

HEARING LOSS NOT RECOGNIZED BY STATE AGENCIES

Florida is the fourth largest state in the U.S. and has the second highest percentage of population who are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind.

Currently in Florida: There is no single state program responsible for deaf and hard of hearing issues and services. However, there is one entity advocating for us, the hearing impaired; The Florida Coordinating Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Why is it important to have a Council representing people with hearing loss?

Nearly 3 million Floridians are deaf or hard of hearing - impacting countless others whose lives are affected by family members with hearing loss. There is a prevailing assumption that state funded agencies serving people with all disabilities equally serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

This is NOT the case. Instead, persons with hearing loss are frequently shunted between agencies or to not-for-profit Deaf Service Centers that are not funded to provide intensive ongoing social services. Hearing loss is an invisible disability, and the needs of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing are not being recognized or adequately addressed.

A harsh contrast: Many persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind require supports and services to be fully independent and productive citizens. It is estimated that there are approximately five times as many Florida citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing (16% of population) compared to the number of persons who are blind or visually impaired (3%). Expenditures by the state to provide needed services to persons who are developmentally disabled, blind or visually impaired, or deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind vary enormously.

COMPARISON OF FUNDING RESOURCES FOR THREE (3) DISABILITY GROUPS
(Governor's Recommendations for FY 2006-07)

Persons with Developmental Disabilities	Persons who are Blind/Visually Impaired	Persons who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing
General revenue \$472,704,923	General revenue \$13,945,691	General revenue \$0
Trust Funds \$658,718,688	Federal Funding Sources \$35,164,033	Funds carved from the from the Department of Health budget \$250,000
Total of funds included \$1,131,423,611	Total of funds included \$49,109,724	Total of expenditures identified \$250,000

The purpose of the contrast in this is NOT to imply that any of the funding used to meet the needs of citizens who are blind, visually impaired, deaf-blind or individuals who have developmental disabilities is unnecessary or that this funding should be diverted. The FCCDH exists to work to counteract this vast disparity in funding and to level the playing field for all disabilities including the deaf and hard of hearing.