

# Stay Connected

Phone and Video Calling Solutions  
for People with Hearing Loss



By Janine Verge, Eli Lubell,  
Lauren Peters, & Melanie Santhikumar

Did you know one in five Canadians live with hearing loss? This means that many people might have trouble hearing during a phone call. Communication is a two-way street, so it is important everyone does their part to understand the kinds of barriers people face and ways to help overcome them.



# Signs of hearing loss on the phone

- Do you often ask friends and family to repeat themselves, to speak more clearly, or to speak louder on the phone?
- Is the volume of your phone set to the highest level?
- Does speech sound muffled on the phone?
- Is it difficult to hear some words being said, especially if there is background noise?
- Do you sometimes miss phone calls because you did not hear it ringing?
- Do you have difficulty finding your phone when it is ringing?
- Do you avoid using the phone because it is too much effort?

If you said yes to any of the signs above, you should consult your local audiologist.

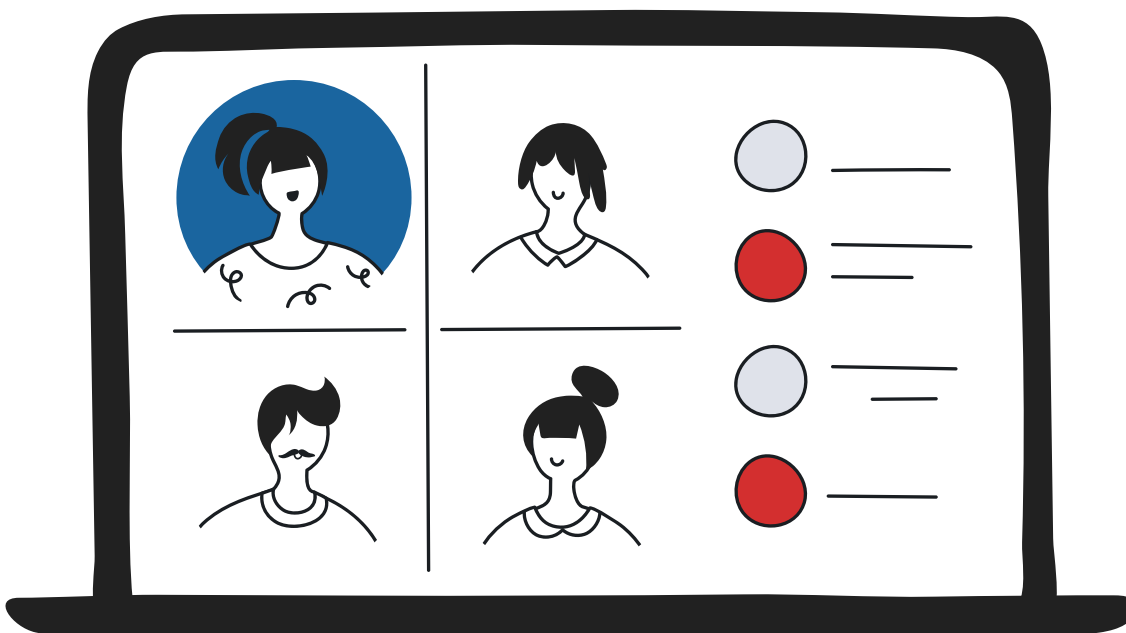
This booklet lists methods, options and features to make phone conversations on a landline phone, mobile device, cellphone, or video platform more accessible for yourself and others. **Improving telephone communication and technology skills can make a difference for you and your communication partner.**

The booklet includes solutions for hearing the phone ring, improving clarity, managing emergency situations, and offers specific solutions for people with and without hearing aids or cochlear implants. Everyone is different and might prefer different solutions. Keep trying until you find out what works best.

According to the Employment Equity Act, you have the right to ask for accommodations to help reduce barriers, including accessible phones:

<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/E-5.401.pdf>

Hearing access is a basic human right. By working together, we can make Canada a more accessible place for everyone, including people living with hearing loss.



# Table of Solutions

Landline Solutions	6
Cellphone Solutions	7
Video Platform Solutions	8
Hearing Aids & Cochlear Implants Solutions	9
Headphone and Headset Solutions	10
Alerting Solutions	12
Alternative Solutions	13
Relay Services	14
Phone Features for Other Access Needs	16
Communication Partner Solutions	17
Emergency Solutions	19
Leaving an Accessible Phone Message	20
Other Links for More Information	21

# Landline Phone Solutions

## Difficulty understanding what someone is saying on a landline phone.

- Use a speakerphone so you can hear with both ears (instead of one with a handset). Tip: Reduce or eliminate any background noise and use the phone at a closer distance for best hearing outcomes.
- Use an amplified landline phone. The extra volume may make the speaker louder and easier to understand.
- Use other devices that will make your landline phone louder. Try an amplified handset or in-line amplifier (connects between the handset and the phone base) to increase the volume of the speaker's voice.
- Check to see if you have tone controls on your landline phone. A lot of speech clarity is in the higher tones so you might want to try increasing the volume of high pitches for added clarity.
- Use an amplified headset or headphones with a microphone connected to your landline phone base (directly or with Bluetooth).
- Still having difficulty? Consider consulting with your local audiologist to test your hearing. This information will help discover solutions to help with telecommunication including candidacy for hearing aids.
- Already using hearing aids or cochlear implants? Check out our 'hearing aid and cochlear implant' section below for other options.
- Captioning landline phones are currently unavailable in Canada – sign this petition to support availability:  
[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc\\_cPDYAWisyX9cDiJNkDMTHk459XtcFT\\_T\\_kFiTlr4PGrkfw/viewform?fbzx=5917967617184593500](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc_cPDYAWisyX9cDiJNkDMTHk459XtcFT_T_kFiTlr4PGrkfw/viewform?fbzx=5917967617184593500)

# Cellphone Solutions

## Difficulty understanding what someone is saying on a cellphone.

- In the 'settings' menu select 'accessibility', then choose 'hearing' or 'hearing enhancements' for hearing related accessibility options.
- Check this link which offers up to date information on cellphones and their accessibility features for people living with hearing loss:  
<https://www.gari.info/findphones-results.cfm>
- Check these links which offer up to date information on apps you might want to consider using for people living with hearing loss:  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jBcMgGGKgUY2myJz8749IIZIWFwjlxBUjcy35SnahPo/edit#gid=0>  
<https://www.gari.info/findapps-results.cfm>
- Use captioning apps (e.g., Live Transcribe, Otter ai, AVA):  
<http://connect-hear.com/knowledge-base/overview/>
- Consider taking a cellphone training class to learn more about how to use different features. These might be offered where you purchased your phone, your local library, community health or recreation programs, or from on-line non-profit groups such as:  
<https://gluusociety.org/>  
<https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/>

# Video Platform Solutions

Meetings held using video platforms might enhance communication by giving visual access to the speakers face for speech reading, real time captioning, obtaining transcripts and sharing files during the session.

- For more information: see the Canadian Audiologist publication on ten ways to make virtual meetings more accessible:  
<https://canadianaudiologist.ca/accessibility-07-20/>
- Learn more about video conferencing using platforms like Google Meet, Facetime, Microsoft Teams, and Skype regarding access to captioning and transcripts at:  
<http://connect-hear.com/article-categories/videoconferencing/>
- Not all video conferencing platforms offer free automatic speech recognition (ASR) captioning. Sign this petition for Zoom to provide free ASR captioning for people with hearing loss:  
<http://chnng.it/QH7r4bmm>



# Hearing Aids & Cochlear Implants Solutions

- Consult with your audiologist to make sure your hearing aids or cochlear implants are in good working order.
- Find out what options your hearing aid(s) or cochlear implant(s) have for connecting to other devices such as t-coil or Bluetooth Technologies.
- Ask your audiologist how to get the most from your hearing aids or cochlear implants when using a phone or computer. They may be able to connect them wirelessly using t-coil or Bluetooth technology. Here is a YouTube video for more information:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7ZDzqC3Mak>
- Speak to your audiologist to make sure you know how to use your t-coil properly (if you have one). You need to know if you have to turn on/off the t-coil program yourself or if it is automatic.
- Learn the proper placement of the handset to optimize the use of your phone with your hearing aid(s) or cochlear implants. Ask your local audiologist for more details. Here is a YouTube video for more information:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRzloBL6Y4k>
- Learn how to connect your hearing aids or cochlear implants with tablets and computers. Here is a document for more information:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SkjV3yy6o7R91McSqlkMyEptbXBagiN9sa3GscdbRBM/edit>

# Headphone and Headset Solutions

## For those who do not wear hearing aids.

- Using headsets/headphones lets you listen to the phone call with both ears, which can improve your listening performance and reduce your effort.
- Ensure your headsets/headphones have a built-in microphone. This will be necessary if you want to speak and be heard on your phone or computer with other people.
- Consider getting a headset with independent volume controls for each ear. This option is important if your hearing is different from ear to ear. If you are not sure, ask your audiologist to test your hearing and tell you if your hearing in both ears is the same.
- Change tone controls to suit your listening needs. These settings can be found within some headset/headphone settings or on the device you are using. A lot of speech clarity is in the higher tones, so try increasing the volume of high pitches for added clarity.
- Make sure you consider comfort, especially if you are going to wear it for long periods of time. Comfort varies with cushioning, adjustable fit and whether the device is worn over-the-ear or in-the-ear.
- Consider using active noise cancelling headsets/headphones to help block out unwanted noise around you.
- Ensure you have the correct plugs to connect your headset/headphones to your phone or computer (e.g., 1/8th inch, Micro USB, USB- C, Bluetooth, t-coil). Check the specifications on your device for more information.

- Make your landline phone or desktop computer compatible with Bluetooth devices like headsets and or hearing aids with USB dongles:  
<https://headsetplus.com/blog/how-to-connect-a-bluetooth-hearing-aid-to-an-office-telephone/>
- Make sure you are listening safely to protect your hearing. For more information read this booklet on hearing safety when using personal audio devices:  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240044784>



# Alerting Solutions

## Trouble hearing the phone ring.

- Visual alerts — flashing light on phone.
- Visual transmitters — use an external device that alerts you the phone is ringing with strobe or flashing lights.
- Extension ringers – increases ring volume and allows ring to be set off in a different room from the main phone.
- Change tone of ring – some ringtones may be louder or easier for you to hear, so it is important to set the tone where you are likely to hear it best. If you are not sure, ask your local audiologist to test your hearing and tell you the best way to set your ring tone.
- Vibration
  - **Set cellphone to vibrate.**
  - **Use external or paging alert system to send a vibrating signal on a belt, lanyard, or Bed Shaker.**
  - **Set monitoring wristband (e.g., Apple Watch, Fitbit) to vibrate with incoming calls.**
- Cordless phones with multiple handsets allow you to hear the ring in many rooms.
- Digital Enhanced Cordless Technology (DECT) 6.0 have better sound quality and range of transmission compared to analogue cordless phones– some can even connect with hearing aids (e.g., Phonak DECT, Clarity).

# Alternative Solutions

## Other methods to use to communicate.

- Use text and e-mail.
- Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) — this service allows users to send a message that contains media such as pictures, videos, or audio to other users.
- Short Message Service (SMS) — is a text message service that can be used (including landline phones) allowing up to 160 characters of texting. May cost extra depending on the plan.
- Real-time Text (RTT) — is a text transmitted instantly as it is typed:  
<https://support.apple.com/en-ca/guide/iphone/iph3e2e47fe/ios>  
<https://support.google.com/accessibility/android/answer/9042284?hl=en>



# Relay Services

For those who cannot use landline or cellphones and/or would prefer to use sign language, this is how to access relay services.

- Video Relay Service (VRS) – callers connect with a sign language interpreter who provides real time interpretation for calls:  
<https://srvcanadavrs.ca/en/resources/resource-centre/faq/>
- Voice Carry Over (VCO) – when the VCO feature is enabled during video relay service, it allows users to use their own voice to be heard by the other party. When the other party responds, the video Interpreter signs in American Sign Language (ASL) or Quebec Sign Language (LSQ).
- Message Relay Services – communicate through a relay operator via a teletypewriter, telecommunications devices for the deaf (TTY/TDD) or over the internet (IP) relay service.
- A TTY/TDD is a text-based telecommunications device. Although not as popular as they once were since cellphones, video platforms, and video relay services became available, some of these services may be of use in your community.

- There are three different phone numbers, depending on the type of call you would like to make:
  - **711 (TTY to Voice)**
  - **1-800-855-0511 (Voice to TTY)**
  - **1-800-855-1155 (TTY to TTY)**
- Internet Protocol (IP) Relay Service – callers use their computer, laptop, tablet, and mobile phone to reach a relay operator. ‘IP Relay Canada’ is available as a free app on google play and the apple store:  
<https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/phone/acces/mrsrt.htm>



# Phone Features for Other Access Needs

## More phone features to consider based on other needs.

- **Vision:** Magnify your screen, choice of font and screen sizes, raised keypad markers, audible or tactile feedback, voice activated controls, external braille display, speech-to-text, built-in screen reader, adjustable screen displays.
- **Cognitive Features:** Choice of call alerts, photo contacts list, familiar keypad layout, audible or tactile feedback, easy-to-use devices, built-in screen reader, physical keypads, keypad shortcuts, caller ID, photo dialing, alert/remote pendant, re-play options on answering machines, recording the audio of calls for play back, and transcriptions/captioning of calls.
- **Mobility and Dexterity:** Answer calls automatically, hands-free headset, built-in screen reader, physical keypads, keypad shortcuts, operate the phone through other devices
- **Speech:** Alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) support, Hearing Carry Over (HCO) calls (the user types their conversation to a relay operator to read to the (voice) telephone user).



# Communication Partner Solutions

## Skills used by everyone to enhance communication on the phone or when using video platforms.

- Ask the person you want to communicate with what service, technology, or platform they would prefer before beginning your conversation.
- Speak with clarity, at a normal pace and volume, emphasize key words, make pauses when appropriate.
- Reduce background noise and make your space/room free from distractions.
- Ask if clarification is needed or provide occasional recaps in case the thread of conversation has been lost.
- Consider calling more than once or give people more time to answer the phone before you hang up. It might take longer for a person living with hearing loss to recognize that the phone is ringing.
- Consider allowing another person to participate in the conversation, if requested.
- Recognize there may be a request to record the conversation for sharing with a relative or caregiver, or to replay to verify what was discussed.
- Allow time for the person you are talking with to process what is said before getting a response.
- When using virtual phone calls, have your face visible at all times, have good lighting, and avoid covering your mouth so that your lip movement and facial expression helps people follow what is being said.

- If problems arise, stop the conversation, and fix the communication barrier before moving on.
- Rephrase/use different words instead of repeating the same misunderstanding over and over.
- Verbally summarize the main points discussed for clarification and/or provide transcripts/notes/e-mail overview promptly following the conversation.
- Make sure only one person talks at a time.
- Consider telling people about your hearing loss and asking for features and behaviours that help the conversation – disclosing is associated with greater self-esteem, better peer relationships, lower anxiety levels, and greater access to accommodations.
- When using a relay operator check to see if they are comfortable with your pace. You may need to pause periodically for the operator to catch up if you are talking too fast.
- Consult your local audiologist and non-profit group representing people living with hearing loss in your area to learn about different assistive listening devices and resources in your community.

# Emergency Solutions

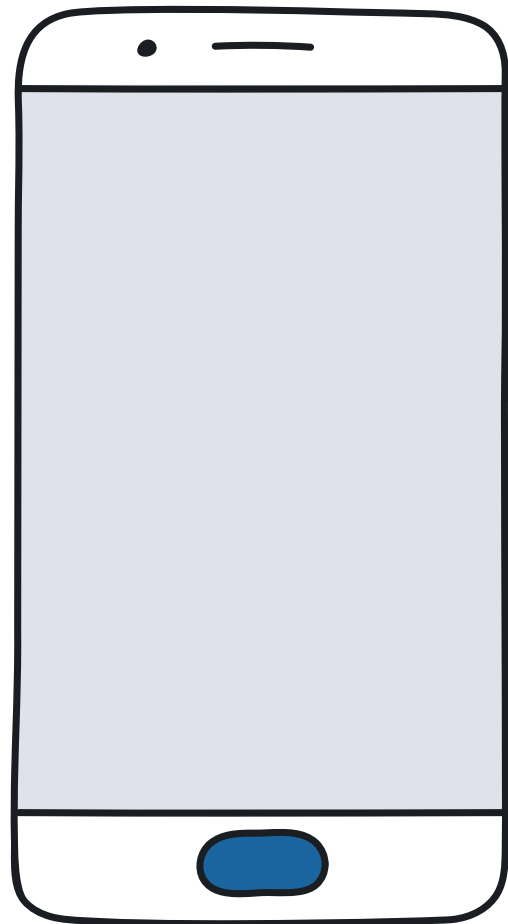
Options available if using a traditional phone is a barrier in case of an emergency.

- Text with T911 — a free service that enables people to communicate with 911 who are unable to use the phone:  
<https://www.chha.ca/hearing-education/t-911/>
- Wireless Emergency Alerts — receive critical local and national emergency warnings:  
<https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/television/services/alert.htm>
- Depending on where you live you may be able to register your phone as someone living with a hearing loss.

# Leaving an Accessible Phone Message

Ways to leave an accessible phone message for people who might have a hearing loss.

- When leaving a message on a landline or cell phone, speak clearly with a normal pace and volume.
- Say your phone number slowly at the beginning of the message and at the end so people do not have to listen to the whole message several times to understand the numbers.
- **Example:** “Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my phone number is.... (then state the message); again, my phone number is...”



# Other Links for More Information:

## **Apps for People Living with Hearing Loss:**

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qtqgKFI9iFm0JXdhGy9A4uzjmE7fGi83thCzz7BfVqM/edit>

## **Captioning Options on Phones and Computer Platforms:**

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18g0yT08qPmboMX5WUvacOOvN8M90tvr0\\_WtlhUxTd0k/edit#gid=376066376](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18g0yT08qPmboMX5WUvacOOvN8M90tvr0_WtlhUxTd0k/edit#gid=376066376)

## **Hearing Options on your Computer:**

<https://mcmw.abilitynet.org.uk/?Symptom=Hearing%20loss>

## **Aural Rehab Telephone Training Programs for Cochlear Implant Users:**

<https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/371605>

<https://www.cochlear.com/us/communication-corner/program/adult-telephone.htm>

<https://blog.medel.com/telephone-tips-for-cochlear-implant-recipients/>

## **Organizations that provide Captioning Services in Canada:**

<https://www.productionhub.com/directory/profiles/closed-caption-captioning-service-subtitles/ca>

## **Tips for People who Primarily Use ASL/LSQ during Virtual Meetings:**

<https://www.deafhhtech.org/rrc/accessible-virtual-meeting-tips/>

## **Canadian Association of the Deaf: Position Paper on Telecommunications:**

<http://cad.ca/issues-positions/telecommunications/>

## **The Evolution of Alternative Communications Technologies for the Deaf, Hard of**

**Hearing, and Speech Impaired:**

<https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/publications/reports/rp130213.pdf>

**RSS – HAC: Hearing Aid Compatibility and Volume Control:**

<https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/smt-gst.nsf/eng/sf11485.html>

**Hearing Loss in the Workplace:**

<https://chha-nl.ca/hearing-loss-in-the-workplace/>

**Working with Hearing Loss:**

[https://www.chha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Working\\_With\\_Hearing\\_Loss.pdf](https://www.chha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Working_With_Hearing_Loss.pdf)

CAA would like to thank the many reviewers who helped provide suggestions for this booklet.



Canadian Academy of Audiology  
Académie Canadienne d'audiologie