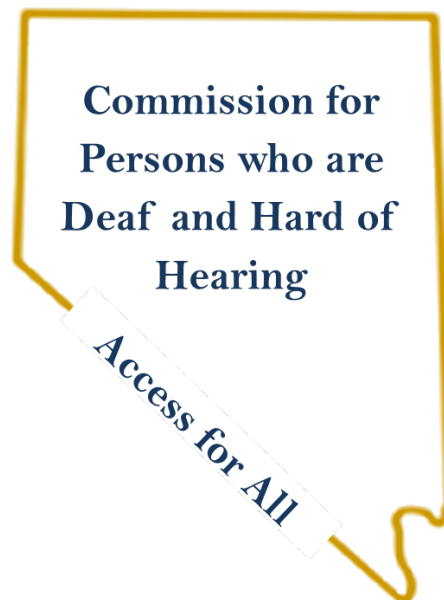




Nevada State Plan for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Speech Impaired, Deaf-Blind and Deaf Plus

SFY2022 – 2027



Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NVDeafCommission@adsd.nv.gov

Members

Eric Wilcox, Chair	One member who represents an advocacy organization whose membership consists of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Susan Beckett, Vice Chair	One member who is deaf or hard of hearing
Maureen Fradianni	One member who has experience with and knowledge of services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Jeff Beardsley	One member who is a member of the Nevada Association of the Deaf, or, if it ceases to exist, one member who represents an organization which has a membership of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Vacant	One member who is a parent of a child who is deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Laura Fink	One member who specializes in issues relating to the employment of persons with disabilities
Sandra LaPalm	One nonvoting member who is employed by the State and who participates in the administration of the programs of this State that provide services to persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired
John (Rusty) Shaffer	One nonvoting member who is the Executive Director of the Nevada Telecommunications Association or, in the event of its dissolution, who represents the telecommunications industry
Eli Schwartz	One member who is a user of telecommunications relay services or the services of persons engaged in the practice of interpreting or the practice of real time captioning
Ryan Feldman	One member who is the parent or guardian of a child who is less than 6 years of age and is deaf or hard of hearing
Shawna Goldhammer	One member who represents educators in this State and has knowledge concerning the provision of communication services to persons hearing or speech impaired in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schools and the laws concerning the provision of those services.

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Executive Summary

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing is established to provide advocacy on behalf of individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Speech-Impaired, Deaf-Blind, and Deaf Plus. The Commission was established in 2017 to make recommendations to the state of Nevada and local governments concerning the services to these communities.

For the purposes of this state plan the term “target populations” will be used throughout the plan to include persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech-impaired, deaf-blind, and deaf plus.

The purpose of this plan is to identify recommendations to the State of Nevada and local governments that address critical issues facing the target populations. The Commission will work with state and local partners to implement and monitor these recommendations throughout the duration of the plan.

Through outreach, workshops, and a survey, the Commission was able to identify 5 critical areas to address: effective communication and access to appropriate accommodations, equal employment opportunities, increase awareness of the target population, a more inclusive system of services, and expertise to support language development and education of children.

This state plan includes 8 recommendations which will be monitored and evaluated by the Commission:

1. Government Accessibility
2. Quality Interpreters
3. Emergency Response and Management
4. Healthcare Access
5. Language Development
6. Post-Secondary Education Transition
7. WIOA Partnerships
8. Inclusion of the Community

The Commission will use this state plan to increase access for the target population, continue to engage the target population and partners, and advocate for the rights of the target population. An annual report will be published to highlight activities and accomplishments.

Introduction

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing is established to provide advocacy on behalf of individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Speech-Impaired, Deaf-Blind, and Deaf Plus. The Commission was established in 2017 to make recommendations to the state of Nevada and local governments concerning the services to these communities.

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Critical to this plan is building Nevada’s foundation to engage the target population, increase advocacy for the rights of the target populations, and increase access to programs and services available to the citizens of Nevada. There is much work to be done, but the Commission will prioritize and monitor specific recommendations that will be addressed each year of the plan. An annual report of the Commission activities will include accomplishments and challenges from this State Plan.

The identified partners are critical to the success of this plan and to providing the infrastructure necessary to support the needs of the target population.

Critical Issues

The target populations face a multitude of barriers related to access, awareness, family support and lack of collaborative partners. The impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic further exacerbated these barriers, specifically the lack of access to effective communication for target populations. The community has continuously expressed the need for more qualified sign language interpreters and often share that they feel excluded from access to vital information. Not being provided access to effective communication, especially during a worldwide pandemic, has caused further mistrust amongst the community. More importantly, it has impacted their ability to make informed decisions regarding their health.

According to a 2021 community survey conducted by the Commission, access to quality interpreters and access to employment opportunities were two of the most identified deficiencies within the state. Subsequently, the lack thereof has prevented the target populations from their ability to live a life of choice and independence.

The results from the survey coupled with information collected from townhall events further noted that access to emergency preparedness and mental health services are also areas of concern within Nevada. To date there are less than 10 mental health providers within the state that are equipped to provide accessible and specialized services to this marginalized population. The shortage of providers places this community at an extreme disadvantage and precludes them

from accessing the services needed. In terms of emergency preparedness, consistent communication accommodations are the number one barrier to this population.

Based upon community feedback during townhall events, as well as survey results, the Commission has identified five (5) critical issues/needs:

1. Effective communication including but not limited to appropriate accommodations through government agencies, healthcare services, and employment services.
2. Limited access to equal employment opportunities for the target population.
3. Collaboration among community stakeholders to increase awareness of the target populations including marginalized communities within the target populations.
4. Increased partnerships to create a more inclusive system of services within Nevada for the target populations.
5. Support and expertise to support the language development and education of children in the target population.

Strategic Priorities

To address the critical issues identified above, the Commission will focus efforts within three strategic priorities: Access, Engagement, and Advocacy. These strategic priorities helped to inform the recommendations and will serve as a guide for Commission efforts throughout the duration of this plan.

Access

The Commission is committed to working with partners and stakeholders to increase access to services for the target population throughout Nevada. This includes:

- Effective communication access to priority services such as healthcare, education, employment, and other social services.
- Quality workforce of sign language interpreters, including certified-deaf interpreters (CDI), and captioning providers.
- Inclusion of appropriate accommodations during emergency situations and public meetings such as the Legislative session.

Engagement

The Commission's efforts are most impactful through the development of working relationships with a multitude of partners including state, local, private owned and public businesses to increase diversity and inclusion efforts. This includes:

- Continuous engagement with the target populations to improve efforts.
- Increase awareness of target population and effective communication strategies among state and local partners, as well as other community providers.
- Building partnerships to increase the access and support of the target population throughout the state.

Advocacy

The Commission is deeply invested in advocating on behalf of the target populations in Nevada. Ensuring that all citizens are treated with equity, dignity, and respect is a top priority for the Commission.

- Evaluate policy decisions and program designs to advocate for the needs of the target populations.
- Increase awareness of the legislative process among the target population, including how to participate as advocates for themselves and the community.
- Coordinating with other advocacy groups to amplify efforts on behalf of the target population.
- Addressing the needs of marginalized communities within the target populations.

Monitoring of the Plan

The Commission will identify recommendations that will be priority for each year of the plan. The priorities for the first year will be identified upon adoption of the plan and then by July of each subsequent year. The Commission will gather information, build partnerships, and decide on actions for the prioritized recommendations throughout the year.

Annually, the Commission compiles a report of their activities of the previous year. The report will include updates on accomplishments and challenges related to this State Plan. The Annual Report is distributed to the Governor's office, State Partners, and published for the public on the Commission website. Recommendations may be modified and/or retired each year during the annual meeting of the Commission.

Recommendations

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing puts forth the following recommendations to ensure inclusive, effective services and supports are available to Nevadans within the target population. There are 8 recommendations organized within 4 categories.

Community Awareness

Nevada is not considered a “friendly” state for the target population, in particular for the deaf population. Many of the challenges and recommendations above will help to increase awareness and appreciation of the target population, however targeted efforts to promote awareness and inclusion are necessary to reduce stigmas for this population.

Recommendation #1: Inclusion of the Community

The state can support awareness through increase training and awareness provided not only throughout state agencies, but to community partners as well. Increasing awareness of the needs and rights of the target population throughout all levels will lead to a greater understanding and inclusion of the target population.

Policies and procedures throughout programs and services need to consider the needs of the target population as well as the needs of people with disabilities. This can include but is not limited to plain language, visual communication and assistive technology. These needs span across all areas not just those in the health and human services, but within business, environment and entertainment industries.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the diversity within the targeted population. Not only in terms of variances within the population (i.e. deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, etc) but also the cultural differences that exist among all populations. Increasing cultural competency through training, inclusive policies, and engaging the populations served is necessary to de-stigmatize the target population.

Benchmarks: number of townhall events, number of participants in townhalls, surveys, and diversity of Commission involvement. Number of people in the target population represented in state entities

Partners: all state agencies, state councils and commissions, local governments, and community partners.

Communication Accessibility

Effective communication and accommodations are vital to ensuring access for the target populations. As state and local programs are developed, a variety of communication models must be considered to ensure there is a more inclusive environment for the target population. Communication access is the most cited barrier for this population but is the most vital for Nevada’s success in serving this population.

Recommendation #2: Government Accessibility

The target population needs to receive information about public meetings, including the Legislative session, that is in an accessible format. Often the target population is precluded from exercising their rights in a participatory government simply because the information available about the meetings is not accessible to them. Additionally, press conferences hosted by state

agencies, as well as Legislative meetings need to be inclusive and accommodating for the target population. Accessibility can include but not be limited to information provided in various languages including American Sign Language or Braille as well as having captioning, plain language text, and other accommodations as requested. Often, state agencies identify resource shortages for accommodations. ADA accommodations should be included in the Legislatively approved budgets for the state.

Benchmarks: meeting announcements are released in a variety of formats, sign language interpreters and captioning is available at press conferences and throughout Legislative meetings, state agencies have budgets for ADA accommodations.

Partners: Governor’s office, Legislative Council Bureau, State Agencies, ADA Nevada, Governors Council on Developmental Disabilities, State Independent Living Council, the Commission on Aging and the Commission on Services for People with Disabilities.

Recommendation #3: Quality Interpreters

For Deaf members of the target population, Nevada’s availability of qualified interpreters is extremely limited. This presents significant barriers for the Deaf in accessing services throughout all sectors, but is most needed in education, healthcare including mental health services, and government services. The Higher Education system partners need to seek opportunities to increase enrollment in American Sign Language Interpreter programs, while entities such as the Office of Economic Development look at strategies to recruit and retain qualified interpreters to Nevada. For existing interpreters, the Aging and Disability Services Division should continue to increase interpreter mentoring in Nevada.

Benchmarks: number of interpreters and CART providers added to the Nevada Interpreter Registry each year, % increase in enrollment in American Sign Language Interpreter programs, and interpreter outcomes measured through the Interpreter Mentoring program.

Partners: Nevada State College, College of Southern Nevada, Office of Economic Development, Aging and Disability Services Division – Communication Access Services program, NV Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

Recommendation #4: Emergency Response and Management

The target population needs appropriate accommodations when interacting with emergency response personnel including but not limited to police officers, fire personnel, and paramedics. Training and tools can be implemented by these entities to increase awareness of the target population and introduce tools for communicating with this community. Developing an awareness of basic sign language, identifying when an individual is not able to communicate through the English language, and options for communication will improve interactions between the target population and emergency response personnel.

Additionally, during times of declared emergencies, individuals in the target population have a variety of communication styles that has to be considered in emergency preparedness plans. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted these gaps and the importance of having a variety of

accommodations available including: ASL interpreters, live captioning, information in plain language and visual materials.

Benchmarks: partnerships developed with emergency response groups, number of personnel trained, inclusion of target population in emergency management plans.

Partners: Nevada Office of Emergency Management, local police, sheriff, and fire departments, Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center

Recommendation #5: Healthcare Access

Healthcare, including behavioral health, is a necessity for all people. An individual's health and quality of life is significantly impacted by their ability to access healthcare information and services in a way that is accessible to them. The disparities in healthcare access for the target population most often stem from a lack of awareness from healthcare providers, as well as a lack of access to appropriate accommodations. Education to medical students and healthcare providers about the needs and rights of the target population is critical to ensuring quality access and care.

Recruitment of healthcare personnel, particularly those in behavioral health fields, that are familiar with the target population should be a part of overall strategies for the state and hospital networks.

Benchmarks: number of partnerships with healthcare providers, state workforce development strategies include the target population, number of healthcare rights brochures disseminated, number of communication cards disseminated.

Partners: Nevada Hospital Association, Hospital systems, Healthcare Programs at local universities and colleges, State Office of Economic Development, Office of Minority Health and Equity

Education

Educational milestones are critical to lifelong success for all children. For children in the target population, achieving educational milestones can be particularly difficult if their needs are not considered and met as part of the education process. Within Nevada, targeted efforts are necessary to ensure appropriate language development and a continuum of efforts throughout the educational system.

Recommendation #6: Language Development

Despite recent efforts, such as SB203 in the 79th Nevada Legislature, language development is still poorly supported within Nevada. State programs such as Nevada Early Intervention Services and the Department of Education have a role, along with local school districts. For the families of children who are in the target population, there are many models of language development that can be considered. However, there is limited support to families to explore those models.

Within school districts, there is a lack of expertise in serving the target population. Additionally, individualized education program (IEP) plans need to incorporate communication plans that

support a family’s language choices for their child. This means increasing efforts to recruit and retain qualified staff, providing appropriate assistive technology, and understanding the unique needs of the target population.

Benchmarks: IEP policies include communication plans as a standard, number of staff trained in language development, NEIS policies reflect the needs of the target population, increased modeling/mentors for families and children, increased number of educators specializing in the target population, and increased standards for educators.

Partners: Nevada Early Intervention Services, Nevada Department of Education, local school districts, Nevada Idea Part C office, ADSD-Communication Access Services program, Nevada Hands and Voices, Commission of Professional Standards - DOE

Recommendation #7: Post-Secondary Education Transition

As children in the target population prepare to transition from high school, specific transition plans to support their unique needs are necessary. Improving transition activities is further supported by provisions of the IDEA Act and the WIOA Act, in particular starting transition activities at age 14.

Benchmarks: Increased number of students enrolled in Vocational Rehabilitation, and increased number of students enrolled in post-secondary programs

Employment

Access to employment and employment services is one of the top needs identified by individuals in the target population. Increased awareness of the target population to reduce stigma is needed to support employment goals. Additionally, creating opportunities to ensure the rights of the target population are met is necessary to support success in competitive employment.

Recommendation #8: WIOA Partnerships

Nevada has a robust network of partners to support employment goals for all Nevadans under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. Throughout these various programs, concentrated efforts to include the rights and needs of the target population need to be made. Increasing policies and practices, including employer outreach to reduce stigma and help employers increase awareness of the target population are necessary.

Inclusion and collaboration of the target population in employment programs should be standard at all levels of employment services, both pre- and post-employment. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted challenges with unemployment systems to support the target population. Limited access options and a lack of qualified staff prevented many individuals from being able to obtain benefits. These were challenges above and beyond what was experienced by hearing individuals and continue even today. Stronger efforts to meet the needs of the target population related to unemployment benefits need to be made to ensure equal access.

Benchmarks: WIOA partner outreach efforts on behalf of the target population, WIOA partners including the target population in state plans, state policies inclusive of the target population.

Partners: Governors Workforce Investment Board, Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation, Local Workforce Investment Board

Appendix A: Survey Results

The Commission created a survey to better assess the needs of the target population, the survey was open for three weeks and had a total of 55 participants complete the survey. 44% of the respondents were individuals in the target population, 3% were parents and 15% were support professionals. In addition, 44% of the respondents were deaf, 26% were hard of hearing, and 18% were hearing individuals. Most respondents were from southern Nevada (69%) and 26% were from northern Nevada. Only 5% of respondents were from rural counties.

The majority of respondents were White/Caucasian (34%), followed closely by Hispanic individuals (15%) and Black/African American and Asian/Pacific Islander tied at 9%. Additionally, 60% of the respondents were female, while 2% of respondents identified as non-binary. Most respondents were adults, age 18 and older, however 6 children under 18 responded to the survey.

In terms of services, the qualitative responses to service-related questions are below:

1. What services are you lacking in Nevada? (Please select all that apply)
 - a. Access to quality interpreters (27)
 - b. Access to emergency management/notifications (23)
 - c. Access to mental health services (20)
 - d. Access to education (24)
 - e. Access to employment opportunities/services (28)
 - f. Other (15)
2. What services have you received in Nevada? (Please select all that apply)
 - a. Access to adequate interpreting services (18)
 - b. Access to emergency management/notifications (5)
 - c. Access to mental health services (7)
 - d. Access to education (12)
 - e. Access to employment opportunities/services (18)
 - f. Other (11)
3. What types of workshops would you be interested in attending?
 - a. Advocacy (10)
 - b. Family access/services (15)
 - c. Communication access (6)
 - d. Health/mental health (8)
 - e. Other (11)
4. How has technology and social media changed your interaction and communication with other people?
 - a. Increased access (63%)
 - b. Decreased access. (7%)
 - c. Not much has changed. (30%)

5. My needs as a D/HH individual in the state of Nevada are being met:
 - a. Strongly agree. (13%)
 - b. Agree (23%)
 - c. Neutral (34%)
 - d. Disagree (23%)
 - e. Strongly Disagree (8%)

In response to the question, “What would you like improved?” we received a variety of comments:

- Qualification of interpreters, all areas that are accessible to other populations
- Improved access for medical services, including communication with doctor's offices, hospitals. Mental health providers who understand Deaf AND Hard of Hearing, Hearing loss impacts on mental health.
- Better agency that provides ONE STOP for our deaf community ... agency that UNDERSTAND and “GET IT” our cultures etc!
- Better streamlined information to the deaf population quickly.
- Direct therapy provided by DHH Social Worker/ Counselor, DHH Career specialist in job readiness, Deaf Culture and awareness education for Hearing/ Deaf families, Communication Training and ASL for parents, law enforcement, emergency responders.
- Access to services through schools need to improve!
- Information/Training on unconscious biases, racism, disproportionately represented, marginalized population that are also Deaf/HH, antiracism, white privilege, voter suppression
- access to find accessibility
- Bring awareness and resources to the deaf and hard of hearing community so we know who, where and what to look for
- Open the new Deaf and Hard of Hearing advocacy center office nearby my home. Open up for ADA accessible like DMV department of motor vehicle and else.
- Less paperwork and more job find.
- Future of good life
- Not sure these survey questions provide reliably data to inform the Commission. We already know most of these things. Yes, the population needs more of everything and programs that support them. A program and not a grant mechanism.
- Equal services as good as California. Better control and screening on guest(s) for Townhall meeting.
- Employment Opportunities, Advocacy, sign language classes, Microsoft Teams and TV does a much better job with closed captioning than our phone systems
- Education and computer literacy
- increased collaboration and partnership between agencies and program - state, medical, education, higher ed, business
- The expansion of the 501 law to include hearing impaired individuals. Too many meetings or services don't provide services including State and Federal Agencies
- All of them to be improved 100% better
- Everything.

Appendix B: Previous Accomplishments

The Commission has overcome many obstacles and continued to remain steadfast in executing their mission to ensure all Nevada citizens will have equal and full access to resources, services and opportunities in all aspects of community life. Over the past 5 years the Commission has accomplished many tasks including the following:

- Advocating for a full-time, paid Executive Director to help meet the goals of the Commission.
- *Unemployment Access* – because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of Nevada businesses, the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR) experienced an unprecedented surge in unemployment claims. The DETR system was completely inaccessible by individuals who are Deaf, relying on Relay services to call DETR. The Commission partnered with the Nevada Disability Advocacy Law Center to write a letter to the Director of DETR, explaining the issues with access. As a result, DETR temporarily changed business processes to allow for access by the Deaf community.
- *Media and Interpreters* – The many press conferences held by the Governor included sign language interpreters, most often the state sign language interpreters, however news outlets placed banners in front of the interpreters which blocked access for the Deaf community. Additionally, not all news outlets would even broadcast the interpreters. The Commission wrote a letter explaining the critical role the interpreters had in conveying potentially lifesaving information to the Deaf community. As a result, the Governor's office and news outlets reconfigured the press conferences to ensure the interpreters would always be seen on screen.
- *Masks and Accessibility* – Face coverings make it impossible for individuals who read lips to do so. The Commission, working with the Healthcare Alliance, wrote a letter to Caleb Cage, the Nevada Health Response Director explaining the issue with face coverings and offered alternatives, such as clear shields. As a result of this effort, the state of Nevada Department of Administration released an all-state memo requiring state agencies to consider purchasing clear masks/shields to be used by team members when working with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- The Commission developed and provided testimony during the 81st legislative session for at least 3 different bills that aligned with goals and mission of the Commission.
- Las Vegas Townhall (2019). Approximately 45 individuals attended this meeting. The Community focused questions to the Nevada Deaf Association and Deaf Centers of Nevada, of interest to the community was Camp Signshine. Community members also wanted clarification on contact information for the Communication Access Services program manager to be able to find out about services available through the program.

- Reno Townhall (2019). Approximately 25 individuals attended this meeting. This was a very interactive group with the following themes discussed:
 - Increased collaboration within the community especially with politicians to present a united front, advocacy for the good of the community not just individual interests. Ensure more partnership between organizations serving the Deaf community to expand access to services and advocacy efforts.
 - Educational interpreting and a deaf school are needed to help move the community forward. Overall, the quality of interpreters in the education system is not sufficient to ensure students are able to be successful.

- Elko Townhall (2019). Approximately 15 individuals attended this meeting. This was also a very interactive group with the following themes discussed:
 - Communication Access especially in healthcare and education settings. There is a severe shortage of interpreting available in the area, which creates a lot of barriers for individuals.
 - Overall, the Elko community is yearning for more representation and more services. They often feel like they are on an island with no one to advocate for them.

- Legislative Workshop (2020). The Commission held their first workshop on December 9th, 2020. Overall, the webinar had a great turnout with 24 participants. Members of the community provided the following feedback: 66% rated the workshop very helpful 66% reported they are very confident in participating in the upcoming legislative session 66% reported they are extremely likely to attend a similar event in the future 78% reported the event met their accessibility needs 67% reported they currently live in the southern region and 22% reported living in the northern region.

- COVID-19 + Mental Health Townhall (2021). The Commission hosted their first townhall event for the year primarily focusing on topics regarding COVID 19 and Mental Health. Overall, the event was informative and well received by the community, participants outlined major areas of concerns and learned from three Mental Health professional’s resources to aid them as they combat mental health issues especially during the time of COVID. 43 registered 32 attended.

- Black History Month Celebration (2021). This event was the first of its kind to celebrate the contributions of the Black Deaf Community. Five (5) panelists from a myriad of professional backgrounds participated in an open forum where they presented information about themselves and the history of the Black Deaf community. 34 registered 25 attended.

- Women’s History Month (2021). Another diversity initiative that highlighted and celebrated women who are a part of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Panelist shared their background and experiences while also participating in a robust discussion centered around, women empowerment, leadership, and representation. 38 registered, 28 attended.

- Communication Access Townhall (2021). The second townhall event of the year the Commission partnered with Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center (NATRC) and Communication Access Services (CAS) to gather information regarding their experiences with communication accessibility. 53 registered, 39 attended.
- Deaf Day at Legislature (2021). The Deaf Commission participated in their first virtual legislative advocacy event along with Nevada Hands & Voices. Community members had the opportunity to learn about the legislative process, meet with legislators, and hear from a panel discussing challenges and solutions in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. 80 registered, 55 attended.