deafness forum of australia

POSITION STATEMENT

TITLE: COMMUNICATION ACCESS – EVENTS AND MEETINGS IN VENUES AND MEETING ROOMS

ISSUE:

Most venues and meeting rooms provide inadequate communication access facilities for use by participants who are Deaf or hearing impaired in events and meetings.

All people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment have the same right to access facilities as do people with hearing. Therefore, if a venue provides facilities to amplify sound, uses sounds to alert venue users to anything, or provides equipment requiring the use of hearing (such as telephones) for use in the venue, then they should provide parallel facilities that enable Deaf and hearing impaired people to hear (or see) the sounds. If Deaf and hearing impaired people are to participate in events and meetings, they will also need those parallel facilities in venues and meeting rooms not equipped with sound amplification. If a venue does not provide necessary facilities then the event or meeting organisers should do so. Failure to provide equitable access to such facilities means the person who is Deaf or has a hearing impairment is discriminated against. It is illegal to discriminate against people on the basis of their hearing/deafness disability. If there are legislative provisions to provide particular facilities, such as fire alarms, then again those facilities must be accessible to all.

It is possible to provide communication access through the provision of the right equipment. For example, it is possible to purchase or hire hearing augmentation systems that parallel the function of public address systems. It is possible to purchase Teletext-enabled TV sets so that captions may be displayed. It is possible to purchase telephones with volume control, and portable telephone amplifiers and couplers. It is possible to purchase smoke alarms and a range of other devices that attract attention via flashing lights or vibrations rather than via sounds. A range of affordable solutions exists.

There is no valid reason why operators of venues and meeting rooms cannot provide adequate communication access for all users who need it.

POSITION:

That, regardless of whether or not there are particular legislative requirements:

1. All venues or meeting rooms should have appropriate means in place to ensure that all Deaf or hearing impaired venue users will be alerted to any danger (e.g. fire, bomb threat), and to any evacuation drill or system test, within the premises at the same time as all other venue users. Appropriate means for fire alerts might be alarms with flashing lights and portable vibration pagers.

2. All venues or meeting rooms should provide (as required by participants in functions or meetings – including participants in staff workplace meetings):

- Functioning assistive listening systems (ALS), such as Induction Loop (IL), Frequency Modulated (FM), or Infrared (IR) systems, to enable all participants who need ALS to clearly hear speakers and other participants without reverberation or background noise, and for all participants using the provided ALS:

  a) stetoclip or light weight headphones (for participants without telecoils or without hearing aids) and
  b) inductive neck loops (for participants with telecoils). (Receivers with inductive neck loops are not required where IL covers the area.)

- Real-time captioning systems to enable all participants who need such systems to follow what all speakers and participants say.

- Auslan interpreters to enable Deaf participants who need such interpreters to follow what is said by all speakers and participants and to contribute to the events themselves.

- Access to captioning on television sets and video display facilities being used for an event or meeting.

- Where telephones (including payphones) are provided for users of venues or meeting rooms:

  - voice telephones should have:
  a) built-in or clip-on amplifiers (minimum of 20dB gain compared to a standard telephone as defined by Telecommunications legislation) and
  b) telecoil couplers (minimum field strength of 100mA/m) and
  c) flashing lights to alert the user to the fact that the telephone is ringing

  - text facility using Baudot 50 (such as TTYs) compatible with TTYs complying with EIA/TIA-825, and compatible with the National Relay Service. In addition, flashing lights shall be provided to alert the user to the fact that the text telephone is ringing.

3. All venue operators should implement:

- Ongoing maintenance and checking of all communication access equipment and procedures.

- Promote the existence of installed communication access facilities to all venue users (and potential users) by in-house signage, Website information, and venue directory listings (and, ideally, other forms of promotion such as advertising, etc.). Signage should encourage users to make their needs known. Website

information should encourage potential users to make their needs known when making reservations. All staff should be encouraged to identify their needs.

- Use the International Symbol for Deafness where appropriate to identify:
  - the existence of hearing (communication) access
  - the types of system available
  - which areas are covered by the system
  - where to obtain receivers and attachments needed to use a system

4. All event or meeting organisers should ascertain the needs of participants and ensure they are met.

5. All staff and other users of any venues or meeting rooms should make their specific communication access needs known to the venue providers if they expect them to be met. This may occur at the time of venue booking or during venue use. (This does not remove the obligation of the venue provider to make necessary provisions, particularly as use of venues may include events where participants do not register in advance, e.g. some expos, trade shows, etc.)

Explanations:

1. People with telecoils in their hearing aids need telecoil couplers for telephone access. They are built in to some telephones. Many phones that are fitted with telecoils are of insufficient strength.

2. People without telecoils in their hearing aids (or without hearing aids at all) need built-in or clip-on amplifiers for telephone access.

3. Adequate volume control for the majority of hearing impaired people is 20 dB gain compared to a standard telephone as defined by telecommunications legislation.

4. Telephones with the 20dB gain usually have built in telecoils of sufficient strength, and do not require clip-on amplifiers or clip-on telecoil couplers.

5. Wherever flashing lights are used to alert people, they must be visible from all parts of a venue or meeting room.

COSTS OF POSITION:

The costs of implementing this position statement will vary depending on the size of the venue or meeting room, the solutions chosen by the venue operator and their purchasing power.

RESEARCH BASIS:

The availability of the range of communication access facilities referred to in the position statement is known. A large percentage of respondents to a Hearing Access

Standards Project survey conducted by the Deafness Forum in 2003 identified needs for all of the facilities referred to in this Position Statement.

APPROVED: Board - October 2003.

REVIEWED: CEO - November 2004, Board - March 2005.

DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW: No further review yet scheduled.