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**Massachusetts Commission for the
Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

**Chapter 171 Report and Annual
Individual and Family Support Plan**

Fiscal Year 2022

November 2021



**Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Annual Family Support Plan
Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22)**

Overview of Family Support

The 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. The Department of Social Services and Case Management:

Children’s Specialists

Children’s Specialists at MCDHH provide services to families statewide, helping to identify needs and assist them in working with the education system and 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. Children’s Specialists at MCDHH provide the following services:

- **Parent Education** relative to the effects of hearing loss at birth, during childhood and in the teenage years.
- **Identification of Intervention Strategies** for parents and others, including the appropriate usage of hearing aids, assistive listening devices and system, alerting and signaling devices, medical procedures, early intervention, communication and language development and more.
- **Objective Information** regarding choices for early language development.
- **Information and Referral** to specialized services such as mental health (or “behavioral” health or both?), psycho-educational evaluation and testing, speech and language pathologist and audiologists.
- **Technical Assistance** to Early Intervention and educational programs regarding the communication needs and cultural perspectives of Deaf and hard of hearing children.
- **Advocacy and Support** to families and agencies in the development and utilization of service plans.
- **Connecting Children and Families** to recreational and social activities as well as other families and Deaf adult role models.
- **General Case Management** services as needed.

Adult Services Case Managers and Regional based Adult Services at MCDHH are available to D/deaf and Hard of Hearing adults over age 18 and offer assistance in navigating and resolving communication and language barriers to access to health, education, legal and other benefits, services and resources in their communities. Services offered include:

- **Client Education** to understand and navigate specific health, education, legal and/or other service systems and understand their communication and language access rights and resources.
- **Advocacy and Support** to empower individuals and families to effectively access and navigate health, education, legal and other service systems and benefits.
- **Case Management Consultation** to EOHHS and other state and private agencies and programs regarding communication and language access needs of an individual.

This includes but not limited to: Chapter 688 referrals and protective services at DPPC, DCF and Elder Protective Services.

- **Information and Referral** to specialized services such as mental health, victim services, substance use disorder (SUD) resources, legal services. This includes information and referral to legal services/resources.
- **Consultation and Technical Assistance** to EOHHS and other regional state and private agencies and programs regarding the communication and language access needs and cultural perspectives of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. This includes technical assistance/consultation to legal professionals on communication and language access.
- **General Case Management** services as needed to address gaps in resources.

2. Interpreter/CART Referral Services

MCDHH administers 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 Independent Living 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:

- 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.
- 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. 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.

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.

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

- Continuation of the Interdepartmental Service Agreement (ISA) between MCDHH and the Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, which provides annual funding for communication access for deaf people in substance abuse prevention and treatment programs. FY22 initiatives include expansion of counseling and interpreter services.
- 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.
- 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/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.

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 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.