

Providing Appropriate Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

The term “deaf and hard of hearing” can create the mistaken impression that this is a homogenous group with a single set of access needs. In reality, there are important distinctions that require different skill sets for providing appropriate services. The chart below gives a brief summary of the main differences between the populations. **Note that not everyone fits neatly into one of these two categories.** For example, some people can communicate in both sign language and spoken language.

Cultural Deafness

Occurs at birth or soon after

Generally profound loss

Use American Sign Language (ASL)

Interpreters for access

Belong to Deaf community

Self-aware as deaf

Population: about 750,000

Currently, most services designated for “deaf and hard of hearing” people are designed to meet the needs of the culturally Deaf population. These services typically require staff to be fluent in American Sign Language, thus eliminating most people with expertise in the psychosocial and technological needs of nonsigners. Because of the vast differences in backgrounds and needs of the two groups, services should be appropriately designed and staffed for each.

For further information:

http://www.hearingresearch.org/ross/the_hard_of_hearing_person/deaf_and_hard_of_hearing_people_making_distinctions.php

<https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions>

Other Hearing Loss

Can occur anytime; becomes more common with age

Mild to profound loss, often progressive

Use spoken language

Assistive listening systems and/or CART/captioning for access; also need good lighting, quiet setting, view of speaker's face, etc.

No separate community

Denial of hearing loss and bluffing common; often lack knowledge of appropriate accommodations

About 15% of the population