



Wes Moore | Governor

Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor

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October 24, 2025

**To:** Usherla DeBerry, Ed.S., Director, Governor's Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing

**From:** Maryland Department of Aging

**Re:** Request for Information Regarding Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Older Adults

We are writing in response to your recent inquiry with respect to data, programs, services, and funding at the Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) related to deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing (DDBHH) communities. The majority of MDOA program delivery does not occur at MDOA, but at the local level through designated Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) which are all housed in county governments and nonprofits. Although this population is served throughout our network, it is not a demographic that is documented regularly due to the lack of requirements to do so in our significant federally-funded work. Similarly, services provided to the DDBHH community are not standalone services, instead they are a part of or derived from a multitude of programs, which makes tracking data, specifically data related to the amount spent on DDBHH services, challenging. Please see the data and information below regarding services provided by the aging network and future plans to improve accessibility and service utilization for this population.

**Maryland Access Point Referrals:** 6,908 referrals for assistive technology in FY25

While Maryland Access Point (MAP) does not collect any data specific to this population, these assistive technology interactions often include technology support for visual/hearing impairments, among other non-visual/hearing-related equipment.

**Senior Care Grant Program:** The Senior Care Grant Program received 27 requests in Fiscal Year 2025 for assistance with devices to support DDBHH needs.

In the first quarter of FY26 (July-September 2025), 2 additional requests were received. These needs were successfully met through the use of Senior Care's gap-filling funds.

In addition to these funds, constituents seeking support are referred to several resources, including the Starkey Foundation, various charitable organizations, the Lions Club, the Maryland

Department of Disabilities' Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MDTAP), or local emergency grants.

Please note that the program does not track expenses per client based on ability status. Therefore, the exact amount spent specifically on DDBHH older adults is not a readily available data point.

**Hearing Screenings:** Offered by 8 senior centers regularly while other senior centers offer hearing screenings when hosting health fairs.

**Hard of Hearing (HOH) Seminars:** AAA's offer healthy living seminars which include HOH topics.

**Examples of Regional Vision and Hearing-Related Services and Supports (from National Family Caregiver Support Program representatives):**

- **Frederick County:**  
Offers ASL interpretation and communication support across programs, including through contracted providers and for events like Veterans' Appreciation Day. Refers clients to local nonprofits such as the Center for Independent Living (Freedom Center) for hearing aids and assistive devices.
  - Cost:
    - FY24 - \$2,341.00
    - FY25 - \$12,489.45
- **Montgomery County:**  
Access HEARS grant which provides over-the-counter hearing aids and personal sound amplifiers. The Fire Department provides specialized smoke alarms (with neon lights and bed shakers) for deaf/hard of hearing residents.
- **Charles County:**  
Willing to fund hearing aids and assistive devices (e.g., pocket talkers) through Senior Care, the National Family Caregiver Support Program, or Older Americans Act-Title IIIB funds, though recent requests have been limited. Senior centers have hosted audiologists in the past for hearing exams.
- **Prince George's County:**  
While disability-specific data is not tracked, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) provides guidance on Medicare Advantage plans that cover hearing services and connect residents with local screening resources. SHIP received 20 related inquiries in the past 6 months. Referrals are made to resources including Lion's Club and Earcoustic.

- **Howard County:**

Hosts a sign language class at the Ellicott City 50+ Center. Howard County also has audio equipment installed at all 50+ Centers that allows for someone who is hard of hearing to utilize a hearing assistance device. Lastly, hearing screenings are held regularly at the Bain 50+ Center.

**Additional work related to this population:**

- MDOA is assisting the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by providing staff to act as Interim Chair of Maryland Advisory Council on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.
- MDOA and the Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing successfully requested Johns Hopkins update outdated (Jan. 6, 2016) prevalence reporting for the number of deaf and hard of hearing in Maryland.
- Senior Call-Check and Social Connections Program: This program is being restructured as a result of successful departmental legislation, SB223/HB158 in 2025. This will expand the service to more types of communications beyond audio telephone calls. The bill confirms integration with the Telecommunications Access of Maryland (TAM) Program as a partner for outreach and the provision of telecommunications access equipment. An important goal with this legislation was to make this program more accessible to anyone over the age of 60 that is deaf, hearing impaired or with any form of hearing impairment, those with limited English proficiency, or anyone else that may struggle with accessing the current audio telephone message service. We anticipate that additional virtual, web, and text-based communications will be offered. The service will maintain its regular check on participant's personal welfare and, for the first time, be geared at more purposeful social engagement to reduce social isolation. This presents the opportunity for improved data collection related to the DDBHH population.
- To support the goal of making all MDOA websites accessible in 2025-2026, the department hired a Digital Content Manager with extensive experience in accessibility and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). In collaboration with the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), MDOA has conducted accessibility scans of existing webpages and initiated corrections based on the findings. Additionally, all new projects undergo accessibility testing by DoIT experts, and MDOA actively participates in the Accessibility Community of Practice, led by Andrew Drummond.