

KCDHH Celebrates World Hearing Day and 30 Years of Providing Assistive Telecommunications Equipment

FRANKFORT, Ky. (March 5, 2024) – Gov. Andy Beshear and the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) are celebrating two important occasions this year that bring awareness to hearing loss and make free, life-changing assistive technology available to those who need it.

The commission's Telecommunications Access Program is celebrating 30 years of providing Kentucky residents who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired, or have hearing and vision loss, with landline or wireless equipment to make telephone communication more accessible, at no cost to them.

"My good friend, the late Virginia Moore, was a tireless champion for the deaf and hard of hearing community and her participation in our Team Kentucky briefings from the earliest days of my administration really elevated awareness of hearing loss among Kentuckians," said Gov. Andy Beshear. "Ensuring that all Kentuckians have access to high-quality health care and the technology and resources they need to live full and productive lives is essential to moving our commonwealth forward. I'm pleased to celebrate 30 years of the TAP program and will always be an advocate for technologies and resources that improve the lives of the community Virginia held so dear."

While the telephone has played a major role in communication for about 150 years, it has not been accessible to people who are deaf and hard of hearing until the last few decades. Since 1994, the Telecommunications Access Program has provided Kentuckians who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired or deaf-blind with specialized telecommunication equipment at no charge, providing them with an important lifeline that many of us take for granted.

Thirty years ago, Kentucky became the 24th state to implement a Telecommunications Access Program, which is administered by the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and funded by a small surcharge on all telecommunication access lines throughout the state.

"During these past three decades, the commission has made telecommunication accessibility a priority by continuously researching and updating equipment to make phone communication easier for individuals with a hearing loss," said Anita Dowd, executive director of the Kentucky Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. "If you'd like to see the different types of equipment available, we have seven locations throughout the state that you can visit and test the devices to see which best fits your needs."

For information about the program, applying for equipment or a complete list of businesses where TAP equipment can be demonstrated, visit [KCDHH](https://www.kcdhh.com) online or call 502-573-2604.

Kentuckians can test the devices at locations in Frankfort, Ft. Mitchell, Lexington, Louisville, Murray, Owensboro and Thelma.

In addition, March 3, 2024, marked World Hearing Day, an annual global advocacy event for raising awareness regarding hearing loss, promoting ear and hearing care, and calling for action to address hearing loss and related issues. This year's theme, "Changing Mindsets," is crucial for improving access and lowering the cost of unaddressed hearing loss, according to the World Health Organization.

"This year, we are also celebrating World Hearing Day, which is a reminder of the importance of hearing care and prevention for everyone," said Dowd. "Individuals with gradual onset hearing loss often do not recognize their issue until they have isolated themselves. Making phone calls, watching TV, attending church and simple conversations with co-workers, family and friends becomes more challenging, leading to slow withdrawal, isolation and depression."

While hearing loss can affect anyone, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), studies have found an association between untreated hearing loss and the development of dementia in older adults. Research also suggests that using hearing aids to treat hearing loss may help slow the development of cognitive problems.

"On average, individuals who experience gradual onset hearing loss later in life wait 10 years before they seek help," said Dowd. "If you suspect that you or someone you love may be experiencing a hearing loss, we encourage you to visit a local hearing health care provider quickly. Once hearing loss is diagnosed, there are abundant resources available to help."

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The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), established in 1982, exists to serve the nearly 700,000 Kentuckians with a hearing loss and can put you in touch with appropriate resources and services to help minimize the negative impact hearing loss may have on your life. KCDHH acts as an advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing persons on legislative issues, as well as a consultant to the governor, general assembly, and various state and local governmental agencies concerning policies and programs that pertain to people with hearing loss. KCDHH distributes specialized telephone equipment to any Kentucky resident who has a hearing loss or speech impairment that affects an individual's ability to effectively communicate using a regular telephone. The agency also provides a variety of trainings on hearing loss, communication visor cards, fact sheets targeting hearing loss and prevention, as well as information, referral, and advocacy services. To learn more, visit kcdhh.ky.gov.

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