



10 WAYS

ORGANIZATIONS CAN IMPROVE HEARING ACCESS FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH HEARING LOSS

1. Understand That Hearing Loss Is Common

Chances are very high that you will have customers or employees living with hearing loss.

Hearing testing results from a 2012 to 2015 Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) indicate that 40% of adults aged 20 to 79 had at least slight hearing loss in one or both ears. Hearing loss was more common in older age groups. Adults aged 60 to 79 were significantly more likely to have hearing loss (78%) compared with younger adults aged 40 to 59 (40%) and 20 to 39 (15%).

2. Reduce Common Barriers

Every person living with hearing loss is unique, but there are common barriers that can reduce access, including those outlined below.

Background Noise

- Always reduce background noise in customer service areas, offices, and meeting rooms. Background noise masks the sounds people need to hear.

Lack of Personal Amplified Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) with Headphones

- ALDs (e.g., William Sound Pocketalker) are important to use for people living with hearing loss who do not wear hearing aids. These devices can be used in any one-on-one communication situation, such as doctors' offices, medical clinics, intensive care and critical care units, long-term care units, emergency rooms, nursing homes, pharmacies, law offices, and police departments. Personal amplified assistive listeners with a telecoil allow connection to counter and room hearing loops as well.

Poor Room Acoustics

- Poor acoustics and reverberation can distort the quality of sound or mask the wanted signal. Use acoustic panels or soft materials like carpet, curtains, and upholstered furniture to absorb sound and reduce echoes.

Visual Barriers

- Seeing the face of a speaker provides extra clues to support the spoken message and can support speech reading. Barriers can include the face of the speaker being obstructed from view, masks, poor seating position, and poor lighting (e.g., dark rooms or having a conversation in front of a bright window).

Lack of Sign Language Interpreters

- ASL (American Sign Language) or LSQ (Quebec Sign Language) interpreters can be hired for customers or employees who communicate using sign language.

Lack of Captions and Transcripts

- Offer real-time captions for meetings, training, and online videos. 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

- Educate employees on best practices, such as speaking clearly, facing the person directly, and using written communication when needed.

Lack of Accessibility Signage

- Accessibility signage needs to be present so that customers and staff know what assistive devices are available. Please provide wayward finding signage.

Lack of Flexible Communication Options

- Offer multiple ways to contact the business, such as email, phone, and live chat.

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.

3. Provide Public Assistive Listening Technology

Hearing aids alone are not enough to ensure accessibility for people living with hearing loss. Businesses need to be equipped with their own accessible listening equipment for counter service, meeting rooms, and conferences that can directly connect to their customers' hearing aids and/or cochlear implants. Devices may include counter hearing loops, window transfer systems with an installed hearing loop, meeting room sound systems such as hearing loops, Phonak Roger Sound Field systems, and FM/IR systems. All of these systems also include hearing loop technology.

Future technologies may offer additional ways that can reduce barriers (e.g., Auracast), but hearing loops are officially endorsed by the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association as the preferred technology and are expected to be well into the future: <https://getinthehearingloop.ca/resources/>.

4. Create an Accessibility Plan

An accessibility plan is important for a business because it helps ensure that all employees, customers, and stakeholders – including those living with hearing loss – can fully participate. Examples of policies include:

- **Equal access policy:** Ensure you have a formal policy that guarantees equal access to goods, services, and employment opportunities for people who are hard of hearing.
- **Reasonable accommodations policy:** Establish procedures for employees and customers to request accommodations.
- **Accessible communication policy:** Require that all public-facing and internal communications (e.g., websites, meetings, customer service) be accessible.
- **Inclusive hiring and employment policy:** Implement hiring practices that support candidates living with hearing loss.
- **Emergency and safety procedures:** Ensure fire alarms, emergency alerts, and evacuation procedures include visual, vibrating, and text-based alerts, as well as written instructions.

5. Provide Staff Training

Provide regular training on effective communication with people living with hearing loss. The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association offers an online certification program called “Amplify Access” that offers learning modules to support employees who live with hearing loss: <https://chha.ca/amplify-access/>.

6. Connect with Your Local and National Non-profit Organizations That Represent People Who Are Hard of Hearing

Decisions on how to support people who are hard of hearing should include their direct input. National organizations include:

- **Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA):** A national organization that provides support, advocacy, and education for hard of hearing individuals. Offers programs like peer support, scholarships, and accessibility initiatives – www.chha.ca
- **Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD-ASC):** Represents Canadians who use sign language (ASL/LSQ). Advocates for accessibility rights, employment, education, and government policy changes – www.cad-asc.ca

7. Comply with Accessibility Laws

Accessibility is a basic human right. Understanding and complying with accessibility laws is essential for all businesses. Canada has several laws and regulations that protect accessibility rights for people with disabilities. Here are the key ones:

- **Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) (1977):** Prohibits discrimination based on disability (among other protected grounds). Applies to federally regulated organizations. Enforced by the Canadian Human Rights Commission
- **Canada Labour Code:** Ensures workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in federally regulated industries. 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
- **Canada Transportation Act:** Requires accessible transportation services (air, rail, marine, bus). Enforced by the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA)
- **Broadcasting and telecommunications accessibility regulations:** Ensures that media and telecommunications (TV, radio, internet, phone) are accessible (e.g., have closed captioning, sign language services)
- **National Building Code of Canada (NBC):** A set of construction standards that ensure buildings are safe, accessible, and energy efficient
- **Accessible Canada Act (ACA) (2019):** A federal law aimed at making Canada barrier free by 2040. Applies to federally regulated sectors (e.g., banking, telecommunications, transportation). Focuses on proactive removal of barriers in employment, services, built environments, information, and communication

8. Create Inclusive Hiring Practices

Create an accessible hiring process by offering accommodations for interviews. Provide assistive technology or modified workspaces for employees living with hearing loss. Not sure what to provide? Consider reaching out to the following professionals:

- 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>

9. Connect with Trained Technical Experts



The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association's "Get in the Hearing Loop" campaign is a program focused on hearing loop technology that can provide inclusion and equal participation for people living with hearing loss. CHHA has a list of technological partners who can provide support on assistive technologies and installations across Canada: <https://getinthehearingloop.ca/our-partners/>.



The Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ (RHFAC) program works to help improve the accessibility of the built environment in Canada – the places where we live, work, learn, and play – including reducing barriers for people who are hard of hearing: <https://www.rickhansen.com/become-accessible>.

10. Have Regular Accessibility Audits

Establish a way for customers and employees to provide feedback on accessibility issues, update policies, and implement improvements based on their reported needs.



Remember...

Participating in accessibility projects directly impacts society and makes the world a better place by changing attitudinal and cultural barriers, reducing physical barriers, and creating a more inclusive society for people who are living with hearing loss. Businesses and organizations that reduce barriers benefit from an expanded customer base, an improved reputation, legal compliance, better employee productivity, and improved customer experiences.

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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