

# NCTRC Webinar: Can You Hear Me? Equitable Access to Telehealth for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Patients

## Questions and Comments from February 21, 2024 with Panelist Responses

**Q1.** Is there a "white paper" for patients with disabilities to use to show to their medical providers?

- Not yet that we know of, however if it pertains specifically to people with hearing loss, the resources below would be helpful to show or share with their medical providers:
  - [Guidance for Telehealth Providers](#)
  - [Communication Accommodations Request Letter](#)
  - [Telehealth Glossary](#)
  - [Assuring Accessible Communication for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind Individuals in Health Settings](#)

**Q2.** Are these types of accommodations now required for telehealth and in office visits?

- **There are federal laws that provide patients' rights to effective communication during telehealth and in-office visits. Please see below for access to some of the guidance pertaining to these laws:**
  - [Guidance on Nondiscrimination in Telehealth](#)
  - [Health Care and the Americans With Disabilities Act](#)
  - [504 Rehabilitation Act](#)
  - [Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#)

**Q3.** How can medical providers ensure their telehealth platform has the proper user interface and language for impromptu telehealth appointments?

- Some of the questions to ask are:
  - Does your platform allow a third-party American Sign Language Interpreter or captioning provider to join the appointment?
  - Does your platform allow a third-party American Sign Language Interpreter to have their own video frame or tile on the screen which view can be adjusted by the patient?
  - Does your platform allow captioning to appear on-screen to the patient?

- If the answer to the above is yes, the most important thing that you can do as a provider is to then ask those in the community that depend on using American Sign Language and captioning for communication to test it for you.
- Medical practices put the onus on our patients to inform their clinic about communication needs. It is crucial to identify those patients / families who require communication accommodations (e.g. flags / pop-ups for scheduling and for communication preferences). Ideally this would be part of the New Patient Intake/Registration process for all patients. Regardless of how much we prepare for scheduled visits, we must also be prepared for impromptu / last minute encounters that require accommodations. This is where (1) telehealth platforms need to step up to integrate on-demand accommodations (i.e. button for inviting interpreter, activating captions), and (2) clinics may reduce the “burden” of integrating communication accommodations by designating a member of the office staff set up the encounter so it’s ready to go when the provider joins.

**Q4.** Is there an expo where telehealth providers can compare different telehealth platforms and be educated about best practices for an ideal platform and accessibility features?

- The two largest health technology “trade shows” are:
  - [HIMSS Global Health Conference & Exhibition \(March 11 - 15, 2024 in Orlando, FL\)](#)
  - [American Telemedicine Association Annual Conference & Expo \(May 5 - 7, 2024 in Phoenix, AZ\)](#)
- Most of the Regional Telehealth Resource Centers hold regional conferences that have exhibit halls. A list of the upcoming ones may be found here: <https://telehealthresourcecenter.org/events/>
- The National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center has a number of toolkits including one on video platforms: <https://telehealthtechnology.org/toolkit/clinicians-guide-to-video-platforms/>. The Mid-Atlantic Telehealth Resource Center has a Vendor Selection Toolkit: <https://www.matrc.org/explore-telehealth/matrc-vendor-selection-toolkit/> as well as a page of resources pertaining to Telehealth and Disabilities where you may access some great resources related to accessibility best practices: <https://www.matrc.org/explore-telehealth/telehealth-disabilities/>

- The Mid-Atlantic Telehealth Resource Center also has an upcoming conference where the National Telehealth Technology Assessment Resource Center will be onsite with their Telehealth Technology Showcase. More info here: <https://matrcsummit.org/> and here: <https://telehealthtechnology.org/technology-showcase/>
- Unfortunately there have not been any national “standards” developed for accessibility for these technologies. A number of us are working on different initiatives that will hopefully lead to such standards in the future, but we still have a ways to go.

**Comment 1.** Many telehealth platforms are for impromptu calls, so must have an interface that allows for accommodations to be requested before the caller is connected to the provider. Accommodations can include captioning, interpreter, a guardian, etc. Many platforms have plug-in automated speech captioning so that you can use one screen. Not all patients have more than one screen or want to use more than one screen. In other words, please don't assume these are the only solutions available. Some prefer integrated screen accessibility. Ask the patient.

- **Telehealth platforms can have automated speech recognition captioning built in.**
  - Captioning can often be provided on the telehealth screen or on a separate screen such as a second web browser, on a smart phone or a tablet.
  - For some patients that want captioning as an accommodation, automated speech recognition captioning suffices. It is important to understand that automated speech recognition captioning is not always accurate. The accuracy rate can be affected by many factors including but not limited to internet strength, provider (voice accent), whether the provider uses a microphone etc.
    - If a patient specifically requests [Communication Access Realtime Translation \(CART\) captioning](#), it is important to honor that request.
- It is important to understand that all patients with hearing loss are different and that there is not a one-size fits all to accommodate them. The examples of telehealth appointments utilizing communication accommodations during the webinar, were just a few examples of what might be needed for patients with hearing loss. Additionally, in our experience most patients would prefer integrated screen accessibility, however some patients need accommodations beyond integrated screen accessibility.