

*CHHA-BC Board Members – taken September 13, 2025
at a Board Strategic Planning Workshop.*



CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION - BC CHAPTER'S

THE LOOP

Message from the President



DR. RUTH WARICK
President, CHHA BC

Dear colleagues,

Your newly elected board of CHHA-BC rolled up its sleeves for a planning session held mid-September and reviewed its mission, goals, and activities. It was a valuable day spent taking stock of our purpose, reviewing past work, defining our purpose, and determining future activities.

A commitment to creating greater awareness of the identity and issues of hard of hearing persons is at the heart of our work. We aim to further a hearing accessible society, including promoting captioning, advocating for affordable hearing aids, and developing hearing health care resources for persons with hearing loss and healthcare professionals, just to mention a few priorities. CHHA-BC is a consumer-driven member organization; working together, we can be a powerful voice for change.



CHHA-BC Board Members – taken September 13, 2025 at a Board Strategic Planning Workshop.

Left to Right: Joy Borgonia, Naghmeh Samenirad, Gael Hannan, Ruth Warick, Jessica Niemela, Nicole Leung, Elwood Major.

We look forward to keeping you posted about our initiatives in the coming months through our website, social media, educational sessions and this publication. We have posted our annual report on our website and invite you to read it if you have not already done so – it can be found at https://swiy.co/CHHABC_AGM_ReportMay.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to fellow board members for their leadership, energy and commitment:

Gael Hannan, Vice-President
Jessica Niemela, Secretary

Elwood Major, Treasurer
Nicole Leung, Member at Large
Naghmeh Samenirad, Members at Large

As well, thanks to our staff who maintain our operations so well: Joy Borgonia, Operations Manager; Purti S. Kannan, Finance Coordinator; Narada Thomas, Social Media Coordinator, and Vivian Zhang, Administrative Support.

With warmest regards,

Dr. Ruth Warick
President, CHHA-BC

president@chha-bc.org

September: Disability Awareness

Joy Borgonia
Operations Manager

September's Disability Awareness Month offers a vital opportunity to highlight the importance of accessible employment for hard of hearing individuals and to support them in achieving their career goals. Creating an inclusive work environment benefits not only these job seekers but also organizations by bringing in diverse perspectives and talents.

Accessibility in the workplace for hard of hearing employees involves more than just physical accommodation; it includes effective communication strategies, assistive technologies, and fostering a culture of understanding and support. During this month, we encourage employers to review their communication practices, implement accessible hiring processes, and provide ongoing support to employees with hearing differences.

There are resources to assist job seekers such as Employment Counsellors whose role is to connect hard of hearing job seekers with meaningful employment opportunities, advocate for appropriate accommodations, such as sign language interpreters or captioning services, and educate employers on the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. By working together, we can break down barriers, promote independence, and empower individuals with hearing loss to contribute fully to the workforce.

Let's make September a month of awareness, action, and inclusion - building a future where everyone, regardless of hearing ability, has equal access to employment opportunities.

Breaking Barriers at the Workplace

Narada Thomas

Social Media and Web Coordinator

British Columbia just marked Disability Employment Month this September and it's important to recognize the big and ongoing barriers that stop Deaf and hard of hearing folks from fully participating in the economy. This month was a great reminder for employers, lawmakers, and community supporters to go beyond just talking about it and do something real to create true inclusion.

We Need Action on Laws: While the Accessible British Columbia Act lays some groundwork for change, it's all about how well it gets put into action and having strong employment standards. Advocacy and community efforts are key to turning these legislative goals into real-life job situations.

For Deaf and hard of hearing people here in British Columbia, getting a meaningful job is often blocked by serious barriers. These challenges aren't a reflection of what they can do. Instead, they're rooted in failures within the system, communication breakdowns, and ongoing negative attitudes.

Good communication is super important in any job, yet it remains the biggest hurdle.

- **Lack of Access to Services:** There's a real shortage of qualified ASL interpreters, provision of real-time captioning services, and other communication supports during interviews or meetings, which isolates employees and stops them from fully participating.
- **Workplace Environment:** Regular workspaces, especially those with lots of background noise or that rely on sound for safety alerts, create constant hurdles. Wearing masks and using plexiglass during the pandemic only made communication tougher.
- **Accommodation Gaps:** A shocking 38% of disabled people working report facing discrimination, and many don't get the accommodations they need. For example, just 16% of those who need communication aids at work get them.
- **Misunderstandings and Biases:** Common misconceptions about how expensive and complicated accommodations are keep employers from hiring qualified candidates. There's also a lack of understanding about Deaf culture and the legal requirement to provide support under the BC Human Rights Code, which often isn't properly enforced.
- **Policy Shortfalls:** Even though the Accessible British Columbia Act is a step in the right direction, its rules aren't fully enforceable for private companies yet, leaving many people without help. Plus, provincial spending on disability often focuses more on income support instead of job-related programs that could help break down barriers.

To create a workplace that welcomes Deaf and hard of hearing employees, a multi-layered approach is needed that includes government support, non-profit knowledge, solid training, and smart use of technology. By moving past basic compliance and adopting an accessibility-first culture, employers in British Columbia can uncover a valuable talent pool and create a fairer work environment.

There's a great support network of public and non-profit organizations ready to help employers adopt inclusive practices. Using these resources is a key first step toward building a solid accessibility plan.

Using universal design principles means creating a workplace that's automatically accessible, which reduces the need for constant individual accommodations. These changes also help all employees by making communication clearer and improving safety.

- **Physical Space:** Workplaces should be designed for easy visibility for sign language and lip-reading, with good lighting for visual cues and soundproofing materials to cut down on background noise.
- **Meeting Protocols:** Set up clear guidelines for meetings, like using a "talking stick" or raising hands during virtual calls, sharing agendas ahead of time, and always using captions. Make sure there are flexible communication options like instant messaging and email to go along with verbal chats.
- **Technology can really help make workplaces more inclusive.** A mix of alerting, amplification, and captioning tools can effectively bridge most communication gaps.
- **Real-Time Captioning and Transcription:** On-site or remote CART services provide live transcripts of meetings and events. Apps like [Google Live Transcribe](#) and Otter.ai deliver real-time captions for casual conversations.
- **Assistive Listening Systems:** These systems send sound directly to a person's hearing aid or cochlear implant, cutting out background noise. You'll find FM/infrared systems for big rooms and induction loops set up in meeting areas.
- **Personal Amplification and Communication:** Devices like the Domino Pro or amplified phones boost sound for individual chats. Services like Video Relay Service and IP Relay let employees make and receive calls using a sign language interpreter.
- **Visual and Tactile Alerting Systems:** These devices use flashing lights or vibrations to alert people about safety alarms, phone calls, or doorbells. Options include integrated systems like Sonic Alert HomeAware II or wearable vibrating pagers and smartphone apps.

By bringing in these strategies, getting outside support, encouraging mentorship, redesigning workspaces, and using assistive tech, employers can break down the barriers that have kept Deaf and hard of hearing professionals out of the workforce.

Hard to Hear It: My Advocacy Journey

April Mitrik
Hard to Hear It

Hey there, I'm April! I never imagined hearing loss would be part of my story in my twenties. I always associated hearing issues with the elderly - until I started experiencing them myself. Life has a way of throwing us unexpected challenges, and for me, that challenge came in the form of Otosclerosis. I was 25 when I first noticed something wasn't quite right. Initially, I brushed it off as simple issues like wax buildup or water in my ear, especially since I had been swimming a lot that summer. But when I started favoring one side to hear better, I knew something was wrong. I booked an appointment with my family doctor, and that's when my journey really began.



April Mitrik (Photo provided by April)

The day I received my diagnosis is etched in my memory. Hearing the words *Otosclerosis* and *you'll need a hearing aid* was a shock. How could this happen to me at just 25? I

left the clinic feeling overwhelmed, and the first call I made was to my parents, who reassured me, "It's okay, we'll help you get one."

Though discovering my hearing loss at a young age was tough, it became a journey of self-discovery and advocacy. I started my channel, *Hard To Hear*, to encourage others to take their hearing health seriously and to know that they're not alone. Whether you're newly diagnosed or have been living with hearing loss for a while, there's support available, and you don't have to navigate it by yourself.

My Mission: To help YOU feel confident and supported as you navigate your own hearing loss journey. If you're on a similar journey, I'm here for you every step of the way. Healing is a process, but together, we can embrace this new chapter of life with confidence.

To learn more, visit www.hardtohearit.com

With love,

April

All Things Hearing Loss: A Cross-Border Conversation

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – Young Adults Network (CHHA-YAN)



A recent panel brought together young leaders from across North America in August to explore the shared and unique experiences of individuals who are hard of hearing as they navigate daily life in Canada and the U.S. While both countries offer support systems, the conversation revealed significant disparities in access, resources, and outcomes.

With representatives from the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – Young Adults Network (CHHA-YAN), the CHHA-BC Chapter, and AG

Bell's Young Leaders Network, the panel offered personal insights into accessibility across education, employment, and hearing healthcare.

Whether navigating classroom accommodations, the workplace, or accessing hearing assistive technology, panelists shed light on the ongoing barriers and opportunities for improvement in supporting the hard of hearing community across both countries.

The discussion underscored a clear call to action: the need for more consistent and equitable policies and support - regardless of geography to ensure that all individuals who are hard of hearing have access to the tools and opportunities they need to thrive.

A special thank you to Keegan Noxell, Jessica Niemela, Andres Cravioto, Nate Williams, and Emerson Herry for their valuable insights and contributions to this important conversation. Stay tuned for future events as we continue to amplify voices, share lived experiences, and advocate for greater accessibility.

CHHA Vancouver – Walk2Hear

Rosalind Ho

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – Vancouver Chapter

The CHHA Vancouver Branch is currently running our 15th annual Walk2Hear campaign with \$1,985.00 raised so far via our fundraising page at <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/canadian-hard-of-hearing-association-vancouver-branch/p2p/2025-walk-2-hear/>. The fundraising page will remain open until October 31, 2025.



Participants walking along the beach.

The fundraising campaign culminated in a gathering at Jericho Beach Park on Sunday, September 14, 2025. We had an excellent turnout of 48 people despite rainy weather.

After welcoming everyone and very important stretches, led by Keelin Livesey, participants set out to walk a 2 km loop around the park.

Awards were distributed at the closing ceremony. The Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility Walk2Hear2025 team was our top fundraiser. The draw prize winners were Nicolas Lempp, Renee Fong, and Ellen Liu.



Group photo of Walk2Hear participants

Many thanks to our event volunteers: Ellen Liu, Sam Mari, Lisa Cable, Alia Hudson, Kristine Valdez, Ryann Trofimczuk, Ari Clish, Brooklyn Bradford, and Kiana Gallegos. Thanks also to Keelin for serving as our First Aid attendant.

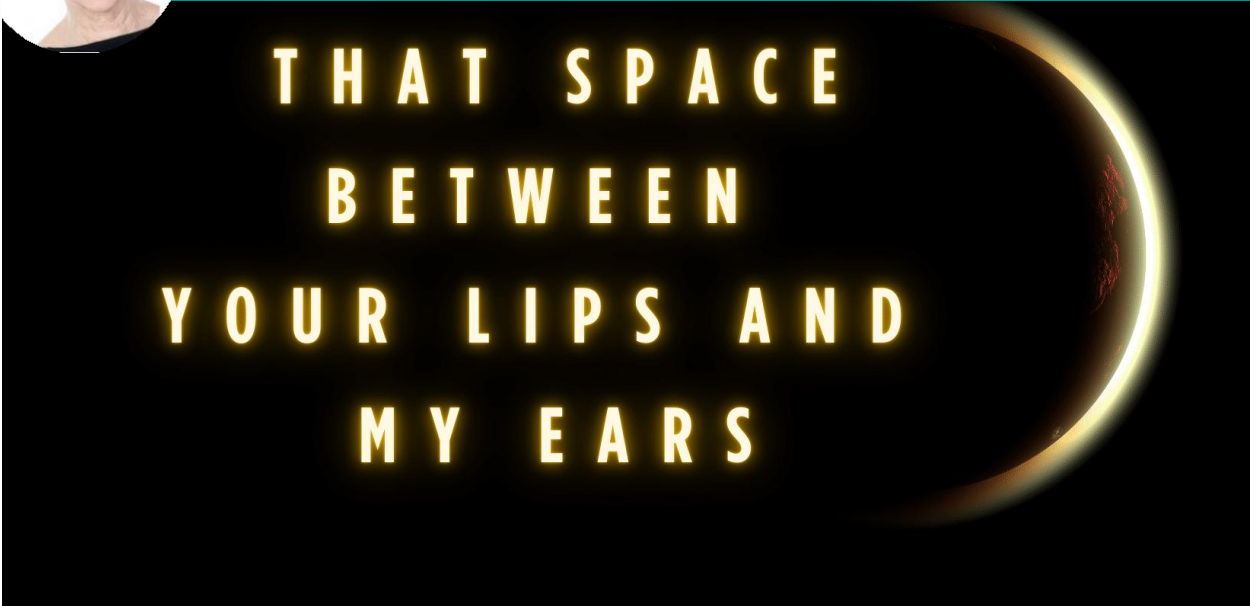
The Walk2Hear event was made accessible with the use of CART and ASL interpreting.

That Space Between Your Lips and My Ears



Gael Hannan

Author, Speaker, and Vice President, CHHA BC



THAT SPACE
BETWEEN
YOUR LIPS AND
MY EARS

I haven't yet watched [Code of Silence](#), in which a deaf worker with exceptional speechreading abilities uses her skills to aid criminal investigations. I want to avoid the usual cringing at the myths of hearing loss and deafness perpetuated in popular media. If someone can assure me that Code of Silence avoids these myths, even in the pursuit of TV entertainment, I'll give it a go.

But until then...

There's a space between a hearing person and me,

Between their words and my ears.

A space that changes shape and size as it

Fills with the sounds of spoken language

That I don't always get.

To "hearing people", this space is not only invisible,

It doesn't exist,
As they converse easily with (most) people, crisply, speaking and listening,
Back and forth, blah-de-blah-blah-ing.
But the people with hearing loss, we can feel this space
Between your voices and our ears.
It's challenging, sometimes painful,
Because in this clear, tasteless, and odorless expanse,
Sound and meaning are often splintered,
With blurry edges and hollow middles
Or even nothingness—as if the sound never happened.
We work hard to understand.
We look across this space to the lips of speakers, taking in their full face and eyes and facial
expressions and body language
Which help fill in the words' meaning when our hearing aids don't detect crucial bits of speech.
(But what we see is never enough to expertly speechread criminal conversations from a
distance!)

We get things wrong and ask for the sounds to be recreated and spoken again
We might even have to ask what are we talking about now, if the discussion has spun out of our
control.
If we have the topic wrong, nothing we see or hear will make sense.
(And we wouldn't want to send someone to jail on something we thought we saw them say,
right?)

This distance and time between the spoken words and the receptive ear,
Between your lips and my ears,
Is, for some of us, the space between hearing and loss.
Some of us will say, "I never had good hearing, so how can I have lost it?"
And some of us say, "Hearing has slowly dripped away" or
"It left so fast I didn't have time to say goodbye."
But we can smooth the space between there and here.

Let's use technology, develop skill at reading faces, and learn how to ask and pull

Better communication from the people on the other side.

Communication is the glue that connects us.

Without it, we really would be islands, separate from each other.

And I don't want that kind of space between a hearing person and me.

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Canadian Hard of Hearing Association British Columbia Chapter

VOLUNTEER JOB OPPORTUNITY

Position of Treasurer for CHHA-BC

Are you passionate about supporting the hard of hearing community? Do you have a background in finance or accounting? Are you interested in contributing to the hard of hearing community? CHHA-BC is seeking a Volunteer Treasurer to join our board.

CHHA-BC is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for and supporting individuals who are hard of hearing across British Columbia. We strive to improve accessibility, awareness, and resources for our community.

We are looking for candidates who:

- Are hard of hearing and reside in BC
- Have a background in finance, accounting, or related fields
- Are willing to contribute time and expertise to our mission

Interested?

Please send your resume and a brief statement of interest to info@chha-bc.org. Join us in advocating for accessibility and inclusion.