



## Americans with Disabilities Act: Ensuring Effective Communications

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against individuals because of disability. The ADA requires that all places of “public accommodation” (services and places used by the public) provide appropriate “auxiliary aids and services” whenever it is necessary to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities.

The regulations for the ADA provide a comprehensive list of auxiliary aids and services, including the following for individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing:

*“qualified interpreters, notetakers, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, telephone handset amplifiers, assistive listening devices, assistive listening systems, telephones compatible with hearing aides, closed caption decoders, open and closed captioning telecommunication devices for deaf persons (“tdd”), video text displays, or other effective means of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments.”*

Other commonly required auxiliary aids and services include:

- ❑ Flashing fire alarm signal devices
- ❑ Captioned television
- ❑ Captioned movies
- ❑ Vibrating alarm clock (in a hotel room, for example)

Typically, no one entity is required to provide all of these. Instead, a public accommodation should:

- ❑ Evaluate the services available to people who are not deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing, and make sure there are alternative ways for deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing people to participate, equally.
- ❑ Provide the most commonly required devices (for example, closed captioning on a hotel TV) or those with emergency requirements (for example, flashing fire alarms). Local and state building codes provide explicit requirements and guidelines for emergency and architectural requirements.
- ❑ Train all staff or employees to respond positively and appropriately to a request for auxiliary aids and services. Thus, when a consumer or family member inquires about accommodations, the response will be “Sure, we can provide you with the services you need for equal access.”
- ❑ Make sure your staff members are able to set up and use equipment such as fire alarms, telecommunications equipment, etc.
- ❑ Ask the individual needing an auxiliary aid or service what he or she needs.
- ❑ It is appropriate to ask consumers to request interpreters, transcription, or other services in advance of conferences, meetings, etc. so that you have time to find and hire qualified

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providers. Typically, brochures, web sites, and flyers should include a phrase such as “Contact us at XXX-XXXX at least three weeks prior to this conference to request ADA accommodations.”

- ❑ Know how to locate and hire (or rent) the necessary services or devices when a consumer requires them.

Remember- the goal is to provide equal access to your services or facility so that individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing can participate fully, contribute fully, and/or purchase or use your products or services fully, just like anyone else.

## Where can I call to find out if I am required to provide and pay for reasonable accommodations that ensure effective communications?

1. The [Great Lakes ADA and Accessible IT Center](#) at the University of Chicago is part of a nationwide system of federally funded programs to provide advice and assistance in understanding and implementing the ADA. You can contact them at:  
1-800-949-4232 (voice/TDD)  
312-413-1856 (fax)  
[GLDBTAC@uic.edu](mailto:GLDBTAC@uic.edu)  
[www.adagreatlakes.org](http://www.adagreatlakes.org)
2. [IndependenceFirst](#), one of Wisconsin’s independent living centers, provides consulting and information on the ADA. Staff can refer you to other resources near you if necessary. You can contact Independence First at:  
<http://www.independencefirst.org/programs/adaconsultation.asp>  
or  
414-291-7520 (V/TTY)    414-291-7525 (fax)

## Where can I call to find out more about ensuring that deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing people have equal access to my program, business, or service?

1. Contact **Interpreting Solutions, Inc.** at: 414-732-9966 or [jill@interpretingsolutionsinc.com](mailto:jill@interpretingsolutionsinc.com)
2. Access additional information on **Interpreting Solutions, Inc.** web site at [www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com](http://www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com)

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