



# Hearing Access Health Guide

*for people with hearing loss*

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – BC



# Introduction

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Our health is precious, and we must be able to access health services without barriers to communication due to our hearing loss.

Communication challenges have been magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring use of masks and physical distancing. While the pandemic will eventually pass, some of these challenges may well remain, such as the widespread use of masks.

This publication is intended to give you practical tips for your interactions with your doctor, dentist, and other health professionals. It provides extensive information on how to plan for your hearing access during a hospital stay.

The publication also shares information about communication tips, technologies and services that can help overcome barriers. It is part of a *Hearing Access Health Kit* which contains various products available on request to CHHA-BC.

CHHA-BC wants to help you become your own best advocate in having your communication needs met in often stressful health environments and situations.

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This publication is a product of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – British Columbia, which takes full responsibility for the content. We appreciate the assistance of Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility and acknowledge the following sponsors:



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CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION – BC CHAPTER



# Contents

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<b>Introduction to the Hearing Access Health Guidebook .....</b>	<b>04</b>
We are Here to Help .....	04
<b>Planning For Your Hospital Stay .....</b>	<b>05</b>
Before Your Hospital Stay .....	05
During Your Hospital Stay .....	05
Take for Your Hospital Stay.....	07
Request of the Hospital .....	07
Communication Tips .....	07
Impact of the Pandemic.....	08
<b>Your Visit With Your Doctor or Other Healthcare Professionals.....</b>	<b>09</b>
Scheduling Appointments.....	09
In-Person Appointments: Interaction at the Reception Desk .....	09
For Interactions with Your Doctor and Other Healthcare Professionals .....	09
<b>Hearing Access Plan Form .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Hearing Access Technologies and Services .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Amplified Telephone .....	11
Assistive Technologies .....	11
Captioned TV and Captioned Videos.....	11
Captioning and Interpreting Services.....	11
Cochlear Implants .....	12
Hearing Aids .....	12
Implantable Hearing Devices.....	12
Pen and Paper or Dry Erase Board.....	12
Message Relay Service .....	12
Speech-to-Text Apps.....	12
Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – British Columbia .....	14
Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility .....	14



## Introduction to the Hearing Access Health Guidebook

This publication is part of the *Hearing Access Health Kit* which includes handouts that can be downloaded ([www.chha-bc.org](http://www.chha-bc.org)):

- Hearing Access Health Guide for People with Hearing Loss
- Publication for Health Professionals on Hearing Access
- Hearing Access Plan Document

Other kit items as noted below are available at no charge by submission of CHHA-BC's on-line order form. These items include:

- ✓ **Large laminated sign** stating that you are hard of hearing or deaf to be placed on the wall over the bed or on the door of your hospital room. (Poster strips are supplied.)
- ✓ **Small plastic bag and plastic container** for your hearing aid, cochlear implant processor or other implantable device; you will need to complete the label with your name and room number.
- ✓ **Pen and writing pad** to write messages.
- ✓ **International symbol for hearing access** (the blue sticker) to be pinned on the hospital gown or pillow.
- ✓ **Hearing access stickers** to add to your charts, wrist strap and intercom button at the reception station as a reminder about your hearing loss.
- ✓ **Communication symbol card** to aid in communication.

There is no charge for the materials in the *Hearing Access Health Kit*.

### **We are Here to Help**

Please contact the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – British Columbia, or the Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility for further information about your accessibility issues with hearing healthcare. *Contact information can be found on the back of this booklet.*

# **Planning For Your Hospital Stay**

## **Before Your Hospital Stay**

- Inform your doctor and specialist about your hearing loss.
- Complete a Hearing Access Plan included in this kit and share with your doctor.
- Discuss your preferred means of communication (spoken or signed language, text, email or combination/other). If you require captioning or sign language interpreting, advise staff how they may contact Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility to arrange. (See further information in this brochure.)
- Request that your medical records clearly identify your hearing loss and communication preference.
- Ask to wear your hearing aid, cochlear implant speech processor or other implanted hearing devices during surgery and other procedures, if possible. If removed, request that staff put instruments in a plastic container or bag in a safe place with your other valuables.
- If applicable, explain that you cannot understand staff speaking through masks and request alternative communication such as use of a captioner/interpreter, use of assistive listening equipment, or other visual/written modes of communication.
- If you use speech-to-text apps (also known as automated speech recognition apps), explain how it works. Speech-to-text apps use software that recognizes audio content and transcribes it into written words displayed on a screen such as a computer or cell phone. See further information in this guidebook.
- Ask to be informed if your prescribed medications are known to have adverse effects on hearing.
- Ensure family and friends understand your specific requirements if they will be helping you inform staff about your hearing loss and communication needs.
- Find out the appropriate hospital contact, such as the social worker or patient advocate, to advise of your needs and assist with your hospital stay. Arrange to meet with the person in advance of your hospital stay.
- If you are a senior citizen and do not have a family member or friend to assist you, connect with the Better at Home Program of the Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility. The program matches seniors who have hearing loss with a volunteer who can assist you. See contact information for the Wavefront Centre at the end of this publication.

## **During Your Hospital Stay**

- When checking in, explain that you are hard of hearing and may not hear your name when called.
- Ask staff to approach you to get your attention.
- Ask staff to face you when communicating and to be brief and clear.
- Enquire whether your medical record prominently displays the fact of your hearing loss; if not, request that it do so.
- If you do not understand, request staff to repeat, use visual or written modes of communication, or use your assistive listening device if applicable. Do not bluff if you do not hear or understand; you may miss crucial information.

- Share your Hearing Access Plan (See document on page 10).
- Be prepared to repeat information you provided in the pre-hospital visit such as explaining that public address messages or staff speaking through masks are difficult for you to understand. Request alternative communication such as use of a communication device, or visual or written modes of communication, or use of a captioner/interpreter.
- Also enquire in advance if a family member or friend can assist you in the hospital.
- If you use automated speech recognition apps, explain their use and consider a backup plan, as complete accuracy is not guaranteed. One approach is to have the healthcare worker view the screen at the same time so any corrections can be made. If applicable, provide a description of your hearing aid, cochlear implant, or other implanted hearing device. For example, when describing your hearing aid keep it simple. Example: "My hearing aid is a medical device that amplifies sound and requires an active battery to function. It is fragile and should be stored in a safe place when not in use. The battery door should be opened when not in use." For more information refer to the Technologies section of this publication.
- If you have taken your assistive listening device with you to the hospital, also explain what it is and how it should be handled. Example: "My FM system amplifies sound from the transmitter to the receiver. Both components require an active battery. The batteries can remain in the device unless stored for more than a few weeks. It is fragile and should be stored in a safe place." Ask staff if there is a hospital safekeeping form to complete for the device. See the Technologies section of this publication for more information.
- Repeat the request to wear your hearing devices during surgery; if they must be removed, ask that they be put in a container, in a safe place with your other valuables.
- Enquire in advance if your hospital has WiFi for computer and mobile phone access.



## Take for Your Hospital Stay

- Your hearing aid, cochlear implant, or other implantable device. Bring your charger and/or extra batteries.
- A sturdy storage container, labelled, for your hearing device.
- Your assistive listening equipment (such as your remote microphone system) with batteries or a charging station; clearly label each component with your name and phone number.
- Plugs and chargers for your cell phone and/or hearing devices.
- A small flashlight.
- Materials in the CHHA-BC *Hearing Access Health Kit*.

## Request of the Hospital

- Hearing loss identification symbol be placed on your patient room door and above your bed.
- A safe place to store your hearing devices and assistive listening equipment.
- An amplified telephone with a visible alert or text telephone called a TTY (if applicable).
- Captioned TV and captioned videos (if applicable).
- An assistive listening device to help you hear (e.g., FM system or pocket talker).

(More information about devices is available in the Technologies Section.)

## Communication Tips

Share these communication tips for healthcare professionals and staff:

- Communicate in an area with low background noise. The light should be on your face, not behind your head.
- Get the person's attention before starting to speak.
- Face the person when speaking.
- Keep your face clear of barriers to speechreading.
- Speak clearly and at a moderate rate – do not over-enunciate or shout.
- Try to rephrase with different words when repeating a statement.
- Check back to ensure the client has understood the communication.
- Write your message if necessary.
- Consider using an assistive listening device.

Adopt these tips:

- Self-identify as having hearing loss.
- If you hear better in one ear, let others know.
- Provide your Hearing Access Plan.
- Provide the Handout on Communication Tips for Healthcare Professionals and Staff (located in the *Hearing Access Health Kit* but also copied above).
- Remind staff to approach you in a waiting area instead of calling your name.
- Repeat back information to ensure you have understood.
- If unable to comprehend the person speaking, ask for information to be written down.
- Provide your hearing access symbols for your medical chart.



### **Impact of the Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the usual way of doing business and communicating around the world. Hospital staff were required to wear health-regulated masks. Due to a lack of supply of clear masks meeting health standards, these were opaque masks. The masks obscured the face and preventing lipreading visual cues which people with hearing loss rely on for understanding speech.

Physical distancing was put into place increasing the distance between communication partners. In most cases, no additional persons could accompany or visit a patient, especially in a COVID-19 ward. For people with hearing loss who rely on family members or friends to act as a go-between with staff, this posed additional challenges. As of this writing, some of these restrictions have eased but, if they return, the following tips are offered:

- Captioning and sign language interpreting are available remotely by use of technology through the Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility.
- Inform family members and friends of your access needs prior to your hospital stay, so they can share them by phone/other contact with your doctor and hospital medical staff or social worker.
- Use an assistive listening device to amplify sound and clarify speech.
- Use speech-to-text apps (See section on technologies for more information).
- Do not hesitate to ask for verbal clarifications and information in writing.
- Encourage the use of clear masks where feasible.
- Be your own best advocate.

# **Your Visit With Your Doctor or Other Healthcare Professionals**

This section focuses on interactions with your doctor and other healthcare professionals or contacts in out-patient settings. Note: much of the information in the section on the hospital setting is applicable in this setting. There are two main areas of concern:

1. Scheduling appointments.
2. Interactions during appointments.

## **Scheduling Appointments**

- Tell the receptionist that you have hearing loss.
- Advise receptionist of your communication needs for the appointment such as a captioner or use of assistive listening equipment.
- Confirm date and time of your appointment and confirm whether in person or by other means such as by phone or internet.
- If you cannot use the phone, discuss arranging appointments by email, on-line or have someone help you make the appointment. Alternatively, use the TELUS Relay system using a TTY (See the section on Technologies).
- If you are not confident that you can communicate effectively during the medical appointment, for example, if it is to be conducted by phone or online, request that the appointment be in-person or request the provision of a captioner (see captioning in the section on Technologies).

## **In-Person Appointments: Interaction at the Reception Desk**

- Remind staff that you have hearing loss.
- Ask that a sticker be put on your chart indicating that you have a hearing loss.
- Ask staff to approach you directly or use a vibrating pager to let you know when it is your turn to be seen.

## **For Interactions with Your Doctor and Other Healthcare Professionals**

- Inform your doctor about your hearing loss and provide your Hearing Access Plan.
- Request that your Hearing Access Plan be added to your chart as well as a sticker for clear identification of your hearing loss.
- If you are going to the hospital, review the applicable sections of this publication under Planning a Hospital Visit with your doctor.
- Ask if any new medicines being prescribed are known to have adverse effects on your hearing.
- If you are a cochlear implant user and your doctor recommends an MRI, check with your CI specialist about its impact on your CI.
- Ask to wear your hearing devices until tests or procedures begin. If this is not possible, ask staff to put the devices in a container with your name on it.
- If communication is unclear, seek clarification and/or request in writing.
- Share Communication Tips for Healthcare Professionals and Staff (Included in this publication and in the kit).

**HEARING ACCESS PLAN - Please alert medical staff and request to be included in your Medical Record.**

CLIENT FIRST NAME:

LAST NAME:

**DESCRIPTION**

- Hard of Hearing       Deaf or Deafened       Low Vision       Other (specify)

**DEVICES USED**

Hearing Aid(s)       Right       Left

Cochlear Implant(s)       Right       Left

Glasses       Yes (need for lipreading)

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMMUNICATION METHOD**

- Oral with or without speech reading  
 Augment with Text (pen and paper/ speech-to-text app/ dry erase board)  
 Sign Language  
 Other (specify):

**APPLICABLE FOR A HOSPITAL VISIT - HOSPITAL TO PROVIDE**

- Amplified phone  
 Use of a TTY  
 Use of my Cell Phone for texting or apps  
 Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)  
 Sign Language Interpreter  
 Captioned TV and Videos  
 Use of my Pocket talker  
 Other Assistive Device  
 Other : (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**CLIENT ASSISTANT**

The following person is designated as my patient advocate: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of person to me:

- Family member  
 Friend  
 Advocate (e.g., through Wavefront Better at Home Program or CHHA-BC)

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_



## **Hearing Access Technologies and Services**

### **Amplified Telephone**

An amplified telephone has a volume control that increases sound. An additional feature is a visible alert such as a light that flashes when the phone rings.

### **Assistive Technologies**

A range of assistive listening devices help you overcome hearing difficulties in noisy situations or when at a physical distance. These devices include remote microphone and infrared systems which use radio or light frequencies to transmit sound from a microphone to a receiver, increasing your ability to hear.

Another device is called the Pocket Talker which is a form of an amplification device. It consists of a microphone with earbuds or other attachments for you to hear the amplified voice of the speaker.

Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility lists a range of these devices on its website, available for purchase: [www.wavefrontcentre.ca/shop/pockettalkers-tv-listening-devices/](http://www.wavefrontcentre.ca/shop/pockettalkers-tv-listening-devices/)

### **Captioned TV and Captioned Videos**

Request that televisions have closed captioning capability. Any information videos should have captions.

### **Captioning and Interpreting Services**

Captioning is the transcription of the spoken word into readable text. The most accurate method is called Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) provided by a trained professional. Services may be arranged in person or remotely through Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility.

Sign language interpreters are also available for medical situations through Wavefront ([www.wavefrontcentre.ca/acs/](http://www.wavefrontcentre.ca/acs/)). Through the Medical Interpreting Services Program, sign language services are available at no charge.

## Cochlear Implants

Cochlear implants are complex electronic devices that include a surgically implanted component which is inserted into the inner ear, and a sound processor which is worn behind the ear. The device works by stimulating the cochlear nerve. The sound processor will require care similar to a hearing aid as described below. Cochlear implants are sensitive to magnetic fields so check with your doctor or CI specialist before getting an MRI.

## Hearing Aids

Hearing aids are electronic devices worn in or behind the ear to amplify sounds. Within the device are components of a microphone, amplifier and speaker. Proper care requires:

- Storing hearing aids in a container when not worn.
- Keeping hearing aids away from heat and moisture.
- Turning off when not in use or opening the battery door to deactivate. (Most hearing aids do not have an off/on switch.)
- Taking extra batteries for your hospital stay.

Ask your doctor about the hospital protocol for wearing a hearing aid during surgery.

## Implantable Hearing Devices

There are various other implanted devices, the most common of which is the BAHA ( Bone Anchored Hearing Aid). A BAHA consists of an implantable device and an external sound processor which sends sound to the implant. Vibrations from the implant transmit sound through bone conduction to the inner ear.

## Pen and Paper or Dry Erase Board

These tools are useful for writing down information.

## Message Relay Service

When using a TTY, a trained TELUS relay operator will type spoken messages so that communication partners can read what the other person is saying. For more information go to [www.telus.com/en/bc/support/article/telus-ip-relay-service](http://www.telus.com/en/bc/support/article/telus-ip-relay-service)

## Speech-to-Text Apps

Speech-to-text apps on Smartphones use automatic speech recognition; accuracy may not be perfect. For situations requiring sharing of accurate health information, professional services should be used.

Examples of services using automated speech recognition – charges may apply to use:

- Online meeting platforms: Google Meet, Zoom and Microsoft Teams
- Smartphone Apps: Google Live Transcribe, Otter, Ava



### **Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – British Columbia**

Formed in 1986, CHHA-BC is a consumer-based, non-profit, self-help organization which is part of a national network and includes local branches. CHHA-BC represents the interests of people with hearing loss and is engaged in awareness-raising, educational and advocacy activities.

**Website** [www.chha-bc.org](http://www.chha-bc.org)

**Email** [info@chha-bc.org](mailto:info@chha-bc.org)

**Voice – toll-free in BC** 1-866-888-2442

**Voice – local** 604-423-3247



### **Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility**

Established in 1956, Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility is a BC based, charitable not-for-profit organization operating as a social enterprise. Wavefront Centre delivers innovative services in Audiology and Communication Devices, Counselling, Seniors Outreach, and Accessible Communication Services that assist people who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing achieve full communication accessibility.

**Website** [www.wavefrontcentre.ca](http://www.wavefrontcentre.ca)

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