



# NEVADA STATE PLAN FOR PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF, HARD OF HEARING

Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and  
Hard of Hearing

Khianti Thomas, Executive Director

## Members

Eli Schwartz, Chair	(e) 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
Eric Wilcox, Vice Chair	(h) One member who represents an advocacy organization whose membership consists of persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Maureen Fradianni	(c) One member who has experience with and knowledge of services for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Jeff Beardsley	(b) 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
Summer Wright	(f) One member who is a parent of a child who is deaf, hard of hearing or speech-impaired
Laura Fink	(j) One member who specializes in issues relating to the employment of persons with disabilities
Sandra LaPalm	(a) 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	(d) 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
Susan Beckett	(i) One member who is deaf or hard of hearing
Vacant	(k) 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
Vacant	(g) 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.

## Contents

Members.....	1
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction and Purpose of the Plan.....	4
Critical Issues.....	4
5 Year Strategic Priorities.....	5
Access.....	5
Engagement.....	5
Advocacy.....	6
Recommendations.....	7
Access.....	7
Engagement.....	8
Advocacy.....	9
Appendix A: Previous Accomplishments.....	11
Appendix B: Survey Results.....	14

DRAFT

## Executive Summary

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing serves in an advisory capacity to state programs, service providers, and the community. It is the responsibility of the Commission to identify gaps in services, advocate for the target population, and provide recommendations to the state in efforts to improve accessibility. The Deaf Commission has developed a comprehensive state plan to serve as the guiding document to assess, support, and monitor the needs of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind and Speech Impaired communities (referred to as “consumers” throughout the rest of the document) throughout the state. After analyzing the issues, priorities, and benchmarks in the previous strategic plan it was determined that there is still a lot of work needed to support this population.

Specifically, the Commission has identified four critical issues that have constantly placed the population at a disadvantage; perpetuating preexisting barriers that continuously exclude the population from living a life of equal and full access to resources, services, and opportunities in all aspects of community life. The identified issues in this plan result from stratified qualitative and quantitative data collected through community surveys, townhall events, and feedback from community engagement initiatives.

Moreover, this plan identifies the overarching priorities that the Commission will monitor throughout the next five years. These priorities will address the identified issues and include collaborative partnerships of other state entities to ensure the target population is provided equitable opportunities and access to all aspects of life. These priorities have been categorized into three strategic focus areas to aid the Commissions in developing recommendations to the state.

Lastly, the recommendations outlined in the plan have been created to strategize support for the population and ensure advocacy efforts are both efficient and effective. The recommendations will be monitored based on benchmarks and quarterly updates provided at Commission meetings. Annual updates will be completed each year and will drive efforts related to the annual report of the Governor. The updated plan will be posted on the ADSD website and made available to the public, stakeholder groups and related Commissions.

## Introduction and Purpose of the Plan

Over the course of five (5) years, the Commission has worked diligently to define their position in the community as a staunch advocate. Within the last year alone the Commission has seen a tremendous uptick in advocacy efforts and increased visibility in the community. Despite unprecedented events such as the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19), the Commission has remained steadfast and continued to advocate for the needs of consumers.

The Commission recognizes that the needs of the target population are still substantial compared to the resources available. Unfortunately, due to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic it has further exacerbated these needs; shifting the Commission's priorities to focus more on educational and advisory activities in efforts to increase accessibility. The Commission has had to completely change their approach and learn how to operate in a complete virtual space. This has been extremely difficult due to technological challenges, lack of resources, and "zoom fatigue".

The purpose of this plan is to identify the overarching priorities of the Commission specifically addressing areas of concern related to awareness, engagement, and advocacy. The Commission will prioritize and monitor specific recommendations that will be addressed over the state fiscal year 2022/2023 biennium and will be updated in every odd year thereafter. Following this format will help the Commission effectively organize, advocate, and implement efforts to better support the target population. The Commission is committed to further supporting the needs of the community through outreach, education, and advocacy.

The plan will include action items to assist with the implementation of the overarching goals and identify different entities to support the goals of the Commission. The entities listed in this plan are to be collaborative partners and/or subject matter experts that facilitate or take initiatives in providing services to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, and Speech Impaired Nevadans.

## Critical Issues

The community has continued to 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 perpetuating the lack of access to effective communication for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. 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, 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 Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired Nevadans 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 four (4) critical issues/needs:

1. Lack of access to effective communication including but not limited to appropriate accommodations through government agencies, healthcare services, and employment services.
2. A need for improved access to equal employment opportunities for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Speech Impaired.
3. Increased collaboration among community stakeholders to increase awareness for marginalized communities within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Speech Impaired spectrum; including but not limited to demographic/ethnic backgrounds, Deaf Plus communities, and social differences.
4. Increased advocacy efforts to improve the quality of services for the target population; including partnering with other entities to create a more inclusive sustainable environment.

## 5 Year Strategic Priorities

To address the critical issues identified above, the Commission is focusing efforts in three areas: Access, Engagement, and Advocacy. These strategic focus areas will assist Commission efforts over the next five years in further assessing areas of concern and building collaborative partnerships.

### 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 Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind and Speech Impaired community to improve efforts.
- Collaborative partnerships with organizations to create cultural sensitivity awareness trainings that will be provided to public entities that may work with the target population.
- Partner with other organizations to increase awareness of target population and effective communication strategies.

### Advocacy

The Commission is deeply invested in advocating on behalf of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, and Speech Impaired citizens of Nevada. Ensuring that all citizens are treated with equity, dignity, and respect is a top priority for the Commission.

- Advocate for the needs of the target population ensuring that proper services are being rendered by evaluating policy decisions and program designs.
- Ensure the community is aware of the legislative process, how to actively participate and understand their rights.
- Coordinating with other advocacy groups to amplify efforts on behalf of the target population.
- Addressing the needs of marginalized communities within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired community.

## Recommendations

Based on the critical issues identified by the target population and the Commission's strategic focus, the Commission puts forth the following recommendations to support the inclusion of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, and Speech Impaired individuals throughout state and local programs.

### Access

Effective communication and accommodations are vital to ensuring access for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, and Speech Impaired communities. 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 #1: Communication Accessibility**

1. Advocate for a more inclusive environment during legislative session by including interpreters and live captioning on screen to provide access to Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants.
2. Work with entities including but not limited to the Dept of Education and the Medical Schools to enhance education efforts regarding topics that impact the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.
3. Partner and develop a communication access guide to further support the inclusion of people with disabilities.
4. Advocate for access to effective communication accessibility including certified/qualified interpreters and live closed captioning available during Governor briefings.
5. The Commission will research and recommend a variety of options and practices to increase the quality of interpreters statewide. Among other things, this could include the development of an Interpreter Certification Board.

#### **Recommendation #2: Emergency Preparedness**

1. Partner with organizations to provide training on continued basis to emergency personnel (Law Enforcement, Fire Fighters, EMT) in efforts to encourage the use of simple communication methods including but not limited to sign language and/or assistive technology devices.
2. Advocate for the requirement of ASL interpreters and live close captioning during any emergency communications on all televised local news networks.

#### **Strategies:**

- Stakeholders within Nevada need to work together to have a comprehensive training to support the need for access to effective communication including but not limited to plain language reference, visual communication, and assistive technology.
- Outreach initiatives will be designed to support promotion and execution of trainings to entities including but not limited to (government agencies, healthcare facilities, schools etc.)



**Benchmarks:** Commission will host webinar/training events open to the public at least once a quarter focused on Communication Accessibility.

**Potential Collaborative Partners:** Department of Education, Nevada Hands & Voices, Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center, Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) Communication Access Service Program (CAS), Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED)UNR School of Medicine, UNLV School of Medicine/Nursing

## Engagement

Engagement of the target population to empower and educate them to work together in advocating for their needs is critical to long-term success in achieving access to services. Additionally, ensuring state and local partners are engaged in conversations throughout program development efforts to elevate the needs of the target population will ensure inclusion from the onset of programming.

### **Recommendation #1: Increased public awareness and inclusion of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Speech Impaired community.**

1. Identify, evaluate, monitor, and collaborate with other community stakeholders to increase awareness for the marginalized communities within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind and Speech Impaired spectrum; including but not limited to demographic/ethnic backgrounds, Deaf Plus communities, and social differences.
2. Increase the dissemination of information about public programs to ensure that it is accessible (i.e., plain language, American sign language, and/or captioning) to ensure there is a wide- spread understanding of services available to the target population.
3. Enhance education efforts to increase Deaf and Hard of Hearing awareness to healthcare providers, including but not limited to mental health services, primary care, and outpatient services as well as government agencies and other employers.
4. Develop educational materials (e.g., printed pamphlets, flyers, etc.) to increase sensitivity and understanding about target population's access and rights.

### **Recommendation #2 Cultural Competence/ Community Awareness**

1. Develop, collaborate, and promote diversity initiatives to increase awareness of the needs of marginalized communities and family supports within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, Speech Impaired communities.
2. Conduct community-based trainings and presentations that incorporates cultural competencies.
3. Create a culture of support for underserved populations within the consumer network.
4. Work with community-based based partners to support cross-coordination with other family service organizations for access to mentors.

### **Strategies:**

- Develop materials to increase awareness about the target population, materials including informational pamphlets, pictographs, flyers etc.

- Build working relationships with outside agencies to increase the knowledge of target community, encouraging the need for more representation and inclusivity.
- Partner with local interpreter training/ Deaf studies programs to aid in the support of more consumer awareness and engagement.
- Create quarterly newsletter to keep the community informed on all Commission related activities and events.

**Benchmarks:**

Create at least four events throughout the year with outside partners that promote cultural sensitivity and awareness training for target population.

**Potential Collaborative Partners:** Nevada Office of Minority Health and Equity, Commission on Service for Persons with Disabilities (CSPD), Nevada Governor Council on Developmental Disability (DD Council) Nevada Disability Advocacy Law Center (NDALC) Communication Access Program (CAS) Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center (NATRC) Interpreter Education Programs Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED) College of Southern Nevada (CSUN)

*Advocacy*

To empower Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind and Speech impaired individuals, and families to advocate for themselves by providing targeted materials that address advocacy issue and hearing loss awareness.

**Recommendation #1: Ensure the inclusion and representation of the target population.**

1. Increase representation of the target population on the Commission. Including but not limited to individuals from diverse background and demographic/ethnic groups.
2. Ensure individuals who are speech-impaired or deaf-blind are represented and considered in programming decisions.
3. Develop plans and outreach efforts to engage the target population in rural communities.

**Recommendation #2: Increase employment opportunities for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf Blind, and Speech Impaired individuals, especially in positions that work with this population.**

1. Review, Collaborate and Implement policy recommendations to address barriers regarding hiring processes for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Speech Impaired individuals
2. Advocate for the need of language/ cultural models in classroom settings for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

**Potential Collaborative Partners:** Job Connect, Voc Rehab, Small Business, State agencies, Nevada Office of Minority Health and Equity, Commission on Service for Persons with Disabilities (CSPD), Nevada Governor Council on Developmental Disability (DD Council)

Nevada Disability Advocacy Law Center (NDALC) Communication Access Program (CAS)  
Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center (NATRC) Interpreter Education Programs Nevada  
Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED)

**Strategies:**

- Identify outreach efforts as well as other actions to increase representation marginalized communities.
- Work with agencies to support the need for equal employment opportunities by reviewing and amending current policies to be more inclusive of target population. Include the need to prioritize hiring of fluent/native language users to ensure access and modelling of primary language of target population.

**Benchmarks:**

Review, revise and implement policy change that prioritizes individuals with disabilities for at least 5 different organizations.

DRAFT

## Appendix A: 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:

The Executive Director position was recruited during the state fiscal year and an offer was made in March 2020. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this Executive Director, Khianti Thomas started on July 27, 2020.

*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 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 81<sup>st</sup> legislative session for at least 3 different bills that aligned with goals and mission of the Commission.

06.18.2019: Las Vegas. 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 Sunshine. 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.

06.26.2019: Reno.

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.

06.27. 2019: Elko

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.

12.9.2020: Legislative Workshop

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.

2.10.2021: COVID-19 + Mental Health Townhall

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.

2.26 .2021: Black History Month Celebration

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.

3.22.2021: Women's History Month

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.

#### 4.21.2021: Communication Access Townhall

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.

#### 4.26.2021: Deaf Day at Legislature

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.

DRAFT

## Appendix B: 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. Below is qualitative and quantitative data collected from the survey.

### Deaf and Hard of Hearing Survey Results

The Nevada Commission for Persons who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing has created a survey to help identify the needs of the community. We are looking to gather this data to better support our development of our new strategic plan. We are kindly asking the community to complete the survey to the best of your ability to help us ensure we are addressing the needs in our new plan.

**\*Survey results are reported as percentages, whole numbers, and written responses\***

1. Are you taking this survey as?
  - a. Self (44%)
  - b. Parent (3%)
  - c. Care giver (0)
  - d. Support professional. (15%)
2. Please select your hearing status
  - a. Deaf (44%)
  - b. Hard of Hearing (26%)
  - c. Deaf Blind (0)
  - d. Deaf Plus (1%)
  - e. Hearing (18%)
3. Demographics Location regions
  - a. Northern Region (Washoe, Carson, Douglas, Storey, and Lyon) (26%)
  - b. Southern Region (Clark, Lincoln, Nye, and Esmeralda) (69%)
  - c. Rural/Frontier – All other counties (5%)
4. Ethnicity
  - a. White/Caucasian (34%)
  - b. Black/African American (9%)
  - c. Hispanic (15%)
  - d. Pacific Islander/Asian (9%)
  - e. Other (5%)
5. Gender, how do you identify?
  - a. Female (60%)
  - b. Male (38%)
  - c. Non-binary (2%)
  - d. Agender (0)
  - e. Other (0)
6. What is your or the person you care for/serve age group?
  - a. Under 18 (6)
  - b. 18-24 (2)

- c. 25-34 (6)
  - d. 35-44 (13)
  - e. 55-64 (12)
  - f. Age 65 and older (5)
7. 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)
8. 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)
9. 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)
10. 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%)
11. 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%)
12. What would you like to see improved?