

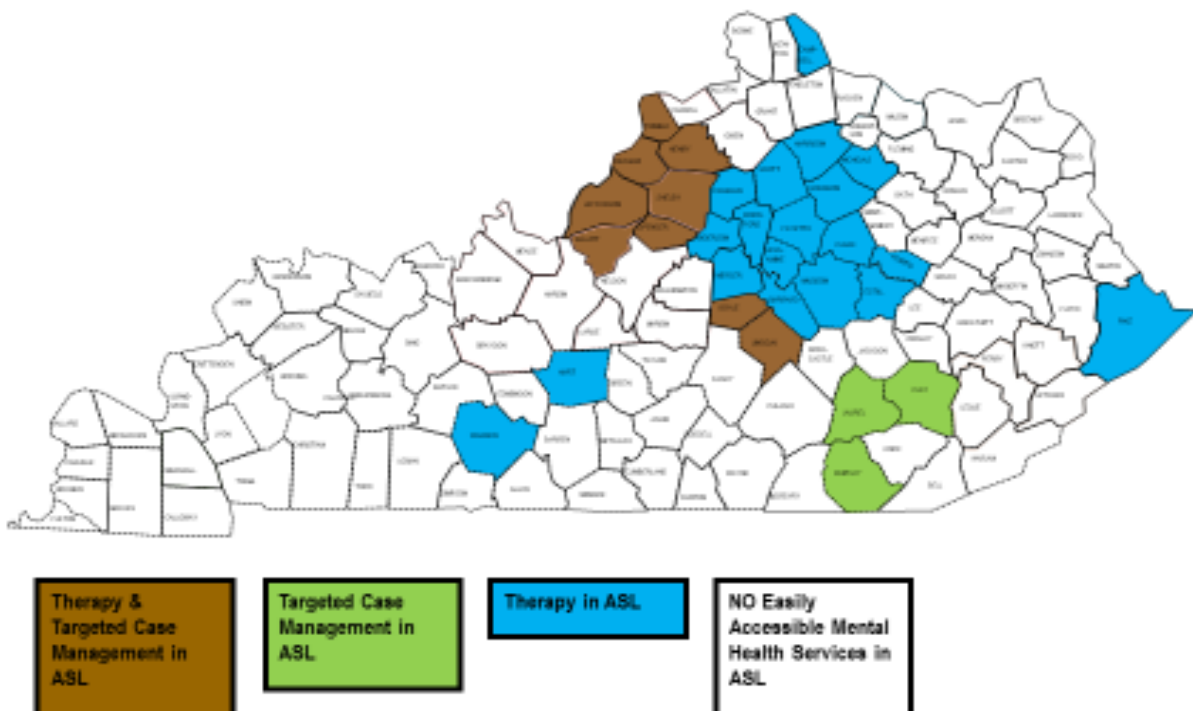
Kentucky Advisory Committee on Needed Services for Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind

Questions? Call (502) 782-6181 (Voice) or (502) 385-0460 (VideoPhone)

Deaf Mental Health Services

The specialization of Deaf Mental Health Services has emerged in the past decade with more emphasis on Deaf-led programming and recognition of the vast diversity of experiences and intersectional identities of individuals who are Deaf and use sign language. The Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities has financially supported accessible services to outpatient mental health clients since 1992. Three Deaf Mental Health clinical specialists collectively travel nearly 50,000 miles to reach an average of 121 people and provide over 1000 direct service contacts per year. Their caseloads reflect a wide range of ages, clinical presentations, and communication needs. The map below displays the counties in which these clinicians and three part-time targeted case managers provided services directly in American Sign Language (ASL) through the CMHC system. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2018, the CMHCs served 153,361 mental health clients, of which **4,902 (3%)** were Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind (407/4409/86 respectively). Individuals in the regions without specialists receive services mediated through ASL interpreters paid for largely by DBHDID. CMHC / DBHDID contract-mandated “point people” for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services are charged with addressing access issues in their respective regions. There is significant variation in the specific skills and other responsibilities of the “point people” within their agencies. High turnover rates among them is also of concern. Vast areas of the state remain underserved by providers who have the clinical, cultural, and linguistic competency to best address the needs of the Deaf community.

Kentucky Counties with Accessible Therapy or Targeted Case Management in American Sign Language at Community Mental Health Centers





Deaf Mental Health Specialists know that collaboration and ongoing education for community providers is essential to assisting their clients with accessing a variety of services and supports including food, shelter, educational/vocational and career services. Here are some of the entities they work with to advocate for accessible and effective services and supports:

- KY ADAPT: Assisting Deaf Adults to Participate Totally
- KY Career Center /Office of Deaf Services
- Department for Community Based Services
- Family Preservation Agencies
- Managed Care Organizations
- Courts
- Domestic Violence Shelters
- Law Enforcement
- Schools
- Day Programs
- Guardianship

An estimated 18,000 Kentucky adults with serious mental illness (SMI) are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind. An average of 2500 individuals were served in the CMHC system in each of the past three fiscal years. This equates to 14% of potential consumers accessing the CMHC network. How could lives be different if Kentucky had specialized, fully accessible acute care, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Supportive Housing services for signing individuals with Serious Mental Illness (SMI)? A continuum of care designed to have 24/7 language access and services provided by Deaf Mental Health Specialists could reduce hospitalizations and episodes of illness while increasing employment and quality of life. Effective person-centered planning and positive health outcomes center on the availability of the right services at the right time in the right places.

An estimated 5,100 Kentucky children/youth with severe emotional disturbance (SED) are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind. An average of 536 individuals under 18 were treated in the CMHCs per year for mental health issues in SFY2017 and SFY2018. During that same timeframe, the number identified with SED increased from **344** to **368**. Creating a system of care where children, families, and youth know that language needs will be met and their culture will be understood is critical. From early childhood mental health through transition aged youth services, Kentucky children who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind need choices and access. Reaching children with the appropriate interventions can prevent lifelong issues including language deprivation syndrome, repeat hospitalizations, long-term stays in residential treatment, unemployment, child welfare, and criminal justice system involvement.

According to the Hearing Health Foundation, the rate of hearing loss in the US doubled between 2000 and 2015. The Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) System has seen a 126% increase in service

access since data tracking began. As hearing loss becomes a public health epidemic, mental health, substance use, and developmental/intellectual disability service providers must be ready to meet their needs.

