



Making Workplaces Accessible for D/deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees

A guide for employers in British Columbia



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In this guide

You will learn:

- 1 Common employment barriers faced by DHH workers
- 2 Myths and misconceptions about DHH workers – and how to undo them
- 3 The biggest challenges BC employers face hiring and retaining DHH workers – and how to overcome them

At the end, you can find a non-exhaustive directory of resources for BC employers to help:

- Find and recruit DHH jobseekers
- Locate ASL Interpreters and other communication accessibility services, like captioning
- Access further learning and training



Overview

Workplaces work better when everyone can participate. It starts with accessibility: the practice of ensuring everyone can use, navigate, and interact with the workplace environment.



Did you know that an estimated 5 to 9% people in Canada are D/deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH)? ^{[1][2]} Even though that includes nearly one in ten people, 41% of employers have never hired a DHH employee.

In 2025, CCRW's research team investigated the employment inequities faced by DHH workers, and how employers can be part of the solution. We surveyed nearly 200 BC-based employers in small, medium, and large organizations, in industries ranging from construction and manufacturing, retail trade, healthcare and social assistance, finance and real estate, and many more.

We also held interviews and focus groups with DHH jobseekers, employers, and ASL interpreters.

This guide shares what we learned about what employers need in order to successfully hire and retain DHH workers. We created it for employers who want to make their workplaces accessible and inclusive for their current and future DHH employees.



Key Terms

The D/deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community is diverse. Everyone is different in terms of how and when they became D/deaf or Hard of Hearing, their level of hearing, and how they communicate.

The acronym ‘DHH’ includes people who are:

Deaf, deaf, and deafened (or late-deafened):

people who cannot hear or have profound hearing loss.

- The word Deaf (with a capital ‘D’) is usually used by people who identify as culturally Deaf.
- The word deaf (with a lowercase ‘d’) is a term that may be used by anyone who cannot hear or has very low hearing. Similarly, deafened is a term that usually refers to people who became deaf later in life.

DeafBlind (or Deaf-Blind):

people who have hearing loss and sight loss.

Hard of Hearing:

people with hearing loss. Hard of Hearing people may have different levels of hearing, from mild to significant hearing loss.

Some people who are Deaf, deaf, DeafBlind, or Hard of Hearing may use different words to describe themselves. The best way to know what term someone prefers is to ask and listen. If you’re unsure, don’t assume — just ask.

*Note: Be aware that ‘hearing impaired’ is considered outdated.

This term may still be used in media and many workplaces; however, it is not acceptable to most DHH persons because 1) it frames being D/deaf or Hard of Hearing as a defect, and 2) it groups all DHH persons under one label, overlooking their different needs and levels of hearing.

Sign languages like American Sign Language (ASL)

are languages that are communicated via body movements like hand gestures. Not everyone who is DHH uses sign language, but many D/deaf people and some Hard of Hearing people do.

ASL Interpreters

are professionals who translate ASL to spoken language and vice versa.

Video Relay Services (VRS)

connect people with sign language interpreters via video communications to facilitate telephone calls.

Captioning

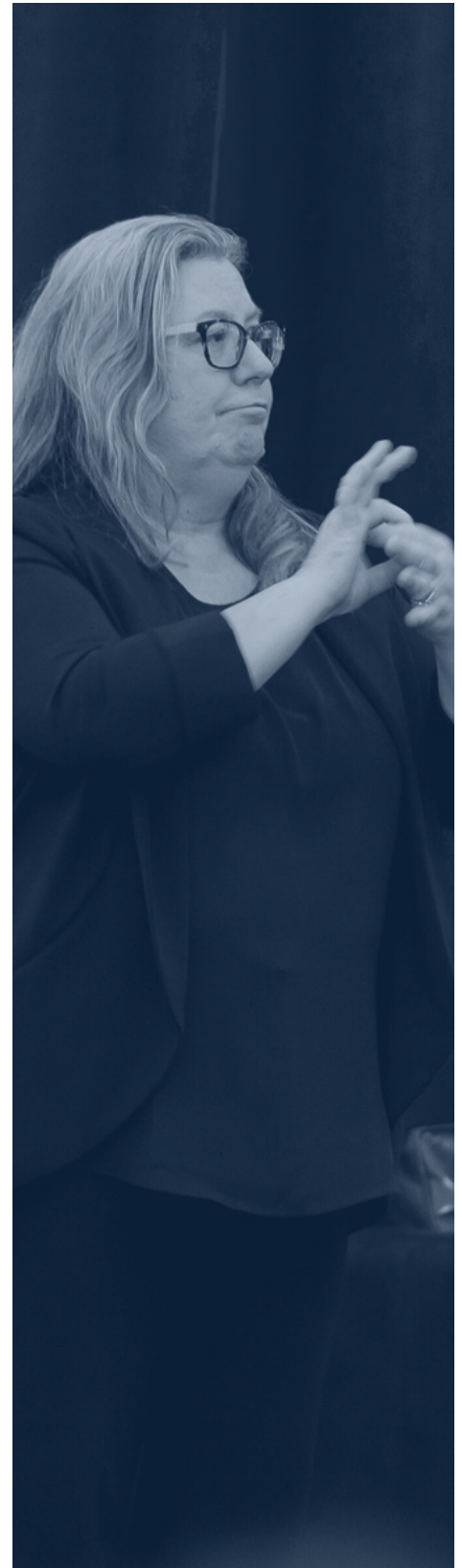
involves converting audio content into text. Captions can be recorded in advance (such as on a pre-recorded webinar), auto generated (e.g., in software like Zoom), or created in real time (e.g., Communication Access Realtime Translation services/CART).

Speech-reading, or lip-reading

involves understanding spoken communication by interpreting the speaker's mouth and face movements.

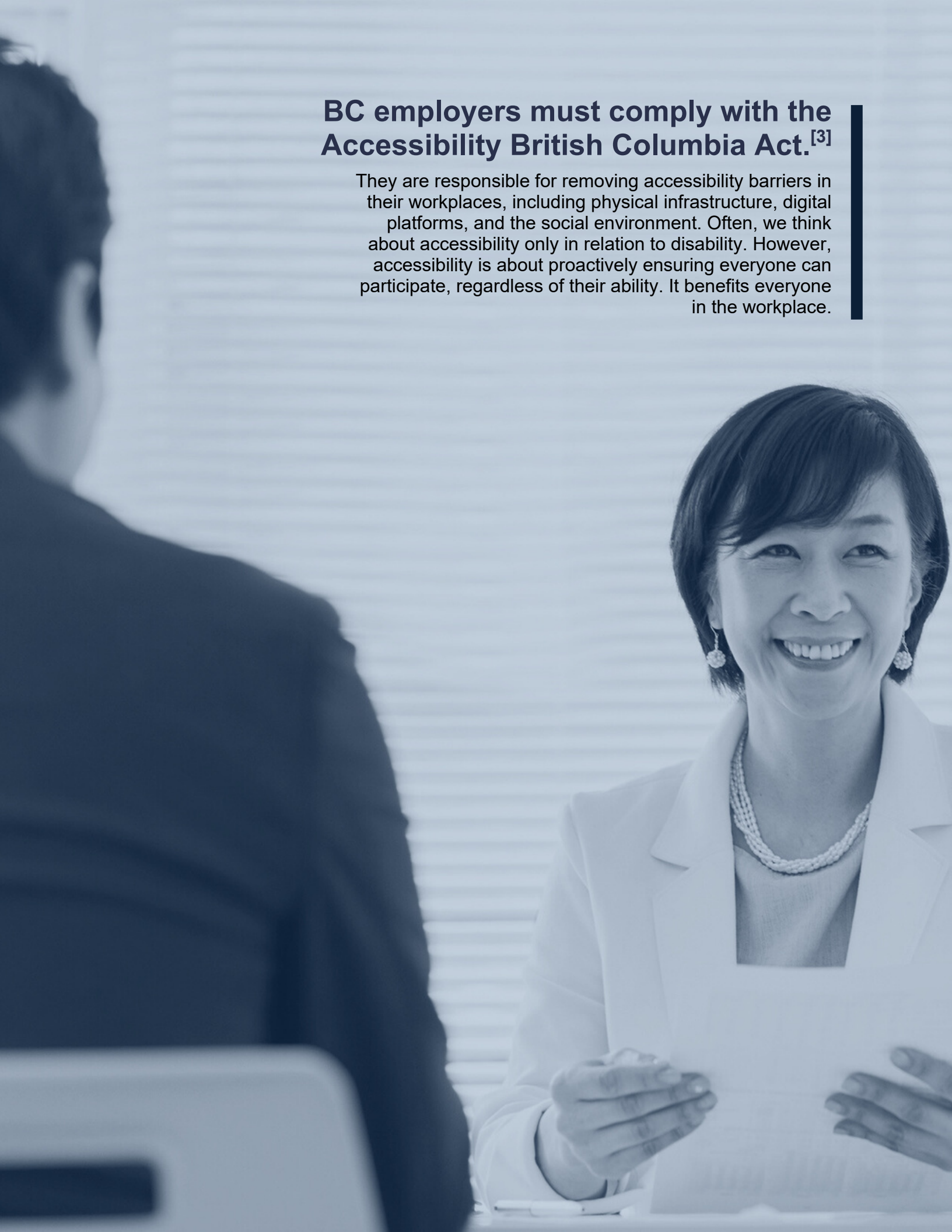
Text-to-speech software

such as Natural Reader, Speechify, and NVDA (Braille compatible) convert text to auditory speech.



BC employers must comply with the Accessibility British Columbia Act.^[3]

They are responsible for removing accessibility barriers in their workplaces, including physical infrastructure, digital platforms, and the social environment. Often, we think about accessibility only in relation to disability. However, accessibility is about proactively ensuring everyone can participate, regardless of their ability. It benefits everyone in the workplace.





DHH Workers

DHH people are employed at lower rates than hearing people. For DHH people with disabilities, as well as young DHH workers and those who are gender or racial minorities, employment barriers – like unemployment, underemployment, and income disparities – are multiplied.

Lack of access to accommodations

Many DHH workers encountered employers who were reluctant or denied providing accommodations. Some told us that employers and colleagues lacked understanding for requests like asking others to speak louder.

Inaccessible technology and infrastructure

High-noise workplaces and poorly designed acoustic environments can be barriers for Hard of Hearing workers. Background noise that seems minor to a hearing person can be disruptive or overwhelming for a Hard of Hearing person.

Lack of available jobs

DHH workers in our research were frustrated by a lack of jobs that matched their skills, salary expectations, and accessibility needs. Many were overqualified for available roles. At the same time, many entry-level roles had inaccessible job requirements.

Communication barriers

Many Deaf workers found that employers expected high-level English fluency – even if ASL was the worker’s first language. Hard of Hearing workers told us how they needed to frequently remind coworkers to speak up or to face them directly.

Bias and discrimination

Discrimination isn’t always obvious. Covert discrimination, like saying someone is ‘not a good fit’ or subtly excluding them from conversations, can lead to rejected applications or being overlooked for promotions.

“

I think the code word is that ‘you're not a good fit for our team’.” -DHH Jobseeker



Employers

Most employers we surveyed were open to hiring a DHH person – only 13% said they didn't intend to. But they faced challenges to recruiting and hiring DHH workers.

Employers' 5 biggest challenges were that they were:

- 1 Not sure how to communicate with DHH people
- 2 Not sure how to accommodate DHH employees
- 3 Uncertain about DHH workers' abilities
- 4 Lacking resources to train or support DHH employees
- 5 Concerned about safety issues

For very small organizations (<50 employees), a lack of applications from DHH jobseekers was also a major barrier.

Next, we address the myths and misconceptions behind some of these challenges. Then we share best practices and resources for employers looking to find, hire, support, and retain DHH employees.



Myth 1

It's too difficult to communicate with DHH employees.

Reality: With the right support, it is not difficult at all for a hearing person and DHH person to communicate.

If an applicant or employee discloses that they are DHH, they will likely tell you exactly what they need to facilitate communication (e.g., an interpreter, captions, etc.). In addition to procuring these services (learn more in the Best Practices and Resources sections), familiarize yourself with how to communicate respectfully with DHH persons, as well as with interpreters. For example, you should always speak directly to the D/deaf person, not to the interpreter.

Sometimes, this myth is based in discomfort. You might worry: “what if I do something wrong?” The best way to combat this discomfort is knowledge and practice. To help, we’ve compiled a list of resources for further learning at the end of this guide.

Myth 2

DHH workers are not as capable, reliable, or qualified.

Reality: DHH workers are as capable and competent as hearing workers. In fact, many DHH workers struggle to find employment because they are overqualified for available positions – and because many workplaces aren’t accessible.

Sometimes, employers believe low English skills mean low literacy. However, for many D/deaf people, ASL (or another sign language) is their first language – not English – and they may be highly effective communicators in ASL. This doesn’t indicate a lack of competency, but a lack of recognition of sign languages as valid forms of communication.

Myth 3

Having an ASL Interpreter is all you need to make the workplace accessible for DHH employees.

Reality: Not every DHH person uses ASL. And for those who do, having an Interpreter doesn't necessarily mean the workplace is accessible.

Someone may use sign language, spoken language, techniques like speech-reading, or a combination of many communication modes. They may require an ASL interpreter in the workplace, or they may not. Don't make assumptions – instead, ask an applicant or employee what they need, regardless of how they identify.

Myth 4

Employing a DHH worker is a safety risk.

Reality: Employing a DHH worker is only a safety risk if employers don't make the workplace safe.

For example, a D/deaf worker may be unable to hear an audible fire alarm. As an employer, you are responsible for updating your safety protocols and devices to ensure that they are effective for all employees. Visual and vibrational alarms are examples of alternatives to auditory-only systems.

For roles where being able to hear is necessary to complete essential job requirements, or where being unable to hear would pose an unavoidable risk, remember that accommodations can include adjusting responsibilities.



For example, in a manufacturing facility where identifying machinery malfunctions relies on audible cues, an employer could reassign this particular responsibility to another team member, and instead assign a D/deaf team member to conducting quality assurance, overseeing inventory management, or other tasks.

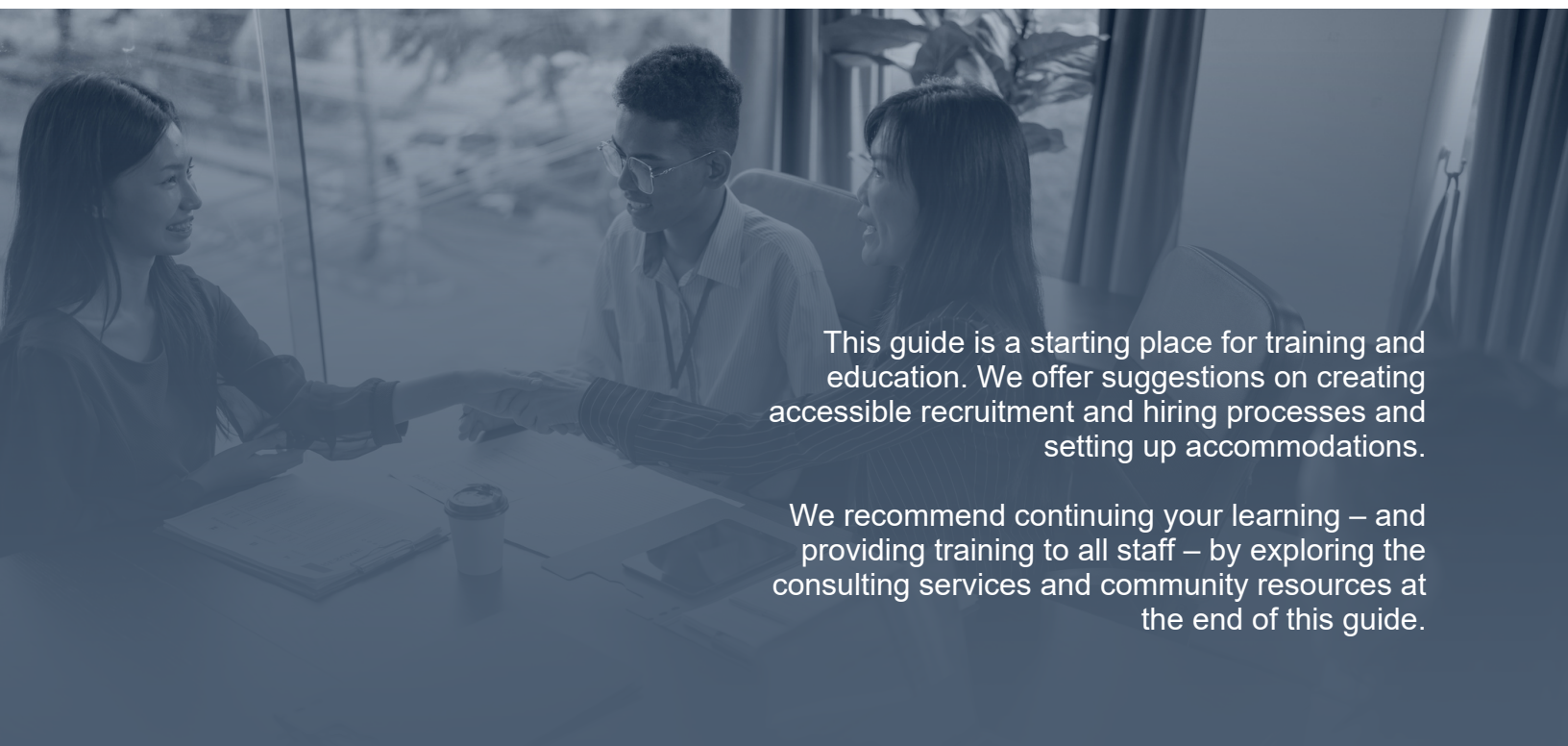


Best Practices

According to nearly 200 BC employers, the top 3 most helpful resources for hiring DHH workers would be:

1	2	3
Staff training and education	Resources, guides, or tools for recruiting DHH workers	Help setting up workplace accommodations

For employers with past experience hiring DHH workers, #3 was “Connections to skilled DHH applicants.”



This guide is a starting place for training and education. We offer suggestions on creating accessible recruitment and hiring processes and setting up accommodations.

We recommend continuing your learning – and providing training to all staff – by exploring the consulting services and community resources at the end of this guide.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing large black headphones and a grey hoodie, is sitting at a desk and typing on a laptop. The desk is cluttered with a black cup, a white mug, a small framed picture, and a desk lamp. In the background, there is a bulletin board with various photos and a poster that reads "THE FUTURE IS NOW".

DHH jobseekers can face barriers before even applying to your job posting

Job postings and recruitment systems are usually designed based on spoken-language norms. They can exclude people who use sign language or rely on visual communication.



Recruitment & Hiring

Barrier	Solution
Job postings don't mention accessibility or accommodations.	Communicate your policy on accommodations clearly and directly. DHH jobseekers are more likely to apply when postings explicitly communicate your policy on accommodations.
Job postings aren't reaching DHH applicants.	Share postings directly with DHH-focused community organizations. Participate in job fairs hosted by DHH organizations.
Requirements prioritize communication method rather than essential job skills.	Avoid vague requirements like 'strong communication skills', which can be interpreted subjectively and introduce bias.
Inaccessible online platforms (e.g., relying on audio prompts, assessments, or CAPTCHA).	Provide multiple formats, including text-based alternatives, captioned audio, and visual indicators. As a best practice, provide sign language video.
Written application requirements or assessments that rely on narrow definitions of literacy.	Provide plain-language versions of all written materials. Provide ASL Interpretation for those who need it. Accept application submissions in multiple modes. Recorded video responses allow applicants to communicate in sign language.



Interviews

Barrier

Solution

Relying on spoken communication and auditory cues.

Make your policy on accommodations clear to interviewees and provide them if requested, such as interpreting or live captioning.

Not allowing enough time.

Schedule longer interviews with DHH applicants. If an interpreter will be present, double the interview time. Booking enough time ensures DHH persons have the same opportunity as hearing persons to listen, process, and respond.

Using subjective evaluation criteria, like 'fit', or evaluating applicants based on communication style instead of job-related competencies.

Audit your interview process. Use structured questions focused on essential job skills. Establish objective criteria. Train interviewers on the process.

Don't evaluate speech patterns, accents, or communication style.

Don't evaluate 'fit'. Norms around hearing status can exclude DHH applicants.



DHH workers can encounter ongoing communication barriers that affect their safety, productivity, and inclusion.

Many workplaces rely on auditory-only communication for meetings, training, safety alerts, and informal interactions. This can expose DHH workers to risk, exclude them from critical information, and limit team-building opportunities.



In the workplace

Barrier	Solution
Auditory-only safety alerts, meetings, and training.	Assistive technologies, like visual or vibrational alert systems, are essential. Don't assume personal devices like hearing aids or cochlear implants eliminate the need for accessible systems. Involve DHH employees in decisions about safety protocols.
Assuming accommodation is a one-time occurrence.	Review accommodation plans regularly. Ask employees if they are satisfied with accommodations and if their needs are fully met. Some employees will need ongoing accommodations throughout their tenure. Learn how to procure and work effectively with service providers.
Excluding DHH persons from informal communication and team-building activities.	Common mistakes like talking over others, turning away, or interrupting can make it challenging for DHH employees to participate in conversations. Train all staff on respectful communication practices. Book interpreters for informal parts of work – like lunch breaks – as well as formal meetings.
Workplace policies that overlook or undermine communication strategies used by DHH employees.	DHH employees may use different strategies, like speech-reading, phone apps, or asking trusted team members for help. Blanket policies, like 'no phones allowed', can create barriers. Be flexible and work with employees to ensure their needs are met.



Across the Employment Lifecycle

Barrier

Solution

Limited access to services like ASL Interpreting and captioners.

Interpreter and live captioner availability can be limited, especially on short notice or in rural regions. Plan in advance – booking may require 2+ weeks of lead time. Consider remote interpreting when appropriate.

Not working effectively with service providers, like ASL interpreters and captioners.

Share prep materials in advance, such as tech set-up info and key terminology. Providers will usually tell you how far in advance they need these materials.

Provide time before the interview for interpreters and interviewees to get to know each other.

Inaccessible environments.

Good lighting is needed to see interpreters and captions. Minimize background noise. Avoid distracting backgrounds and clothing. Ensure speakers and interpreters are positioned for best visibility.

Excluding DHH persons from decision-making.

Involve DHH employees in designing policies that impact them. Consult DHH-led organizations and DHH employees to establish accessibility plans. Collect ongoing feedback.

Unsafe workplace culture.

Inclusion must be fostered at all levels of an organization. Invest in training for all staff to build understanding of D/deafness, hearing loss, and communication accessibility.



Resources

**This list is a starting point
for BC employers looking to find
communication and accessibility services,
recruit qualified DHH jobseekers,
and access education and learning.**



ASL Interpreters

ASL Interpreters can support in-person, hybrid, or virtual interviews, onboarding, trainings, meetings, conferences and presentations, and more. They can also record ASL versions of documents or videos. Some Interpreters are self-employed, and others work for organizations.

Providers in BC include:

[Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility](#)

[Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre](#)

[Asign](#)

[Still Interpreting](#)

Organizations with searchable directories:

[West Coast Association of Visual Language Interpreters \(WAVLI\)](#): the professional association representing interpreters in BC.

[Canadian Association of Sign Language Interpreters \(CASLI\)](#): the professional body for interpreters in Canada.



DeafBlind Intervenor

Intervenor convey auditory and visual information to DeafBlind persons.

Providers include:

[Wavefront Centre for
Communication Accessibility](#)

[CNIB Deafblind Community
Services](#)



Captioning

Live captioning is preferred over auto-generated captions.

CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) provides live captioning for meetings, training, events, and more. CART providers and Captioned telephone service in BC include:

[Wavefront Centre for
Communication Accessibility](#)

[Island Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Centre](#)

[SRC Canada VRS
Convo Canada](#)

[Accurate Realtime Inc.](#)



Recruiting DHH Jobseekers

Few applications from DHH jobseekers are often due to inaccessible recruitment processes and/or limited connections with the DHH community. Working with community organizations is one of the most effective ways to address this.

Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility offers employment programs for DHH job seekers

Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre provides employment services to DHH jobseekers.

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) Surrey office provides employer support, job matching, & accommodation guidance for DHH workers & workers with disabilities.

BC Association of the Deaf supports Deaf community engagement and can assist employers in connecting with Deaf networks in BC.



Further Learning

Training improves communication, builds confidence and trust, and helps foster psychologically safe workplaces.

Employer education, training, and consulting

Wavefront Centre for Communication Accessibility provides customized workplace training and consulting.

Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre supports employers on Vancouver Island & in the Gulf Islands by providing information & support on making workplaces more accessible for DHH employees.

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) provides employer training and inclusive hiring support.

Other resources, guides, and quick tips:

The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes provides a guide on communicating with D/deaf people that is not focused exclusively on students/youth.

The Deaf-Hearing Communication Centre has a brief online guide with tips for effective communication between DHH and hearing persons.

The World Institute on Disability has a resource about DHH etiquette and unpacking myths and misconceptions.

The Canadian Association for the Deaf has a page about D/deaf terminology.

Academic Communication Equity BC (ACE-BC) has an online resource page, and can provide local support and context.



References

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- [2] Canadian Association of the Deaf. (2015, July 3). Statistics on Deaf Canadians.
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- [3] Accessible British Columbia Act, SBC 2021, c 19