



10 WAYS

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HEARING LOSS CAN IMPROVE HEARING ACCESS IN THEIR COMMUNITY

1. Understand What Common Barriers Exist in Your Community

Hearing loss is common. About one in five people live with hearing loss in Canada. These barriers can affect receiving goods and services, information and communication, transportation, employment, education, and/or the built environment, including the barriers outlined below.

Lack of Assistive Technology – Hearing Aids Are Not Enough

- Hearing aids alone are not enough to ensure accessibility. Businesses need to ensure they are equipped with their own accessible listening equipment for counter service, meeting rooms, and conferences that can directly connect to their customer's hearing aids and/or cochlear implants.

Background Noise

- Stay away from background noise. If there is background noise, it often “masks” the desired signal.

Echoey Rooms

- Be aware of echoey rooms. Poor acoustics and reverberation can distort the quality of sound or mask a wanted signal.

Visual Barriers

- The face of the speaker being obstructed from view, masks, seating position, and poor lighting (e.g., dark rooms or having a conversation in front of a bright window) may make getting information from speech/lip reading more challenging.

Lack of Interpreting Services

- Businesses should offer ASL (American Sign Language) or LSQ (Quebec Sign Language) interpreters for customers or employees who communicate using sign language.

Lack of Captions and Transcripts

- Businesses should offer real-time captions for meetings, training, and online videos. They should provide transcripts for recorded audio content and phone calls when possible.

Lack of a Microphone

- Every person communicating should use a microphone, such as presenters, meeting participants (in-person or virtual), and staff in reception/counter areas.

Poor Communication Skills of Others

- People in the community should be educated on best practices, such as speaking clearly, facing the person directly, and using written communication when needed.

Lack of Flexible Communication Options

- Organizations should offer multiple ways to contact the business, such as email, phone, and live chat. Sign language interpretation should be available upon request.

Lack of Visual Menus and Instructions

- Restaurants, service-based businesses, and retail stores should offer digital or printed menus and step-by-step written instructions.

2. Advocate for Yourself

Advocating for accommodations is within your right. Tips on how to advocate are outlined below.

- **Be direct and clear:** State your hearing loss openly; for example: *“I have hearing loss, so I may need you to repeat things or face me when speaking.”*
Tell people what helps you; for example: *“I understand better when you speak clearly and don’t cover your mouth,”* or *“I rely on lip-reading, so please face me and make sure there’s good lighting.”*
- **Use visual or assistive cues:** Wear a hearing loss pin or badge. Some people wear a **“Hard of Hearing”** badge or sticker, especially in noisy environments.
- **Set expectations in groups:** It’s helpful to set expectations for group situations. For example, you could let people know: *“In meetings, I follow better when one person speaks at a time,”* or *“Please use captions during video calls.”*
- **Be confident and educate others:** Most people want to help but may not know how. If someone forgets, remind them politely; for example: *“I need you to face me when talking. It really helps!”*

3. Advocate for Others

Advocating for others in your community helps create a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone. Some ways of advocating are to:

- Educate and inform others
- Write to local officials and businesses
- Engage with local media
- Help create accessibility plans
- Join Disability and Accessibility Organizations
- Network with other Advocates
- Engage in policy advocacy
- File accessibility complaints, if necessary

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association has a “Get in the Hearing Loop” campaign, with resources for the public to help them be advocates. For more information, visit <https://getinthehearingloop.ca/resources/>.

4. Know Your Rights

Accessibility is a basic human right for people living with hearing loss. Canada has several laws and regulations that protect accessibility rights, including:

- **Human rights protections:** The Canadian Human Rights Act and provincial/territorial human rights laws protect against discrimination based on disability, including hearing loss.
- **Accessible Canada Act (ACA):** This law ensures federally regulated entities (banks, transportation, broadcasting, etc.) improve accessibility for people who are hard of hearing.
- **Employment rights – Canada Labour Code:** Under the Canada Labour Code, employees have the right to request accommodations to reduce communication

barriers in their workplace. This code ensures workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in federally regulated industries. It covers occupational health and safety regulations.

- **Provincial and territorial accessibility laws:** Since most accessibility matters fall under provincial jurisdiction, different provinces have their own laws:
 - Ontario: *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* – aims for full accessibility by 2025
 - British Columbia: *Accessible British Columbia Act* – focuses on removing barriers in provincial services
 - Manitoba: *Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)* – outlines accessibility standards
 - Nova Scotia: *Accessibility Act* – aims for an accessible province by 2030
 - Quebec: *Act to Secure Handicapped Persons in the Exercise of Their Rights* – promotes integration and equal rights

5. Request Reasonable Accommodations in School

Students with hearing loss have the right to request accommodations. Connect with your local Audiologist for support and documentation. You should also consider contacting the people below.

- **For K–12 students:** You (or your parents) could speak with your teacher, principal, school counsellor, or special education coordinator. Schools provide support through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or accommodation plans.
- **For college/university students:** Contact the Accessibility Services Office at your school. They will help arrange accommodations, but they may require medical documentation.

6. Request Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace

Several organizations and professionals support people who are hard of hearing and request and implement reasonable accommodations in the workplace. These organizations provide advocacy, legal support, workplace accessibility resources, and assistive technology solutions. When looking for supports:

- **Identify your needs:** Consider what accommodations would help you perform your job effectively, such as:
 - Assistive technology (hearing aids, captioning apps, amplified phones)
 - Communication support (real-time captioning, interpreters)
 - Work environment changes (quiet workspaces, visual alerts)
 - Flexible communication options (email/chat instead of phone calls)
- **Ask for help:** Not sure how to identify your needs? Consider asking some of the following professionals for help:
 - Audiologists (letter of support, workplace assessment)
 - Occupational Therapists (workplace assessment)
 - Local disability employment service centres
 - Local non-profit organizations that support people living with hearing loss
 - Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA): <https://www.chha.ca>
 - Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC): <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca>
 - Neil Squire Society
 - Accommodation Network (JAN) – Canada: <https://askjan.org>

- **Make a formal request:**

- Check company policy: Some employers have a specific process for accommodation requests.
- Submit a written request: While verbal requests count, written documentation is stronger.
- Be specific: Explain your hearing challenges and suggest possible accommodations.
- Attach supportive documentation from other professionals.

7. Ask for Funding Support

Consider applying for funding support for hearing access:

- Government-funded programs by province/territory: Each province and territory has different programs that may cover hearing aids, assistive listening devices (ALDs), and cochlear implants
- Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)
 - Hearing Aid Benefits
- Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB)
 - Indigenous Services Canada
- Canada Workers Benefit – Disability Supplement
- March of Dimes Canada – Assistive Devices Program
- The War Amps – Assistance for Children and Veterans
- Employment Insurance Sickness Benefits
- Private insurance (employer benefits and health plans)
- Medical Expense Tax Credit
- Disability Tax Credit

8. Look for Accessibility Signage

When you enter a business and see the international sign for hearing access, you know there is hearing loop technology available that can help you hear. This sign could mean there is a counter hearing loop, a meeting room loop, or loop technology in a theatre or conference setting. It means you can connect to a sound system directly with your hearing aids or cochlear implants if you have a telecoil in them. Sometimes there are amplified assistive listening devices with headphones available if you do not wear amplification or do not have a telecoil. Make sure to ask staff what technologies are available.



9. Choose Hearing Aids That Are Accessible

When purchasing a hearing aid, make sure to include options that allow you to connect to assistive technology in your community. Ask your Audiologist about getting a:

- **Telecoil:** A telecoil in your hearing aid allows you to connect to hearing loops all around the world at counter service, meeting rooms, and theatres
- **Roger X (02):** A miniature universal Roger receiver that allows direct connection to Phonak Roger Sound Field systems in classrooms, meeting rooms, and theatres
- **Auracast:** Allows hearing aids to connect directly to public audio broadcasts

There will be different accessible sound systems that can connect to hearing aids and cochlear implants in different ways for many years to come. Being able to connect to as many different accessible systems gives you the greatest flexibility to participate in your community.

10. Connect with Your Audiologist

Getting regular hearing tests with an audiologist is important for the reasons outlined below.

Allows Earlier Detection of Hearing Loss

- Hearing loss often develops gradually, making it hard to notice.
- Regular tests help catch early signs before they impact daily life, allowing for timely intervention.

Prevents Further Hearing Damage

- Untreated hearing loss can worsen over time.
- Early diagnosis allows you to take action, such as using hearing aids or hearing protection to slow progression.

Improves Communication and Relationships

- Hearing loss can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and social withdrawal.
- Identifying and treating hearing issues helps you stay engaged with family, friends, and coworkers.

Boosts Safety and Awareness

- Hearing loss can make it harder to detect alarms, car horns, or emergency signals.
- Regular tests help ensure you are aware of important sounds for your safety.

Improves Work and Academic Performance

- Hearing difficulties can affect job productivity and learning in school.
- Early intervention helps prevent miscommunications and missed opportunities.

Monitors Hearing Aid or Cochlear Implant Performance

- If you already use hearing aids or cochlear implants, regular tests help ensure they are properly adjusted to your changing hearing needs.

Identifies Medical Conditions Linked to Hearing Loss

- Hearing loss can be a symptom of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, ear infections, or even tumors.
- Regular tests can help detect these issues early.

How Often Should You Get a Hearing Test?

- Adults (18–50): Every 3–5 years if no symptoms.
- Adults (50+): Every 1–2 years, since age-related hearing loss is common.
- If you notice hearing changes: Get assessed immediately, regardless of age.



Remember...

Reducing barriers to your own accessibility is an important way to improve communication, increase your confidence, improve access to accommodations, create stronger relationships, reduce stress and fatigue, and receive better healthcare and support.

Let's work together to create a more inclusive society!

Resources

Seven Steps for Creating an Accessibility Project to Reduce Barriers for People who are Hard of Hearing in the Community
<https://canadianaudiologist.ca/issues-in-accessibility-6-5/>

Reducing Barriers for People Living with Hearing Loss During In-Person Meetings
https://canadianaudiology.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CAA_Stay-Connected_In-Person_Booklet_01.pdf

Phone and Video Calling Solutions for People with Hearing Loss
https://canadianaudiology.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CAA_Virtual-Meetings_Booklet_2023.pdf

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