



Canadian
Hard of Hearing
Association
NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

CHHA-NL Position Paper

Increased Scope of Subsidy for Hearing Assistive Technology (HAT)

Introduction

Hard of hearing and late-deafened persons, (also stated as persons with hearing loss), in Newfoundland and Labrador have limited access to hearing assistive technology (called HAT) accommodation that is needed for full and equal participation in all areas of society. These include areas such as education, employment, government services, health care, recreation, sports, cultural activities and others. It is important to note that people without hearing loss in the province take for granted their ability to hear, to understand, and to communicate fully, freely, and without restriction or any technical assistance.

Currently, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador provides a free and excellent program of technical and others supports for persons with hearing loss in secondary and post-secondary education institutions in this province. In addition, it will provide some technology for persons who need it to obtain and retain employment. However, for any other areas of everyday living, such as those listed in the previous paragraph, the expense must be totally borne by the individual, which often means they are unable to obtain the technology they need to live as fully integrated and inclusive citizens of society in a manner that those without hearing loss are able to do.

While those with the financial means to do so can purchase hearing assistive technology at any time, those without the ability to do so cannot, thus, a non-justifiable and two-tier level of hearing accessibility and accommodation exists and those who are unable to purchase the technology themselves are being discriminated against.

Background

Hearing assistive technology (called HAT for short), is any technology that improves everyday communication for persons with hearing loss by improving their ability to see, hear and understand the spoken word and other acoustic sources and can be used with or without hearing aids and Cochlear Implants (CIs). This technology is often called *Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)*, however, this is only one aspect of useful assistive technology needed by persons with hearing loss. The other is *Assistive Signaling Devices (ASDs)*, which can be text-based, tactile or visual systems (or some combination of these), that can be used for notification purposes (messages,

alarms, etc.). Together, these technologies are powerful tools that help to reduce the stress and fatigue of constantly trying to hear and understand, especially in situations where there is some distance from the sound source, other background noises, and poor room acoustics that cause sound reverberation that distort speech.

CHHA-NL Position for Increased Scope of Subsidy for HAT:

It is the position of CHHA-NL that everyone with hearing loss in this province should have equal access and accommodation to hearing assistive technology so that persons with hearing loss can freely and fully access organizations and institutions and have the ability to participate in all daily activities the same as persons without hearing loss. Thus, the government should increase the scope of areas where hearing assistive technology is subsidized (currently employment related only) to permit equal access and accommodation based on individual needs.

Rationale for Position

In Canada, having equal access is considered a fundamental human right that is guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)*, which is entrenched in the Canadian Constitution. Equal access means there can be equal opportunity, however, without it, a fundamental right of Canadian citizenship is denied. Hard of hearing and late-deafened persons with hearing loss in Newfoundland and Labrador have the right to be able to communicate equally, and without impediment with persons in **educational institutions, employment agencies and employers, government services, health care facilities, recreation, sports and cultural activities, and others.**

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007)* is a landmark document that has been accepted and signed by Canada (2010) and 80 other Member States and the European Community (March 2007). The treaty aims to eradicate discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of life including employment, education, health services, transportation and access to justice. Thus, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, being a province of Canada, has the responsibility of providing hearing assistive technology to all persons with hearing loss in this province to ensure they have accommodation in their daily activities if needed, and to equal access to all institutions as noted above.

The *Canadian Human Rights Act [1985]* also extends the laws of Canada to uphold the principle that "all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated...without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices based on...disability."

Hearing loss now affects a significant number of persons in Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador and the percentage will continue to grow. The statistics quoted below, (from a Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) publication titled – *Position Paper on Accessibility and Accommodation*), are revealing and startling:

“Almost 25% of adult Canadians report having some hearing loss (CHS Awareness Survey 2002), although closer to 10% of people actually identify themselves as culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.”

“The average age in Canada is 39 years; by 2030 it will be 45 years. In 2030, Canadians 65 years and older will represent 25% of the total population, nearly double their current 13% (Statistics Canada).”

“Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic condition in older adults and the most widespread disability (Fook 2000; Yueh 2003). Its prevalence rises with age. Reports indicate that more than 80% of patients over 85 have a hearing loss (Yueh 2003). Further, 46% of people aged 45-87 have hearing loss (Dalton 2003).”

These statistics indicate, in a dramatic way, how the percentage of people with hearing loss in this province will increase significantly over the next decade which means that more people will require access to hearing assistive technology.

While hearing assistive technology comes in many forms and can help to minimize the effects of hearing loss and improve communication (hearing and understanding) in many everyday situations, thereby improving overall quality of life, it must be understood that such technology does not fix hearing loss, rather, it is an aid only and may not work the same in all situations for everyone. Also, it can be expensive and beyond the ability of many persons with hearing loss, many of whom are unemployed or under-employed, to purchase, thus limiting their ability to have the same access and accommodation enjoyed by those without hearing loss.

Conclusion

It is clear that the demand for hearing assistive technology in NL will continue to grow significantly over the coming decades. This province has the largest percentage of seniors per capita in Canada and fully 25% of the population will be over the age of 65 by 2030. Given the fact that the percentage of persons with hearing loss increases incrementally with age, current statistics indicated that about 50% of persons at 65 will have hearing loss and the percentage increases as age increases. Thus, many residents of the province, particularly seniors will need to avail of some form of hearing assistive technology in the coming decades. However, many younger people will also require such technology as hearing loss in youth and young adults is also increasing at an alarming rate due to what is known as Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL).

Therefore, it is recommended that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador form a working group to study this issue and to make specific recommendations regarding what technology will be in demand, the costs and the feasibility of establishing a subsidy, the subsidy amount and establish guidelines to access the subsidy. This group can consist of representatives from CHHA-NL (consumers), industry professionals (hearing aid dealers and Audiologists), and government.

APPROVAL AND COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

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Association Contact Information:

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General Information about CHHA-NL

The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL) is a non-profit, charitable organization committed to advocacy, awareness, prevention and the provision of programs and services that promote a better quality of life for hard of hearing and late-deafened people of all ages and their families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

CHHA-NL was founded in 1984 under the name of the Newfoundland Hearing Association (NHA). In 1994, the NHA became the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-Newfoundland Chapter (CHHA-NC) when it became part of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA). In 2002, when the province changed its official name to Newfoundland and Labrador, the association changed accordingly to its current name of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association-Newfoundland and Labrador (CHHA-NL).

The association is run by and for hard of hearing people of the province. Its operations are guided and conducted through the efforts of a Board of Directors, seven full-time staff, and volunteers. While it has a paid membership of all ages, the association provides a diversified program of support services to its members and the public at large.

To obtain additional information about the association, or to request a copy of the association's Annual Report, including information related to the ongoing operations of the association (financial, fundraising, strategic plans, types and delivery of programs and services), please contact the Executive Director, Leon Mills, at (709) 753-3224 (voice), by fax (709) 753-5640, by cell (709) 689-8239 or by e-mail at lmills@chha-nl.ca.