



California Coalition

Of Agencies Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Persons

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Dear Committee on Long Term Care,

As Deaf Access Agencies that serve Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and Late Deafened individuals from “womb to tomb,” we are thoroughly familiar with the many challenges and barriers Deaf Seniors face throughout their lives. It is unfortunate that even in 2020, many are still receiving inadequate end of life care, especially lack of communication access when it comes to making important decisions that affect quality of life and daily living while in long term care.

Initially, many Deaf Seniors do not have input on where they were placed due to lack of communication access or provision of interpreters. This is especially true if the decision was made by their grown children or other family members. Many of these adult children and family members do not sign or are not able to carry on basic conversations with the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person, so many are unfamiliar with that person’s health needs and feelings about the many changes going on in that person’s life.

Living facilities that provide public and private services are required by law to provide effective communication to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, but that is not happening. While they may provide food and a bed to the Deaf or Hard of Hearing person, they are not providing sign language interpreters for family meetings with medical and service providers or activities, workshops, and field trips arranged by each facility. Hence, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals become extremely depressed and isolated soon after placement, and it is not uncommon to see their health quickly deteriorate. Research shows that people thrive when provided with social opportunities and feel connected with others, but that is not the case with many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals placed in silo.

We would like the opportunity for more dialogue around these issues, but as time is of the essence, we are making the following recommendations:

- Provide communication access as required by ADA. Require all facilities to develop a communication plan for Deaf and Hard of Hearing senior citizens who are sign language users. This would include when to use and where to obtain interpreters. Any family meeting to discuss care should have an interpreter present. Activities can be demonstrated visually but workshops or lectures that require a lot of direction need to include interpreting services

if the person wants to participate. This should include CART services when appropriate. This would be helpful for all senior citizens who are losing their hearing due to aging.

- Seek out local Deaf agencies serving that area for support and social activities. Most agencies have a Deaf Seniors group that meets regularly. Transportation needs to be provided so the resident can participate in social activities and/or receive other support services.
- The local Deaf Access Agency can also provide Deaf Culture and Sensitivity training for staff to better accommodate the resident. This should be mandatory and included in the communication plan.
- If a Deaf or Hard of Hearing senior citizen is placed in an assisted living facility, or SNIF, assign staff who can sign/communicate in sign language. Many Deaf Access Agencies provide American Sign Language (ASL) classes and provide Deaf-sensitivity trainings and can educate and support these staff at living facilities so Deaf and Hard of Hearing senior citizens can live with dignity and receive much-deserved quality of care.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

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