

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor



Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Dr. Opeoluwa Sotonwa
Commissioner

Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Chapter 171 Report and Annual Individual and Family Support Plan

Fiscal Year 2023

November 2022



Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Annual Family Support Plan
Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23)

Overview

The Massachusetts Commission on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) defines family support as those services offered by the Commission within its statutory mandate¹ and subject to legislative appropriation that provide assistance, education, training, and planning to the families of Deaf and hard of hearing residents of the Commonwealth, as the term “families” is defined in Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002.²

MCDHH has four components that currently provide family support services:

1. The Department of Social Services and Case Management:

It is the purpose of the Department of Social Services and Case Management (SS/CM) to ensure through education, guidance, consultation, and collaboration that Deaf and hard of hearing adults, children, and their families obtain equal and equitable access to opportunities, education, communication, and culturally competent services. This support from SS/CM ensures their independence within the community, enhances the quality of their lives, and addresses economic, educational, and health care disparities for Deaf and hard of hearing adults, children, and their families in the Commonwealth.

When fully staffed, the department consists of 4 regionally based Children’s Specialists and 5 Adult Case Managers. All staff are bilingual in ASL and English. Our Case Managers who work with adults are also known as Adult Human Service Coordinators. They will continue to work with regional Deaf, late-deafened, and hard of hearing constituents to address barriers to communication and language access to, but not limited to, other EHS and Commonwealth agencies, medical providers, schools, courts, and all other places of public accommodation.

They provide consultation on communication and language access to public and private entities including but not limited to the: Department of Children and Families, Department of Housing and Community Development, Executive Office of Elder Affairs protective services, Department of Transitional Assistance, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Ombudsman, district, superior, housing, family/probate, and juvenile courts, DA offices, public defenders, legal services, immigration legal services, tenancy preservation programs, housing authorities, hospitals, community health centers, medical practices, homeless shelters and programs, domestic violence programs, mental health providers, elder services, and substance use services.

Our Children’s Specialists provide specialized services to anyone connected to children who are Deaf or hard of hearing including but not limited to families, schools, hospitals, and other state agencies. They will continue to provide parent education relative to the effects of hearing loss at birth, during childhood and the teenage years, as well as available communication and language options.

¹ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleII/Chapter6/Section191>.

² [Session Law - Acts of 2002 Chapter 171 \(malegislature.gov\)](#).

The Specialists provide identification of intervention strategies, information, and referral to specialized services such as mental or behavioral health, psychoeducational evaluation and testing, speech and language pathologists, and audiologists. Technical assistance to early intervention and educational programs regarding the communication needs and cultural perspectives of Deaf and hard of hearing children is also provided. They also advocate and support families and agencies in the development and utilization of services plans and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and if needed, transition plans to agencies for adult services or supports.

2. Communication Access Services (CAS)

The Communication Access Services Department (CAS) at MCDHH administers Interpreter and CART (Communication Access Real Time) Referral Services throughout the Commonwealth. These services are vital to Deaf and hard of hearing families and provide communication access for Deaf and hard of hearing children and adults in a variety of settings. CAS works closely with the Interpreter Services Department to ensure our constituents have communication access both in-person and remotely. Our interpreters are regularly deployed to critical settings such as in-patient medical and mental health, out-patient medical and mental health, the spectrum of Substance Use Disorder settings, education, work/vocational, and many more.

MCDHH has launched the After-Hour Emergency Service (AHE). This service will provide communication access in response to emergency requests received during the evening, weekend, and holiday hours. These requests serve Deaf and hard of hearing consumers in critical medical, mental health, substance use, and legal situations.

3. Communication Access, Training, and Technology Services (CATTS)

The CATTS Department serves over 5,000 individuals annually through trainings, exhibits, technical assistance, information requests, and environmental evaluations. Its Modern Guide to Hearing Loss is now available at every public library throughout the Commonwealth. The packet at the Commonwealth libraries includes our visor communication card and COVID-19 communication card. CATTS is also working with hospitals to have the Modern Guides and Visor Cards available to distribute to affiliate locations that feature audiology services – over 200 Guides and Cards have been provided to MEEI in Boston and to Steward Hospitals.

In 2021, the CATTS Department provided 35 trainings to medical providers, educational institutions, legal entities, state and private agencies, and law enforcement entities. Most trainings have between 20 to 40 attendees, and multiple trainings had up to 300 attendees. CATTS actively collaborates with other agencies and community organizations, such as MassMATCH, the State 911 Commission, the Museum of Science Exhibit Accessibility Advisory Committee, and the Massachusetts Office of Disability IT/AT Workgroup. CATTS has also developed at least 30 Vlogs for our community.

Following the successful launch of our visor cards in 2019, which give law enforcement officers a communication tool for interacting with Deaf and hard of hearing drivers during traffic stops or if they need assistance, CATTS has been working on the development of a new Visual Tool that should be available in every licensed ambulance in the state. This Visual Tool has been created in partnership with the Department of Fire Services and the Office of Emergency Management Services (OEMS) with feedback from the Deaf and hard of hearing community. It

will be included in the OEMS Protocols book that travels in every ambulance to aid in emergency interactions and communications for our community.

4. Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Programs (DHILs)

MCDHH contracts with community-based independent living programs throughout the Commonwealth to provide the following services to Deaf and hard of hearing people and their families: skills training, self-advocacy skills, peer mentoring/counseling, alternative support and recreational services, topical workshops for consumer education and advocacy and Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for Substance Use Disorders (SUD) (ASL DVD version developed).

Process for Obtaining Substantial Consultation from Families Regarding Flexible Support Needs

MCDHH makes use of the following mechanisms to gather information from Deaf and hard of hearing people and their families about their support needs:

- The MCDHH Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) is comprised of representatives of Deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, parents, and consumer organizations which regularly inform and advise on the flexible support needs of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
- MCDHH has an active social media presence. Individuals and families often provide comments and post inquiries on MCDHH's Facebook and Twitter pages via the comments and direct messaging sections. The agency is easily reached via direct email connection on its website and via phone and videophone.
- MCDHH staff participate in various Commonwealth and community-based meetings and workgroups alongside Deaf and hard of hearing individuals and families, including, but not limited to, Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) agencies: the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI).

I. Family Empowerment

- MCDHH's Statewide Advocacy Council (SAC) is comprised of representatives of deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind groups and organizations as well as parents.
- MCDHH's website offers multiple ways for individuals and families to reach out with comments and recommendations on agency policies, procedures, programs and evaluation.
- MCDHH's has an active social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, sharing resources and agency news in ASL via video (Vlogs) and accepting queries and comments from individuals and families via direct message.

II. Family Leadership

- MCDHH staff offer individual, family and community-based consultation and training. Staff also provide and training consultation to EOHHS and other Commonwealth agencies on making their services communication and language accessible for deaf and hard of hearing.
- MCDHH regularly offers public health, educational and other information and updates via VLOGs using American Sign Language and captioning.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Independent Living (DHILS) programs provide regional-based Commonwealth-wide supports and resources including individual training and workshops to promote self-advocacy and leadership in their communities. All trainings are fully accessible in American Sign Language (ASL) and with Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART/captioning) services.
- MCDHH's Statewide Advocacy Council (SAC) continues to sponsor trainings on advocacy to individuals and families.
- Children's Specialists attend many Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and 504 meetings with parents to provide advocacy, mediation, and training regarding the rights of their Deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Children's Specialists will continue to provide information on the IEP process and the rights of parents.
- Case Managers and Children's Specialists will provide information on Chapter 171 to families.
- Children's specialists attend a series of workshops that engage both families and providers such as the Federation for Children with Special Needs annual conference.

III. Family Support Resources and Funding

- MCDHH's Social services and DHILS staff assist individuals and families in identifying resource and service needs and in locating funding streams to support assistive technology and other needs.
- An Interdepartmental Service Agreement between the State 911 Department and MCDHH supports costs associated with application review and certification to determine consumer eligibility for participation in the Massachusetts Equipment Distribution Program, which is administered by the State 911 Department.

IV. Accessing Services and Supports

- MCDHH social services staff and DHILS program staff work closely with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals and families to access community-based services from EOHHS agencies through trainings, supports and referrals across the Commonwealth.
- MCDHH Children's Specialists collaborate with DPH newborn screening and Early Intervention, to provide information to parents, and continue to be an ongoing resource to families as children begin schooling.
- MCDHH's Communication Access, Training and Technology Services Department (CATTS) provides community-based education to individuals and families on hearing loss, communication and language access, and assistive technology with referrals to resources for accessing necessary supports and services.
- MCDHH's Social Services and CATTS Departments work collaboratively on outreach efforts that address that healthcare, education, economic disparities that have an especially large impact on individuals and families who are deaf or hard of hearing.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

- MCDHH staff have access to interpreter and translation services in multiple languages to support the diverse language access needs of its constituencies.
- The Workforce Development project at MCDHH is working towards increasing a more diverse American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter, DI (Deaf Interpreter), and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) workforce.
- MCDHH staff educate and consult to EOHHS agencies and other Commonwealth agencies and community-based programs on cultural competency with families and individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

VI. Interagency Collaborations

Executive Office of Health & Human Services

- MCDHH works closely with all EOHHS agencies for ongoing collaboration, education and advocacy to improve service delivery for deaf/hard of hearing individuals, including the Governor's Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, the MassHealth Disability Advisory Group, and the One Care Implementation Council. MCDHH is a designated member of the Advisory Council to the Office of the Child Advocate and provided input regarding protections for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. MCDHH is also a designated member of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness and provided recommendations for accessibility of programs and supports.

Department of Children and Families (DCF)

- Continued collaboration with DCF to improve existing and develop new policies and procedures for obtaining and using qualified interpreters.
- Continued consultation to DCF by MCDHH department of social services children's specialists and adult services case managers on communication/language access and cultural competency with deaf and hard of hearing children and families.

Department of Public Health (DPH) - Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS)

- Continuation of the Interdepartmental Service Agreement (ISA) between MCDHH and the DPH BSAS, which provides annual funding for communication access for deaf people in substance abuse prevention/treatment programs.
- Statewide Coordinator of Statewide Substance Abuse and Recovery Services was created on June 26, 2020. This position serves as a liaison with BSAS Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) Support Services for those individuals and families most affected by substance addiction and works with MCDHH case managers, DHILS specialists and provides ongoing leadership, support, and supervision for Deaf Recovery Coaches. Ensures and provides training for compliance with state Certified Addictions Recovery Coach certifications and recertifications as well as current Deaf recovery coaches.
- FY22 initiatives included expansion of counseling and interpreter services. A MCDHH Case Manager was trained as a Recovery Coach, supervisor, and trainer. Under a six-month pilot program, this individual trained and supervised Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who have now all been certified as Recovery Coaches. DPH committed additional funds in our ISA to cover the cost of a SUD Counselor position, Recovery Coaches, and communication access services at AA/NA meetings and seminars. As a result of this support, we now have a Lead SUD Recovery Coach, starting on June 27, 2022, and 14 Certified Addiction Recovery Coaches - 13 who are Deaf, and 1 who is hard of hearing. Recovery Support Zoom meetings are held daily, totally 11 meetings weekly, with Deaf Recovery Coaches leading the meetings along with participants.
- Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) is the national assessment

model for identifying individuals who may be at risk for Substance Use Disorder. MCDHH has implemented the SBIRT approach in American Sign Language throughout the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services programs statewide.

Department of Public Health - Early Intervention Program

- MCDHH is a mandated member of DPH's Newborn Hearing Screening Council, which allows both agencies to work more closely with providers to improve identification of and service delivery for families with deaf or hard of hearing children. As a result, families of deaf/hard of hearing children receive information and referral to services as soon as there is identification of a hearing loss.

Department of Mental Health (DMH)

- MCDHH works very closely with DMH for ongoing collaboration, cross-agency training and technical assistance to improve services for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)

- MCDHH continues to collaborate on several initiatives with DESE to improve language and service access to children ages 1-5. One focus is on language access and supporting parent education for families with deaf or hard of hearing children. Parents of deaf and hard of hearing children are among the DESE Steering Committee members that analyze data and infrastructure and make recommendations for leveraging existing resources; identify strategies for ensuring early language acquisition for deaf and hard of hearing children, aged 0-5; leverage the expertise of MCDHH Children's Specialists to support public schools, and provide additional linkages related to the Massachusetts State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP).
- MCDHH partners with DESE to improve the quality of teacher sign language communication through use of the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) as a condition of employment among teachers working with deaf and hard of hearing children.
- MCDHH partners with DESE to improve the quality of sign language interpreting of educational interpreters through use of the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) as a condition of employment among interpreters working with deaf and hard of hearing children.

MCDHH facilitates a quarterly MCDHH/DESE steering committee meeting and supports subcommittees addressing communication and language access in elementary and secondary education. Governor's Commission for LGBTQ Youth

- Consultation on communication and language access and cultural competency with Deaf and hard of hearing youth.

MassHealth

- MCDHH serves on the MassHealth Disability Advisory Group. MCDHH also facilitates attendance and participation of community stakeholders and independent living services providers at public notice opportunities as needed.
- MCDHH attends meetings of the OneCare Implementation Council.