

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 2021

February 2021



**Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Annual Family Support Plan
Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21)**

Overview of Family Support

Massachusetts Commission on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) defines family support as those services offered by the Commission within its statutory mandate 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.

MCDHH has four components that currently provide a number of family support services:

1. Case Management Services Children’s Specialists

MCDHH employs Children’s Specialists who provide services to families statewide, helping identify needs and assist them in working with other agencies for the betterment of their children. They also consult with, or provide training to, other agencies about the special needs of children who are deaf or have hearing loss.

MCDHH also provides:

- Cross-agency case coordination
- Crisis intervention (including assistance on the protection phase of abuse cases)
- Specialized information and referrals regarding communication access and services available to deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing people and families
- Client needs assessment by specialized, bilingual staff
- Client plan development (cross-agency)
- Individual case work (intensive, complex cases)
- Chapter 688 transitional case management
- Personal counseling (bilingual staff)
- Development of resources and natural support systems
- Outreach and Case-finding
- Individual consumer education
- Certification services
- Case management for ‘gap’ populations, such as visually disabled and deaf/hard of hearing persons, persons who are less-than-severely mentally ill and deaf/hard of hearing, uneducated deaf/hard of hearing persons, and immigrants

2. Interpreter/CART Referral Services

MCDHH administers the Interpreter and CART (Communication Access Real Time) Referral Services. These services are vital to deaf and hard of hearing families because they provide communication access for deaf and hard of hearing children and adults in a variety of public settings.

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

- Provides public education on all issues related to hearing loss
- Provides free communication accessibility training and technical assistance to state agencies, other public entities, and private entities seeking to ensure compliance with the relevant provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Environmental evaluations, information, recommendations, and technical assistance for home, workplace, and community safety, integration, and stability
- Provides general information related to the needs and services of deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people

4. Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Programs

MCDHH contracts with community-based independent living services programs throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to provide the following services to deaf and hard of hearing people and their families:

- Skills training
- Self-advocacy training
- Peer mentoring/counseling
- Alternative support and recreational services
- Topical workshops for consumer education and advocacy
- SBIRT: Screening brief intervention and referral to treatment (ASL 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:

- Issues and concerns are discussed at Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) meetings on a regular basis as well as through ongoing meetings with Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Skills Programs (DHILS) providers. Parents are represented on MCDHH's Statewide Advisory Council.
- Ongoing individual conversations and consultations with families utilizing MCDHH programs and services.
- Ongoing information gathered by Case Management staff and Independent Living Services program staff.
- Children's Specialists and other staff attend various state and private meetings and workgroups with Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) agencies, including 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) and the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) and obtain information regarding what is happening with families in the community.

Focus Areas

I. Family Empowerment

Ongoing Activities:

- MCDHH Case Managers and IL Specialists in DHILS programs throughout the Commonwealth continue to work closely with deaf and hard of hearing consumers and their families to empower them by providing them with training and supports in order to

develop their Independent Living Skills.

- DHILS programs continue to provide information and support on parenting skills to families with deaf or hard of hearing children.

II. Family Leadership

Ongoing Activities:

- Children's Specialists attend many of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and 504 meetings with the 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

Ongoing Activities:

- MCDHH will continue to provide information to families on MRC's Assistive Technology Loan Program (Money and/or Equipment).
- MCDHH will continue to provide training in the public school systems on making classroom and curriculum accessible to Deaf and Hard of Hearing students according to IDEA and the National Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- 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.

IV. Accessing Services and Supports

Ongoing Activities:

- MCDHH's Communications Access, Training and Technology Services Department (CATTs) continues to provide public education on all issues related to hearing loss. In particular, CATTs conducts extensive public outreach targeted to providing free communications accessibility training.
- The Case Management Services Department and CATTs Department work collaboratively to do outreach to historically underserved regions by actively participating in community events sponsored by diverse population groups.
- MCDHH will continue to submit articles in consumer-run publications to connect readers with new initiatives at MCDHH and encourage family involvement.
- MCDHH will continue to provide resources and information to families.

V. Culturally Competent Outreach and Support

Ongoing Activities:

- MCDHH continues to identify and utilize resources for case managers to access foreign language interpreters to facilitate communication between signing/English speaking staff

and parents and families who speak a different language, in accordance with the agency's Language Access Plan.

- MCDHH staff attend conferences statewide for outreach and support services.
- MCDHH staff continue to educate state agencies on cultural competence as it relates to the deaf and hard of hearing populations we serve, often acting as cultural mediators. Specific agency collaborations occur with DCF, DDS, DTA, and MassHealth.
- MCDHH has a policy on sexual orientation and gender identity nondiscrimination for individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex or gender non-conforming; when the agency is working with a family that is in conflict over the sexual orientation or gender identity of a member of the family, MCDHH will work with everyone compassionately while working to ensure the safety of the family member who is or is perceived to be LGBTQI/GNC.

VI. Interagency Collaborations

Ongoing Activities:

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 via an Early Childhood Education Task Force. MCDHH established the Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in collaboration with DESE. We are collaborating with the Task Force, DESE and DPH in updating the publication "Best Practices in Early Childhood Transition - A Guide for Families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children."
- 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 17 member interagency/interdisciplinary Task Force in collaboration with DESE to 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; provide additional linkages related to the Massachusetts State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP); and 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.
- Improve the quality of sign language interpreting by 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.

Department of Children and Families:

- MOU in place for cross training and case collaboration for both agencies.
- Continued collaboration with DCF to improve existing and develop new policies and procedures for obtaining and using qualified interpreters.

Department of Public Health - Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

- Continuation of the ISA between MCDHH and the Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS), which provides annual funding for communication access for deaf people in substance abuse prevention and treatment programs.

- Implementation of SBIRT in ASL (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) approach in the DHILS programs statewide.
- Implementation of the Statewide Coordinator of Statewide Substance Abuse and Recovery Services on June 26, 2020. This position serves as a liaison with BSAS Recovery Support Services for those individuals most affected by substance addiction and work with MCDHH case managers, DHILS specialists and provide ongoing leadership, support and supervision for Deaf Recovery Coaches.
- Multi-year project with DPH, MassHealth, UMass Medical, Deaf/Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services providers, Massachusetts State Association of the Deaf, interpreters who work in medical settings – an initiative designed to strengthen access to medical care, educate and empower the community, train and increase provider and interpreter awareness, focus on communication access preferences to reduce disparities in access and care.
- MCDHH contracted with DHILS provider agency DEAF Inc. to provide curriculum development and delivery of statewide training on substance use disorder. Four trainings were offered for professionals and paraprofessionals who work with at risk individuals, as well as supervisors, program managers, interpreters, SSPs, mental health providers, social workers, and independent living staff.

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

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

Executive Office of the Trial Court

- MCDHH works with the Executive Office of the Trial Court to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing individuals have equal and full access to the trial courts. The collaboration focuses on expediting interpreter requests for the courts, increasing the number of qualified legal interpreters who are available to serve in this capacity, and improving the administrative operations of both agencies to reduce barriers to access.

Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA)

- The Victim Services Program serves deaf and hard of hearing victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and child abuse. Services include a model of peer support and supports for managing traumatic permanent and long-term hearing loss. This grant was awarded through a partnership with the Massachusetts Office of Victim and Witness Assistance (MOVA). The grant ended on January 31, 2021, and the program will be transitioning current participants to existing appropriate community resources.

Executive Office of Health & Human Services agencies

- 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 Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, MassHealth Disability Advisory Group, and 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 a designated member of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness and provided recommendations for accessibility of programs and supports.