost for the contributions you can make towards company goals

Adaptability, creativity and problem solving are skills demonstrated daily by deafened and hard of hearing people in a hearing world. By recognizing, cultivating and enhancing these strengths, you will be presenting yourself as the best possible resource an employer can acquire in today's continually changing business climate.

## WHAT ARE YOUR SKILLS?

*If you are confident that you can do the job, what else can you contribute?*

*What would make you the best candidate for a potential employer?*

*What innovative ideas from your unique life experience can you offer to a more flexible work environment?*

*How has your hearing loss made you more resourceful in facing challenges?*

## Communication Skills

Employees with strong communication skills are highly prized by employers. It starts with a clear and concise resumé, followed by the personal job interview, which is a time to not only elaborate on your qualifications, but to display your excellent interpersonal skills.

Communication strengths are demonstrated by your ability to listen and understand the questions and respond clearly and accurately, whether you communicate orally, through text interpreting, or with a sign language interpreter. Remember that many employers have little or no experience working with people who have a hearing loss and may be initially resistant due to their own misconceptions or lack of information. For example, an interviewer may incorrectly assume that you function with hearing loss in the same way as one of his or her relatives. It's up to you to clarify how hearing loss and good work performance can be synonymous.

## When to Disclose

There's no "if" in that statement. Trying to hide a hearing loss only perpetuates any fear, anxiety and insecurity you may feel as a hard of hearing or deafened person. You will always be waiting to be "found out".

If you try to bluff your way through your first interview, you risk misunderstanding the questions and answering inappropriately from that point onward. You will always need to be on your guard, even if you get the job. This is a very stressful situation that can be avoided by being open from the start. And where hearing is part of the job qualification for safety reasons, full disclosure is mandatory.

Hiding a hearing loss is also extremely difficult! There are too many clues that co-workers and employers pick up on, which regrettably are often mistaken as signs that you are incompetent, lazy, forgetful, or anti-social. These are certainly worse labels than being hard of hearing!

Some people may correctly surmise that you have a hearing loss, but wonder why you would want to hide a situation that carries no personal blame or shame.

By disclosing a hearing loss, you put yourself in the driver's seat, in a position of control because you are



being honest and proactive. If you are open and do not apologize for your hearing loss or your needs, you will be treated with the respect you deserve. The experience of many job seekers, however, is that certain times are better to disclose a hearing disability.

You are not required to disclose your hearing loss in a resumé, and why should you? The resumé is simply a tool to get an interview, an employer screening mechanism. It is a statement of your abilities and qualifications for the job, which is all that interests an employer at this point. When you are offered an interview, however, advise your interviewers of your accommodation requirements for the meeting, such as captioning or an interpreter. If you do not require special accommodation, you should mention your hearing loss at an appropriate time during the first meeting, preferably at the outset if, for example, you find you need the interviewer to speak more loudly or to change seating arrangements. Remember, you are a qualified job seeker with much to offer an organization.

A good interviewer will ask a candidate to list their strengths and weaknesses. This presents an excellent opportunity to put your hearing loss into perspective, framing it as just one component of your “total package”. When disclosing, be clear about what accommodations you require to do the job well, and how it has worked for you successfully at previous positions.

## The Interview

The implications of hearing loss may be minimal or substantial depending on the degree of hearing loss, the requirements of a specific job, and an employer’s perspective. Here are some tips toward a stress-free job interview.

1. Assess the listening environment of the interview room and the interviewer’s speech. If communication is difficult, and if you have not already done so, now is the time to disclose your hearing loss.
2. Advise the interviewer on the simple modifications needed for a successful discussion, such as:
  - the interviewer’s speech: louder? slower?
  - changing positions to allow better light on the speaker’s face
  - closing doors and eliminating other sources of background noise
  - writing down key words

3. Anticipate possible areas of concern on the job (e.g. safety, communication, productivity) and be prepared to discuss how you will be able to carry out the job if hired.
4. Assume the role of educator and innovator and discuss positive strategies you have used in past employment (or other settings) which helped you to be a strong contributor. You will not only help put the interviewer at ease, but you will also be demonstrating your ability to take responsibility for yourself in day-to-day work.
5. Be aware that the interviewer should not ask you questions about your hearing loss that are not directly related to the position or your ability to do the job.

*Don't feel I experienced insensitivity or discrimination because of my deafness. But impatience and ignorance of what hearing loss means – yes!*



# THE EMPLOYEE: *Dealing with Hearing Loss*

*Sent out 30 resumes that disclosed my hearing loss and received no interviews. I sent out 15 more that did not disclose, and got 5 interviews. That's not a coincidence – there is a best time for disclosing.*



## HEARING LOSS ON THE JOB

More and more adults are experiencing hearing problems in their working lives. Along with the many overwhelming emotions that accompany the onset of hearing difficulties, whether gradual or sudden through trauma or illness, an employee fears job loss.

People who develop hearing loss are often reluctant to disclose their difficulties to their employer or co-workers, regardless of how difficult or debilitating their hearing problems. There are many reasons:

- Stigmatization
- Anxiety about their ability to carry out the job
- Loss of potential career advancement
- Fear of being viewed as “different” or “deficient”
- Lack of information regarding disabilities and accommodation
- Anxiety about changing jobs and the need to re-educate colleagues

While it is unusual for a person who suddenly becomes deafened to try to hide their problem from employers and co-workers, hard of hearing people have historically been reluctant to draw attention to their difficulty. This is partly due to a natural sense of privacy about discussing disabilities in general, but mostly because of misconceptions about hearing loss as well as the perceived threat to job security. Some people choose not to say anything but let their hearing aid “speak” for them.

The results of not disclosing the onset of hearing loss or seeking available accommodation are many and distressing:

- Some people leave their job or retire early due to the psychological stress experienced on the job.
- Stress can lead to increased illness and absenteeism.

- Self-esteem suffers greatly to the point that people with hearing loss choose to limit their own career advancements.
- The difficulty in processing information in meetings or other group situations is often interpreted by co-workers and supervisors as indication of being “slow”, “not sharp”, “inattentive”.

## Taking the First Step Towards Accommodation

The section on “Making It Work” details how you can work with your employer to create a successful plan accommodation. But it starts with you: acknowledging your hearing loss, first to yourself and taking personal steps to manage it, and then discussing it with your employer.

Ask for a confidential meeting with your supervisor. Explain that you have a hearing loss that you feel is interfering with your ability to do your job well. Ask for the company’s support in exploring ways to make your job more accessible. At this point, you may already have prepared some accommodation requests, or you might be starting at the beginning as outlined in “Making It Work”.

With the help of this guide and other resources, you and your employer can identify the wide variety of assistive devices and communication strategies that can be used to significantly reduce hearing loss difficulties in the workplace. You will decide together if everyone in the company needs to know about your hearing loss and how best to educate co-workers about effective communication practices.

Take the first steps – because they will lead you where you want to go.

# THE EMPLOYER:

## Dealing with Hearing Loss



### Diversity in the Workplace

Working with all people requires flexibility, creativity, diplomacy and resourcefulness. With today's rapidly changing technology, economy, and labour pool, organizations such as yours must focus on *ability* rather than *disability* to obtain the best possible employee force.

At some point during the course of their working lives, most people will need to be accommodated on the job whether due to family responsibilities, physical or mental illness, on the job injury or disability. Everyone in society is being accommodated in one way or another, but some accommodations such as large print publications are socially acceptable and do not limit a person's participation or self-worth. Ideally, companies are adopting a new standard by making the principles of inclusion part of company policy.

Accommodation is more than a courtesy – it is good business. Employing and accommodating a person with any disability, including hearing loss, has strong payoffs for the employer:

- Diversity initiatives foster balance and respect in the workplace.
- Positive staff morale means less turnover.
- Workplace becomes free of discrimination and harassment with fewer complaints.
- Organization develops increased flexibility, creativity and innovation.
- Access in the workplace has benefits for everyone, including other employees and customers.
- Company image improves in the business community and with the public as an “employer of choice”.
- Customers with disabilities, including the fast-growing seniors market, are better served.
- Some subsidies may be available to companies employing people with disabilities compliance with Employment Equity and Human Rights legislation.
- Workplace accommodations can reduce workers' compensation and other insurance costs.
- Workplace accommodations can increase the pool of qualified employees.

Hopefully, this guide will not only help erase the misconceptions you may have had about hearing loss, but also assist you in successfully accommodating the hearing needs of your employees. When a job candidate or employee has acknowledged their hearing problems and possible accommodation needs, and demonstrated how they have worked well in the past, the payoff for you is a productive and proactive employee who will be of great value to your business.

### Cost of Accommodation

While many employers fear the high cost of accommodating a disability, studies show that roughly half of all accommodations cost nothing to implement, another 30% cost less than \$500, and only the remaining 20% cost more than \$500. The greatest expenses are incurred with specialized equipment or technical aids, but efforts should be made to explore potential sources of funding for the equipment. For example, there are business tax credits available to employers to help pay for the costs of accommodations for people with disabilities.

Accommodation should be considered just one aspect of meeting the range of your staff's needs. Job accommodations for people with hearing loss might be as simple as:

- Situating a desk to access better light and allow the employee to see who is approaching.
- Sensitivity training for co-workers on communicating with people who have hearing loss.
- Reducing background noise for communication with a hard of hearing person, or moving the desk to a quieter location.

*I have done well in my career because I have learned what I need to do, and to let people know about my hearing loss. It hasn't been easy at times, but being hard of hearing is part of who I am and how I communicate.*

# THE EMPLOYER: *Dealing with Hearing Loss*

## Interviewing a Person with Hearing Loss

- Follow the guidelines for effective communication outlined on page 7.
- If advance notice was provided, confirm with the applicant that both the requested accommodation and interview communication are adequate.
- If the candidate has not disclosed a hearing loss, do not ask any specific questions about it, even if the issue is obvious to you. Be open, however, about any concerns you may have regarding his or her ability to perform certain job functions. Give the applicant an opportunity to explain how she or he would perform specific job tasks.
- Ask the same job-related questions that you ask all applicants to determine how their qualifications match the position.
- Focus on the applicant's abilities.
- Interviews should be conducted in a quiet, well-lit room that reduces visual distractions.
- If multiple interviewers are involved, only one person should speak at a time, indicating their intention to do so before beginning to talk.
- Be aware that a nervous job seeker might experience a more acute hearing loss than normal. Extra efforts to put the person at ease would help.
- Have patience; it might take longer to interview a person with a severe to profound loss.
- Be willing to use the applicant's assistive listening device, and speak at a normal pace and volume. Even with technology, the interviewer may be asked to repeat questions, adjust pace or volume or even write things down.
- When discussing accommodation with the applicant/employee, use positive language such as "Will you need accommodation to do this task?" rather than "Can you do this task?"

## AN EFFECTIVE DISCLOSURE PROCESS

### When You Suspect An Undisclosed Hearing Loss

As you are now aware, many employees are extremely reluctant to disclose a hearing loss for many reasons. This reluctance may put you in a difficult position of wanting to help the employee you suspect may have a hearing loss, but are prevented by law of asking outright about a hearing loss.

Approaching an employee with a suspected hearing loss should be no different than any other situation where a performance issue is drawn to the attention of the employee. As a good manager, you should approach the employee with relevant performance facts (not subjective opinion), with the sensitivity, willingness and flexibility to support the employee regarding solutions.

### When an Employee Discloses

Creating a climate where employees feel comfortable disclosing their hearing loss is important. Further excellent information on this topic is available from Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW), as well as your own Human Resources department. You may have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that can provide counselling or support services. Provincial Workers Compensation Boards may also provide assistance. If an employee approaches you about their hearing loss, they may already have sought personal and professional help for their problem, or it may be very new and this is their first step.

In the case of the latter, the employee should be referred to a physician to start the medical process. In both cases, you and the employee should start talking about the accommodation process, covered fully in the next section, "Making It Work". Showing your immediate support and empathy for the situation will not only help facilitate the accommodation process, but will help move the employee from a place of fear to a place of hope.

### Outside Support

Even after reading this manual, your staff member with a hearing loss may not feel comfortable discussing their problem with you. They may not know how to adequately describe their accommodation needs, because hearing loss is individual and effective accommodation varies greatly. You may want to consider enlisting the services of EAP provider, or an audiologist or counsellor with expertise in hearing loss to help devise solutions to the situation. Provincial hearing service agencies can be of great help in this area or will be able to direct you to further assistance.





# Making it Work



Hearing accommodations are fairly straightforward once the problem is identified. The employee and employer must work as a team to identify the most appropriate strategies and technology to develop an effective plan.

## Keys to Successful Accommodation

1. People with hearing loss cope in different ways. There is no single strategy that works for all people; it may take time and effort to develop one that works best.
2. The employee and the employer must both develop a clear picture of the job's demands, especially those that involve listening and communication. These demands, along with the type and extent of hearing loss, have a direct bearing on the employee's ability to perform essential job functions.
3. Ideally, the employee should enter the meeting with the employer prepared with information about the hearing loss and its associated job difficulties. This is not always an easy task, and an outside hearing loss expert may be of help during the first meeting.
4. An employee-prepared job analysis is helpful in evaluating the job in terms of hearing loss. The employer and employee can then systematically review job responsibilities and devise a plan to reconfigure the activities impacted by the hearing loss. A common discovery is that a job can be done in a variety of ways, regardless of how it may initially have been described.
5. Hearing health professionals can help organizations assess the employee's job accommodation needs, help develop successful communication strategies (including speech therapy and personal counselling, if necessary) and offer expertise on the latest assistive technology. Resources include provincial service agencies, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) which may also offer additional assistance in speech therapy and personal counselling, as well as audiologists and counsellors with expertise in hearing loss.

## Considerations for Accommodation

These questions will help in identifying both problem areas and potential solutions.

1. What is the extent and type of the hearing loss?
2. Does the individual benefit from amplification and are hearing aids worn?
3. Do the hearing aids have a telephone coil or direct audio input feature?
4. What are the qualifications and expectations of the job?
5. What does the worker do in the course of an average day? Why?
6. What specific duties are hearing-dependent?
7. How would others perform these duties?
8. Is background noise a problem in the work environment? What is causing the noise (i.e. machines, high volume of conversations)?
9. Is communication a problem? How does communication take place (phone, in person, etc.)?
10. What are potential workplace hazards for people with hearing loss, if any? What corrective measures are required? What signalling devices could be used, (flashing fire alarm, etc.)?

## Employee Job Analysis

For an effective job analysis, the employee may find this process beneficial. When considering barriers in the workplace, the employee must also be objective about the limitations of his or her own hearing – poor speech discrimination, for example, or hearing aids that were not fitted with certain work environments in mind. Employment goals must be realistic.

### 1. List all Job Requirements and Fundamental Activities

Keep a detailed diary over two days to ensure that most routine activities have been included:

- Meetings
- Telephone conversations
- Small/large group activities

# Making it Work

- Computer work
- Formal and informal communications and exchanges within the office
- Filing, photocopying, faxing
- Training sessions
- Public presentations
- All situations involving alerting sounds: telephone rings, computer prompts, fire and other alarms, door bells/knocks, public address systems, machinery malfunctions/cues

## 2. Identify the Hearing Related Tasks

Select only those job functions that are hearing-dependent, weeding out such non-hearing related activities such as delivering the mail, filing, etc. This preliminary step helps focus the job analysis on problem areas and highlights areas in which the employee is doing well and requires no intervention.

## 3. Identify the Degree and Frequency of Problems

Each activity that presents problems due to the hearing loss is rated as to whether it **always** or **occasionally** presents a problem. If the employee is never able to hear PA announcements, then indicate always. In many cases, occasional problems are due to location in the room or in relation to the speaker, which can be remedied with minimal effort. Similarly, it may help to note why some situations such as phone conversations present only minimal difficulty, while others pose more of a challenge.

## Employee / Employer Meeting

If the job analysis is reasonably thorough and the employee understands why he or she is experiencing difficulty, the employer will have a better understanding of the situation.

1. The discussion should begin with a general talk of the person's hearing loss. The hearing healthcare professional may be of assistance here in explaining and clarifying for both parties:
  - The type, degree and functional implications of the employee's particular hearing level.
  - How hearing instruments work to amplify sound.
2. Using the job analysis, review each job activity and its hearing-related category (always or occasionally), making note of the many responsibilities being completed successfully and requiring no intervention.
3. Discuss why the identified situations present a difficulty, focusing on only the activities that involve communication, listening, and warning.
4. Review possible communication strategies, modifications to the environment, and technology that might make the job more barrier-free, and the employee's performance more effective.

## ACCOMMODATION: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The following accommodation solutions offer a variety of tactics that may work individually or as part of a larger system of access.

**General Communication Tips** (see page 7).

### Environmental Modifications

- The employee's desk should be in a quiet area away from the photocopier, main phone system, outside noise, congregating areas such as corridors, water fountains, restrooms and lunch rooms.
- Employee's back should be against the wall in order to see people approaching.
- Curtains on windows and tinted windows cut down on glaring light that can obscure faces.
- **Background Noise** can be reduced for better communication and lowered stress levels by:
  - Using acoustical walls or screens and sound-absorbing materials on walls, floor and ceilings; drapes and carpets also absorb sound.
  - Rearranging traffic routes within and between work areas.
  - Placing sound reduction covers on printers and typewriters.
  - Placing noisy office machinery in an enclosed space where workers not operating them are not affected.



- Choosing machines that are designed to run quietly.
- Using telephones with adjustable ringer volume controls and blinking lights where appropriate.
- Using offices with walls and doors.
- Using sound-masking systems such as white noise, taped or broadcast music programs to cover background noise and increase worker activity levels.

### Interpreter Services

Professional interpreters or captioners may be hired by the company or contracted as needed for meetings, conferences and training sessions. These services must be organized in advance.

**Real-Time Captioning (RTC):** A trained captioner records conversation on a shorthand transcription device which is projected on a visible screen and/or laptop in real-time. This is one of the most desirable accommodations for a deafened or hard of hearing person for large groups, meetings, lectures or training sessions.

**Computerized Note-taking:** A fast typist provides text translation either on a screen or on a laptop computer sitting next to the person with hearing loss. While the operator and equipment do not function at real-time speed, this is a simpler and less expensive option than RTC.

**Oral Interpreting:** The interpreter repeats what has been said in a way that makes speechreading easier for the person with hearing loss. This is not a common service, and is most suitable for shorter, or one on one sessions.

**Sign Language Interpreting:** The interpreter uses a signed language such as American Sign Language (ASL) or the French LSQ. Most deafened and hard of hearing people do not use sign language as a key means of communication.

### Meetings, Presentations, and Training Sessions

The following suggestions will help the person with hearing loss to actively participate in the sessions.

- Make meeting agenda available in advance.
- Use assistive listening devices which transmit speakers' voices into the hearing aid or assistive device of the person with hearing loss.

- Provide real-time captioning, note-taking, or interpreting as required.
- Person with hearing loss may choose to sit close to the speaker.
- Moderator or other speakers should repeat audience questions prior to answering.
- The presenter with hearing loss should designate someone to repeat questions, have others speak directly into a microphone, or an assistive listening device transmitter.
- Round tables provide best visibility of all speakers.
- Table conference microphones transmit voices to person's assistive listening device headphones.
- Key words, phrases and changes of topic can be written on a blackboard, flip chart, or overhead projector.
- Overhead or slide projectors should be turned off when not in use to reduce humming noise.
- Tapping on tables with fingers or pens should be discouraged as the sound reverberates in assistive headsets and/or becomes irritating background noise.
- Keep room as well-lit as possible.
- Distribute minutes or summary meeting notes as soon as possible after the meeting.

*She made several costly errors at work. I missed meetings and misunderstood customers on the phone. Finally, after hearing testing, I was referred to a service agency for lip reading classes, assertiveness training and assistive devices that have helped a lot. I have even learned to speak out and that's half the battle.*

### Job-Restructuring

Some simple job provisions may work well in a flexible work environment:

- Alternative working hours.
- Working at home to eliminate certain environmental barriers such as noise (peak periods, etc.).
- Modifying job tasks or job-sharing. In some cases, eliminating certain tasks completely from a person's job description may be the best tactic. For example, an employee could be relieved of answering the phone and take on other duties instead.

# Making it Work

## TECHNOLOGY

New technology is outpacing the manuals developed to describe them! Today there are so many specialized technical options for people with hearing loss that they should be carefully reviewed for suitability, as a device may leave the person with other unresolved problems. For example, a person may hear conversations better on a certain type of phone, but still may be unable to differentiate the phone's ring from other phones in the immediate area.

The following technical solutions are just an overview of what is currently available. Experts in technical devices for hearing loss should be contacted for recommendations. Vendors should offer trial periods, and the ability to review specific descriptions, features, and capabilities of appropriate technology.

### Telephones

**Signaling Systems:** A person with hearing loss may not hear the phone, or be able to differentiate their own phone from others ringing nearby. A transmitter can be attached to a phone that will cause a light to be flashed or a personal alerting device to vibrate when the phone rings. Transmitters can be used to activate a visual signaling system for fire alarms and door buzzers in addition to telephones. Tone ringer devices that convert the ring of telephones into a more easily heard frequency range are beneficial for some individuals.

**Hearing aid compatible (HAC)** phones are necessary for hearing aid wearers. Otherwise the user may hear a loud, high-pitched squeal similar to microphone feedback that prevents comfortable conversation.

**Amplifiers:** Most private, business and public phones today have built-in amplification options. However, for many people with hearing loss, more powerful amplification is needed and there are many options available. Some amplified phones are designed for, or work better for, hearing aid users. Portable units that connect the phone to the handset offer additional volume boosts, and portable battery-operated devices also for older phones or when travelling.

**HATIS:** The Hearing Aid Telephone Interconnect System is a hands-free amplification that lets hard of hearing people use telephones, cellular phones, PCS systems and pay phones. HATIS works with any in the ear or behind the ear hearing aid that has a Telephone Switch (T-switch).

**Ringers:** Some phones offer extra-loud rings, which may not be appropriate for some office environments, in which case alternative alerting modes such as flashing lights should be explored.

**TTY:** For an employee who cannot use an amplified telephone, a TTY or TTY-compatible device is used to communicate over a standard telephone line with another TTY user or through a relay operator to reach a non-TTY user. The sender types a message that is displayed as text for the receiving party to read rather than using auditory output like a standard phone. A personal computer can also be configured to function as a TTY by adding a special modem.

**LAN** stands for Local Area Network, where a company runs applications for a variety of PCs from a central server. TTY calls are received through the employee's computer. It also works internally, like a chat system allowing users to communicate in real-time.

### Other Phone Strategies

- Call Display gives the user a head start on the conversation by being able to read the caller's name and company.
- Consider using text messaging or online chat capabilities.
- Videophones that allow the user to see the person at the other end give a huge boost to communication.
- Captioned telephones use a relay captioner to record the spoken conversation, allowing the person with hearing loss to both hear and read what the other person is saying.
- The person with hearing loss can be relieved of any phone duties, taking on other responsibilities instead.

### Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

After hearing aids, ALDs can be a hard of hearing person's best friend. There are many devices that can be used with a hearing aid or as stand-alone to allow the user to hear speech. The speaker uses a microphone and the speech is heard by the hard of hearing person through a receiver that cuts out most other noise. There are many systems and styles, and help from a technical devices expert can make suitable recommendations.

- **Inductive Loop Systems:** Sound is transmitted by means of an amplifying system to a wire loop, which



inductively transmits to persons using their hearing aid T-switch. The loop ranges in size from a large room system for greater numbers of people, or the individual “neck loop” worn around the user’s neck.

- **FM and Infrared (IR):** The FM system functions like a mini-radio station, broadcasting on a frequency to a user’s headset, which has many styles. Infrared uses infrared light spectrum instead of sound frequencies to transmit the signal. These can be used for large or small groups. It is important to note that FM can transmit through walls, whereas IR systems do not penetrate walls and are considered secure transmission.
- **Personal FM systems** are very popular and used in group settings, one on one conversation, in the car, etc. Some are used by people who do not wear hearing aids, some are designed to fit into a special jack on a behind-the-ear hearing aid, while others are used with a loop and hearing aid T-switch.
- **Pocket talkers** are compact personal amplifiers designed for one-on-one or small group conversations that run on batteries.

### **Captioning, Closed and Open**

All DVDs and videos used in meetings or training sessions should be captioned to show the text equivalent of sounds and speech as they occur. Closed captioning can be turned on or off, and open captioning stays on-screen screen. Companies can rent equipment to caption DVDs in-house or hire an outside captioning company. When purchasing training material, permission should be obtained from the copyright holder to caption them if they are not already captioned.

### **Personal Communication Devices (PDAs)**

Today’s internet, cellular and computer technology have made communication much easier for people with hearing loss. Communicating by text is now commonplace even for people who can hear. PDA technology is rapidly advancing, and hard of hearing people benefit from visual components of cell phones and other equipment.

**Text Messaging** is one the most popular means of communication today. Messages, usually short and almost in real-time, are transmitted between cellphones.

### **Computers**

**Laptop** and **wireless** technology keep people connected, almost any time and anywhere.

**E-mail** and **Online Chats** allow fast, real-time, text-based communication between two or more computer users. Webcams allow visual connection of the speakers.

**Auditory Cues:** Computer auditory cues for errors or equipment problems can be replaced with screen or cursor flashing. Depending on the computer type, software may be available to switch the auditory signals to visual, usually triggered by turning down the volume.

### **Fax**

Although decreased in popularity with the advent of computers, sending computer-generated information, hard copy documents or hand-written notes by fax is a viable alternative to telephone messaging in some situations. The non-interactive nature of fax communications makes it unsuitable as a substitute for providing TTY communication capabilities.

*It was my boss who suggested I get my hearing tested as I was having difficulty understanding people on the phone. My employer provided me with a phone set with a volume control. My co-workers are considerate, and my present boss gets my attention by saying my name or tapping me on my shoulder before she begins to speak to me.*



# Making it Work

## Paging Systems

Paging systems reduce barriers in distance communication. Some pagers operate over phone lines, while others are stand-alone units with a more limited range. New interactive pagers that allow users to communicate via e-mail, fax, with TTY's, text to voice (and reverse) technology are exciting new communication avenues. The message can be a simple vibrating signal or flashing light that alerts the receiver to make a pre-arranged response or pagers with LED displays of text for more complicated messages.

## Fire/Emergency Alarms

Visual alerting systems are becoming standard, and are imperative in a workplace that has employees or clients with hearing loss. Visual or touch alerting mechanisms can be substituted for or added to traditional audible signals. Alarms can be purchased with lights, which can also be hardwired to the existing system. When an audible alarm is activated, a visual or vibrating cue can be sent to a receiver in the employee's workspace or on their person. Emergency situations can be communicated through a personal paging system with a vibrating receiver. A buddy system uses a co-worker to alert the employee with a hearing loss, but should never be the sole means of communicating an emergency to a hard of hearing or deafened person.

## Vehicles in the Workplace

For the safety of a person with hearing loss:

- Establish set paths of travel for forklifts and other vehicles, ensuring they stop at intersections.
- Install flashing lights on the vehicles.
- Place mirrors throughout the work site and on vehicles.

## Traveling with Hearing Loss

The challenges of traveling with a hearing loss are minimized with a personal policy of self-identification and modern alerting technology.

- In airports and train stations where it's difficult to understand public address systems, check signage for departure and other important information.

- Advise check-in staff and flight attendants that, because of your hearing loss, you require personal notification of any important announcements.
- When checking into a hotel, ask for an hotel access kit that alerts the in-room guest to a door knock or ringing phone. If this is not available, it's especially important to ensure check-in staff know that emergency alarms may not be heard and special evacuation procedures may be required
- If hotel guestroom phones don't have adequate built-in amplifiers, ask for a portable amplifier, or consider carrying one with you.
- Vibrating alarm clocks ("shake awakes") are invaluable when alarm clocks and hotel wakeup calls cannot be heard.

## ADVISING OTHER EMPLOYEES

Should co-workers be advised of an employee's hearing loss? This depends mainly on the employee's comfort level, but also on whether it impacts the employee's necessary interaction with others, and if the information is vital to the safety of other workers.

Colleagues working directly with the person with hearing loss should be informed but, if feasible, other people in the company who have little or no required interaction should also be told.

The best general policy is for employees to be open about their hearing loss and their preferred means of communication. In a company where co-workers have a good understanding of hearing loss, the overall quality of office communication and staff relationships will be much higher.

## Keeping Informed About Hearing Loss

To keep abreast of technology and other developments that impact people with hearing loss, employees and employers should access regular updates and information from related organizations: consumer groups, vendors and manufacturers of technical solutions, as well as any outside counselling services used in developing a barrier-free workplace for employees with hearing loss.

# The Businessperson with Hearing Loss



## Communicating with Clients and Suppliers

For the businessperson or entrepreneur with hearing loss, the need to self-identify is of paramount importance. A successful business relationship is based on good communication and trust, which can be difficult to achieve for a person trying to deny or hide a hearing problem.

To create the best possible outcomes in your dealings with clients, colleagues, associates and suppliers, you must create the optimal communication environment. How can you do this successfully if you are busy hiding the fact that you missed something, or are playing a constant game of catch-up?

Many of the ideas contained in “Making It Work” can help ensure effective communication in different business situations. However, you may want to enlist the services of a technical device expert who can help evaluate your particular needs and work with you to devise a workable plan.

## The Entrepreneur

Small businesses are the backbone of the economy, so don't let hearing loss interfere with your dreams and goals. Any extra work entailed in accommodating your own hearing loss is more than compensated with a sense of accomplishment, confidence and, hopefully, the material rewards of success.

Launching a business involves creativity, flexibility, adequate financing and a good business plan. You need to develop an effective communication system to ensure your suppliers and clients understand how to communicate with you. You may need to plan for the additional business demands of your hearing loss such as funds for extra technology and more time to communicate, either face to face, on-line, or on the phone. Check out federal, provincial or local government programs that provide financial assistance for new businesses.

## Business Tips

1. Get the best communication technology you can afford. Your accountant can advise what items can be written off as business expenses: cell phones and other communication devices, computers, TTYs, personal listening systems, amplifiers, table microphones, etc. When raising operating funds, include your hearing loss in your business plan, showing how funds are to be used for your special communication needs.
2. While your promotional material and business cards do not need to announce your hearing loss, you do want to immediately advise clients and suppliers of the fact. Let them know how best to communicate with you so that everyone achieves their desired results – make it a partnership. Put associates and clients at ease by showing that you are a professional with solid experience behind you.
3. Offer creative methods of doing business if traditional ways don't accommodate your hearing loss. People will admire you for making your hearing loss work for you.
4. Enlist the support of hearing loss service agencies catering to persons with hearing loss. They can offer valuable support services and counselling that will help your business succeed. Also, the CCRW website is a powerhouse of information and support. (See “Where to Get Information”).
5. Keep informed on hearing loss issues by becoming a member of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association and your local hearing service agency. The internet has thousands of websites of interest to hard of hearing and deafened people.
6. Entrepreneurs enjoy great freedom but they also work alone. To help grow in business and in comfort as a person with hearing loss, find a mentor – a successful businessperson who is also hard of hearing. Hook into business networks for people with different abilities.
7. Keep healthy and fit. Being an entrepreneur is stressful. Being a person with hearing loss is stressful. By paying attention to your health, you will function at the highest possible level.
8. Stay up to date on current events and issues pertaining to the business.
9. Above all, have a positive attitude. As an entrepreneur, you probably already have it. As a person with hearing loss, you have had to learn to cope with frustrations that other people have not. You are well equipped to go out there and succeed!

# Government Supports & Regulations

Various levels of Canadian government offer resources to assist both employees and employers in their access and accommodation efforts. As well, government regulations are in place with respect to accommodating disabilities and health and safety measures affecting hearing. Due to the constantly changing nature of these programs and the variance in services offered by different areas, this manual does not include contact information for these programs.

However, both employers and workers are urged to explore these government support services at all three levels: federal, provincial and municipal. The section “Where to Get Information” lists several useful websites with numerous links.

## Resources to check:

- Canada Revenue Agency
- Provincial Departments of:
  - Labour
  - Health
  - Occupational Health & Safety (govern noise and sound levels)
  - Workers Compensation
- Career Counselling
- Human Rights
- Occupational Health Nurses
- Human Resources and Employment

## Ontario’s Accessibility Directorate – A Model for Other Provinces

In 2005, the government of Ontario introduced the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This law, the first of its kind in Canada, aims to make Ontario fully accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. It introduces a series of accessibility standards in the areas of customer service, transportation, information and communications, built environment and employment.

For more information on the AODA:  
<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/pillars/accessibilityOntario/>

For other provincial links to disability supports and issues sites, see the following section.

## Where To Get Information

1. *Job Accommodation Resources*
2. *Agencies / Consumer Associations – Hearing Loss*
3. *Professional Hearing Health Care Associations*
4. *Internet Resources*

### JOB ACCOMMODATION RESOURCES

**A Place for All:** A Guide to Creating An Inclusive Workplace: The Canadian Human Rights Commission’s on-line guide to helping employers develop, in consultation with their employees, workplace accommodation policies and procedures. An excellent resource <http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/publications/aplaceforall.pdf>

### The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)

CCRW is a Canada-wide network of organizations and individuals that advocate on behalf of work seekers with disabilities and offer invaluable information for employers, employees, and entrepreneurs. Through partnerships, innovation, advocacy and education, CCRW strives to open up the workforce and to promote and support meaningful and equitable employment of people with disabilities. CCRW’s website is an employer’s most valuable resource, linking to numerous sites of interest, including federal and provincial labour legislation, employment issues, service agencies, etc.

Ste 401 – 111 Richmond Ave. W.  
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2G4  
Phone: (416) 260-3060  
Fax: (416) 260-3093  
TTY: (416) 260-9223  
[info@ccrw.org](mailto:info@ccrw.org)  
[www.workink.com](http://www.workink.com)

### AGENCIES / CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS – HEARING LOSS

#### National

#### The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA)

2415 Holly Lane, Suite 205  
Ottawa, Ontario K1V 7P2  
Phone: (800) 263-8068  
(613) 526-1584  
TTY: (613) 526-2692  
Fax: (613) 526-4718  
[chhanational@chha.ca](mailto:chhanational@chha.ca)  
[www.chha.ca](http://www.chha.ca)

Contact information on CHHA’s branches and chapters across Canada can be obtained from the website or through our National office.



## CHHA Resources and Publications:

- **"Universal Design & Barrier-Free Access":** an invaluable document in creating accessible environments for people with hearing loss in public and private place. [http://www.chha.ca/documents/Universal\\_Design\\_and\\_Barrier-Free\\_Access.pdf](http://www.chha.ca/documents/Universal_Design_and_Barrier-Free_Access.pdf)
- **Listen/Écoute**, our magazine published several times each year
- **Sound Ideas:** CHHA's speechreading video and manual introduce the fundamentals of speechreading to the person with hearing loss. Designed for use in the home and as a teaching tool.
- **Hearing Awareness A-Z**
- **Captioning Information**
- **Other:** brochures, videos/DVDs, CHHA reports on the justice system and post-secondary education, access stickers, lapel pins, etc.

### Hearing Ear Dogs of Canada

P.O. Box 907  
Oakville, Ontario L6J 5E8  
Phone: (905) 842-7344  
TTY: (905) 842-1585  
<http://www.dogguides.com/programs/programs03.htm>

### Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)

7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200  
Bethesda, Maryland, USA 20814  
Voice: (301) 657-2248  
TTY: (301) 657-2249  
Fax: (301) 913-9413  
[www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org)

### Tinnitus Association of Canada

23 Ellis Park Road  
Toronto, Ontario M6S 2V4  
Phone: (416) 762-1490  
[chasm@pathcom.com](mailto:chasm@pathcom.com)  
[www.kadis.com/ta/tinnitus\\_1.htm](http://www.kadis.com/ta/tinnitus_1.htm)

## Provincial

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

#### Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre

#300-1627 Fort Street  
Victoria, British Columbia V8R 1H8  
Voice: (250) 592-8144  
(800) 667-5448  
TTY: (877) 677-5488  
Fax: (250) 592-8199  
[idhsc@tnet.net](mailto:idhsc@tnet.net)

### Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WIDHH)

2125 West 7<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Vancouver, British Columbia V6K 1X9  
Phone: (604) 736-7391  
TTY: (604) 736-2527; B.C.  
Fax: (604) 736-4381  
[info@widhh.com](mailto:info@widhh.com)  
[www.widhh.com](http://www.widhh.com)

### WIDHH Okanagan

120-1735 Dolphin  
Kelowna, British Columbia V1Y 8A6  
Phone: (250) 763-3854  
TTY: (250) 763-3547  
Fax: (250) 763-7608

## ALBERTA

### Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS)

63 Cornell Road NW  
Calgary, Alberta T2L 0L4  
Phone: (403) 284-6220  
Toll-Free: (877) 711-3447  
Fax: (403) 282-7006  
[www.dhhs.org](http://www.dhhs.org)

### DHHS Edmonton

11342-127 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T2M 0T8

### Bridges Support Services

10-9912, 106<sup>th</sup> St.  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5  
Email: [contact@bridgessupport.com](mailto:contact@bridgessupport.com)  
Web: [www.bridgessupport.com](http://www.bridgessupport.com)  
Phone: (780) 428-6610  
TTY: (780) 428-6624  
Fax: (780) 428-6661

## SASKATCHEWAN

### Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (SDHHS)

Northern Saskatchewan  
#3-511-1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 1X5  
Voice/TTY: (306) 665-6575  
Toll Free: (800) 667-6575  
Fax: (306) 665-7746  
[saskatoon@sdhhs.com](mailto:saskatoon@sdhhs.com)

### Southern Saskatchewan

2341 Broad Street  
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 1Y9  
Voice/TTY: (306) 352-3323  
Toll-free (800) 565-3323  
Fax: (306) 757-3252  
[regina@sdhhs.com](mailto:regina@sdhhs.com)

## MANITOBA

### Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD)

825 Sherbrooke Street  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3A 1M5  
Phone: (204) 975-3010  
Toll-free (800) 282-8041  
TTY: (204) 975-3012;  
Toll-free: (800) 225-9108  
Fax: (204) 975-3073  
[info@smd.mb.ca](mailto:info@smd.mb.ca)  
[www.smd.mb.ca](http://www.smd.mb.ca)

## ONTARIO

### Canadian Hearing Society (CHS)

271 Spadina Road  
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2V3  
Phone: (416) 928-2504  
TTY: (416) 964-6023  
Fax: (416) 928-2523  
[www.chs.ca](http://www.chs.ca)

## QUEBEC

### Communicaid for Hearing Impaired Persons (C.H.I.P.)

3500 Boulevard Décarie  
Montréal, Quebec H4A 3J5  
Phone: (514) 482-0500, ex.215  
Fax: (514) 482-4536  
[info@hearhear.org](mailto:info@hearhear.org)  
[www.hearhear.org](http://www.hearhear.org)

## NEW BRUNSWICK

### South East Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc.

1690 West Main Street  
Moncton, New Brunswick E1E 1G9  
Phone: (506) 859-6101  
[seds@nb.aibn.com](mailto:seds@nb.aibn.com)  
<http://www.south-eastdeaf.nb.ca/>

### Saint John Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (SJDHHS)

Suite 303-646 Fairville Boulevard  
Saint John, New Brunswick E2M 4Y7  
Phone: (506) 633-0599  
TTY: (506) 634-8037  
(506) 652-3382  
<http://www.sjdhhs.com/>

## NOVA SCOTIA

### Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nova Scotians

Suite 306, 1660 Hollis Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 1V7  
Voice/TTY: (902) 422-7130  
N.S. toll-free: (800) 516-5551  
Fax: (902) 492-3864  
Videophone: (902) 422-7130  
[sdhhs@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:sdhhs@ns.sympatico.ca)  
[www.sdhhs.org](http://www.sdhhs.org)

### **Cape Breton Branch**

56 Nepean Street  
Sydney, Nova Scotia B1P 6A8  
Voice/TTY/Fax: (902) 564-0003  
[cbdeaf@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:cbdeaf@ns.sympatico.ca)

### **NEWFOUNDLAND**

#### **Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) – Newfoundland Chapter**

354 Water Street  
P.O. Box 5203  
St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5V5  
Voice/TTY: (709) 753-3224  
Toll-Free: (709) 753-3224  
Fax: (709) 753-5640  
[chhanl@nfld.net](mailto:chhanl@nfld.net)  
[www.cha-nl.nl.ca](http://www.cha-nl.nl.ca)

## **PROFESSIONAL HEARING HEALTH CARE ASSOCIATIONS**

#### **Canadian Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists**

920 – 1 Nicholas St.  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7  
Phone: (613) 567-9968  
Toll Free: (800) 259-8519  
fax: (613) 567-2859  
[caslpa@caslpa.ca](mailto:caslpa@caslpa.ca)  
[www.caslpa.ca](http://www.caslpa.ca)

#### **Canadian Academy of Audiologists**

1771 Avenue Road  
P.O.Box 54541  
Toronto, Ontario M5M 4N5  
Phone: (416) 494-6672  
Toll Free: (800) 264-5106  
[caa@canadianaudiology.ca](mailto:caa@canadianaudiology.ca)  
[www.canadianaudiology.ca](http://www.canadianaudiology.ca)

## **INTERNET RESOURCES**

These are just some of the many websites that offer information for organizations and business people with hearing loss.

### **Canada**

#### **[www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/labour/](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/labour/)**

Labour site of Human Resources and Social Development Canada with excellent information and other related websites

#### **[www.ccra-adrc.gc.ca/menu-e.html](http://www.ccra-adrc.gc.ca/menu-e.html)**

Canada Revenue Agency main menu with links to tax credit programs for businesses and individuals

#### **[www.safety-council.org](http://www.safety-council.org)**

Canada's Voice and Resource for Safety offers invaluable information for keeping safe on the job, at home, and at play  
[http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs\\_pol/hrpubs/TBM\\_119/oshd-dsst/oshd-dsst03\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs_pol/hrpubs/TBM_119/oshd-dsst/oshd-dsst03_e.asp)

Canada Occupational Safety and Health Regulations: Part 7, Levels Of Sound, Interpretation

## **DISABILITY SUPPORT & ISSUES SITES**

### **Government Of Canada**

#### **The Office for Disability Issues (ODI)**

ODI is the focal point within the Government of Canada for key partners working to promote the full participation of Canadians with disabilities in learning, work and community life.  
[http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/gateways/nav/top\\_nav/program/odi.shtml](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/gateways/nav/top_nav/program/odi.shtml)

### **British Columbia**

#### **Minister's Council on Employment for Persons with Disabilities**

<http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/epwd/>

#### **The Disability Lens**

The Disability Lens is a tool for identifying and clarifying issues affecting persons with disabilities.  
<http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca/PUBLICAT/DB/DisabilityLens.htm>

#### **Alberta Office for Disability Issues Branch**

<http://www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/css/odi/>

#### **The Manitoba Disabilities Issues Office (DIO)**

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/dio/>

#### **Saskatchewan Office of Disability Issues**

<http://www.gov.sk.ca/odi/>

### **Accessibility Ontario**

#### **Ontario Government Accessibility Plans**

#### **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005**

link: <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/accessibility/index.html>

#### **Accessibility Directorate of Ontario**

<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/directorate.htm>

### **Office des personnes handicapées du Québec**

[http://www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/Programmes/CTA/D\\_CTAprogram.htm](http://www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/Programmes/CTA/D_CTAprogram.htm)

### **Prince Edward Island Council of the Disabled**

<http://www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/onelisting.php3?number=5432>

### **Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission**

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/disa/>

### **New Brunswick**

<http://www.gnb.ca/0017/Disabilities/index-e.asp>

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

#### **Health & Community Services: Programs & Policy, Disability Services**

<http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/divisions/pgmpolicy/default.htm#program>

#### **Yukon Health and Social Services: Disability Services**

[http://hss.gov.yk.ca/programs/social\\_services/disabilities/](http://hss.gov.yk.ca/programs/social_services/disabilities/)

#### **Nunavut Health and Social Services**

<http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/phone/hss.shtml>

#### **Northwest Territories Department of Health and Social Services**

[http://www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca/content/About\\_HSS/about\\_index.htm](http://www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca/content/About_HSS/about_index.htm)

### **Other Disability Sites**

#### **[www.abilities.ca](http://www.abilities.ca)**

The Canadian Abilities Foundation has an Employment Service Directory on their website.

#### **[www.gladnet.org](http://www.gladnet.org)**

Global Applied Disability Research and Information Network on Employment and Training (GLADNET)

#### **[www.ccdonline.ca](http://www.ccdonline.ca)**

Council of Canadians with Disabilities

#### **[www.disabilitystudies.ca](http://www.disabilitystudies.ca)**

Canada Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) – information and links for business people with disabilities

#### **[www.ednns.ca](http://www.ednns.ca)**

Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Network

*A Chance to Hear... A Chance to be Heard*



Canadian Hard of Hearing Association  
Association des malentendants canadiens

2415 Holly Lane, Suite 205, Ottawa, Ontario K1V 7P2 Voice/TTY: (800) 263-8068 Fax: (613) 526-4718 [www.chha.ca](http://www.chha.ca)