

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)

Overview of the Number of Persons Served

One in ten people in the United States has a hearing loss significant enough to affect their daily lives. As many as 700,000 Kentuckians may be Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind. Hearing loss may be genetic or caused by disease, ototoxic medications, noise exposure, or aging. Communication can be a daily struggle and often creates barriers to accessing healthcare. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) program housed within the KY Division for Behavioral Health, works to decrease barriers and increase access to services for mental health, substance use and developmental/intellectual disability services.

Effective communication is key. For the 4300 estimated Kentuckians who may be Deaf and use sign language, the availability of service providers who are Deaf themselves or fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) often makes the difference in whether they seek care or not. The Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental & Intellectual Disabilities contracts with three Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) to provide outpatient therapy and targeted case management in ASL with staff trained to make cultural adaptations to treatment.

Individuals who are Hard of Hearing or Deafblind have very different and widely varied communication needs and preferences. Providers must be able to assess communication accurately and provide appropriate accommodations for effective communication. Otherwise, misdiagnosis, over-medication, and poor health outcomes result. Each CMHC is contractually required to have a "point person" to help address access issues in their region. The DHHS Program Administrator offers technical assistance and training on identifying and meeting communication needs in different treatment settings.

To find the number of individuals estimated to be Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind by Kentucky county, go to <https://www.kcdhh.ky.gov/ois/demographics.html>. Environmental factors and occupations like mining, manufacturing, or farmwork impact Kentuckians at disproportionate rates geographically. Culturally Deaf individuals cluster both near the Kentucky School for the Deaf in Danville and in more highly populated areas of the state like Louisville, Lexington, and Northern Kentucky.

Significant gaps in accessible services remain across the Commonwealth. Nearly 6,000 people with hearing loss receive services at CMHCs each year (see detailed graph on next page). That is 1% of the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind population. This often hidden and underserved population needs attention. The DHHS program collaborates with multiple state and community partners to help create a service continuum so that individuals can access care delivered in a culturally, linguistically, and clinically competent manner no matter where they live or what level of care is needed. As mandated by KRS 210.031, the DHHS Program Administrator serves as staff to the Kentucky Advisory Committee on the Need for Services for Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind. The committee meets quarterly and submits a report each biennium. The report is required to address the following.

1. Describe the accommodations and the mental health, intellectual and developmental disability, and substance use treatment services made accessible to deaf and hard of hearing persons.
2. Report the number of deaf or hard of hearing persons served.
3. Identify additional service needs for the deaf and hard of hearing.
4. Identify a plan to address unmet service needs.

Number of Individuals Self-Identified as Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deafblind Receiving Services in Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in SFY2017 and SFY2018

