

Trends

No Data Available

Legend:

↑ Increase, ↓ Decrease, ↔ Steady

Key Performance Areas

No Data Available

Productivity

No Data Available

Legend:

↑ Improving, ↓ Worsening,

↔ Maintaining

For more information on administrative key, and productivity measures, go to www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/agencylevel/index.cfm

Background & History

The programs and services of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), authorized in Chapter 13 of Title 51.5 of the Code of Virginia, ensure that the agency's focus remains on communications access for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech-impaired. VDDHH works with consumers, state and local agencies, and the private sector to achieve consistent and effective communication through training, technology and through the provision of qualified sign language interpreters.

Primary Product & Services

VDDHH fulfills its mission and meets the needs of consumers and state agencies through the provision of the following programs and services:

Interpreter Programs, including the Interpreter Service Program (ISP), coordinating sign language interpreters and real-time captioning (CART) for state agencies and Virginia courts; The Directory of Qualified Interpreters, providing direct access to qualified interpreters across the state; and; The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS), offering diagnostic skills assessments to sign language interpreters.

The Technology Assistance Program (TAP), providing telecommunications-related equipment to qualified applicants who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired.

Outreach Services, available statewide through staff and contracted providers offering training, information and referral, technical assistance and individual problem resolution as well as direct access to TAP.

Virginia Relay oversight, ensuring effective and efficient operation of Telecommunications Relay Services in the Commonwealth. Virginia Relay is a federally-mandated telecommunications relay service for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, Deafblind, or speech disabled. It allows these individuals to use specialized telecommunication devices or features to communicate with standard telephone users. There is no cost associated with the service with the exception of long-distance charges.

Customer Base

VDDHH is aware of several trends which impact both the make-up of our customer base and our ability to provide coverage for each customer group. The agency expects to continue to see growth in the number of older Virginians who experience hearing loss seeking services. This customer base is increasingly "tech savvy," and the agency will need to continually update the technology in our programs to meet the needs of this group. This trend also increases the percentage of customers we serve who are hard of hearing, which continues the shift the agency has experienced over the past ten years towards a broader customer base than the Deaf Community. In addition, this customer group actively seeks assistance from the agency in identifying financial aid resources for the purchase of hearing aids.

Culturally Deaf Virginians (those who are native signers of American Sign Language, from Deaf Families or with strong ties to the Deaf Community) comprise a key customer group as well. This customer group looks to VDDHH to be a highly-visible agency on issues affecting communications access, particularly in state agencies and the highest levels of Virginia Government.

Another segment of the population that will likely seek our services is the growing number of veterans. As hearing loss is the most prevalent disability of returning armed forces personnel, VDDHH is very likely to see an increase in service requests from these returning soldiers and has initiated efforts to meet the needs.

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VDDHH also recognizes sign language interpreters as a key customer group as these individuals seek both credentials and networking opportunities from the agency.

State agencies and Virginia courts are yet another critical customer group, seeking both direct services (specifically interpreter services) and consultative services (staff training and technical assistance in meeting the needs of Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing and speech impaired.)

Customer Listing

No Data Available

Key Agency Statistics

The following statistics highlight the extensive efforts of VDDHH to maximize the impact of services. In most cases, these statistics remain stable, however, it must be noted that, as access to high-speed internet expands, the number of traditional relay calls will show a decline as callers turn to internet-based relay services which are unreported to VDDHH.

Finances

Funding for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) is primarily composed of general and special revenue funds. General funds support the outreach, interpreter, and administrative programs of the agency. The remaining 92% of total appropriations are special funds for the provision and oversight of the federally-mandated telecommunications relay service as well as the related equipment distribution program. The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening program receives an annual \$100,000 in financial support from a federal special education grant and also receives a small annual special fund appropriation for the receipt and expenditure of candidate registration fees.

Fund Sources

No Data Available

Revenue Summary Statement

VDDHH receives funds collected from the Communications Sales and Use Tax in order to maintain contracts for telecommunications relay services in the Commonwealth and to provide telecommunications related equipment to qualified applicants through the Technology Assistance Program (TAP). Additional revenue for Miscellaneous services is collected from candidate fees for participation in the Virginia Quality Assurance Program. These fees cover only a portion of the actual cost of administration of the assessments.

Key Risk Factors

VDDHH faces a number of challenges which may limit our ability to satisfy expectations and achieve our mission.

One growing concern is the number of VDDHH staff who are at or near retirement eligibility. The agency is fortunate to have an experienced staff with excellent credentials but attention must be given to developing staff resources to replace those who will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

Consumer expectations of the agency remain high. As advances in technology enhance the opportunities for communications access, both our traditional customer base (including culturally Deaf Virginians) and emerging customer groups (aging Baby Boomers who are technologically savvy and returning veterans who experience service-related hearing loss) will look to VDDHH to provide access to those technologies.

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In the Interpreter Services Program, as more freelance and private sector opportunities open up (the result of video relay and remote interpreting services) paying competitive salaries with benefits, VDDHH is faced with fewer interpreters who choose to contract with the agency. This limits our ability to fill requests from courts or state agencies that have joined on to our contract. In addition, the agency must be prepared to embrace and promote the provision of services through remote interpreting as an optional delivery modality.

Finally, and significantly, there continues to be a lack of general awareness about the unique service needs, particularly communications access for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities look to VDDHH to be both a model of access and a promoter of the same. This lack of general awareness is not limited to the private sector. State agencies are often unprepared to serve members of the public who are deaf or hard of hearing, both because of a lack of communications access and a deeper lack of understanding of the unique service needs of these consumers. The risk here is increased by reduced funding for the Outreach program. As Outreach contractors are forced to seek funding from additional resources, it can be expected that their focus on the specific issues identified by VDDHH will be limited.

Performance Highlights

VDDHH has one key performance measure which relates to the critical communication access issue of the provision of sign language interpreters for state agencies and Virginia courts. The bar is set high for this measure. The agency consistently fills more than 98% of all requests, though, in some cases, requests are rescheduled to ensure coverage. To ensure that such a high fill-rate is achieved, the agency actively recruits qualified interpreters to join the contract and maintains contact with non-contracted interpreters as well. In 2013, a new contract for interpreter services will be issued which will include a rate differential for services provided in localities in Northern Virginia. This should result in an increased number of contracted interpreters in that area who will accept assignments from VDDHH.

Another notable highlight includes the continued success in the timely provision of results for Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Performance Assessments. As established in regulations, results should be provided within 90 working days of the test date. For the past several years, the average time from assessment date to results has been under 75 working days. To ensure this level of performance, the agency monitors the performance of the contracted raters who complete the scoring on the assessments and provides re-standardization training as indicated.

In the Technology Service Area, two measures are indicative of the Virginia Relay continues to meet or exceed Federal standards for answer rate, with 99.99% of calls answered in less than 10 seconds. In addition, consumers who receive equipment through the agency's Technology Assistance Program (TAP) routinely report a high level of satisfaction with the services received.

Performance Measures

Management Discussion & Analysis

General Information about the Ongoing Status of the Agency

The focus for VDDHH programs and services must remain on communications access. The following initiatives over the next biennium will be critical to the agency's success:

Succession planning must continue in earnest.

As part of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, the Federal Communications Commission recently established a two-year national equipment distribution program to be administered by states to serve citizens who are deaf-blind. Partnering with the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired and the Helen Keller National Center's Richmond office, VDDHH will receive up to \$225,000 in reimbursable funding for the administration of the new program, now known as iCanConnect.

In October 2012, VDDHH changed our Technology Assistance Program (TAP) guidelines to increase services to military veterans living with a hearing or speech loss. Together with the Department of Veterans Services' Wounded Warrior Program, we will work to reduce the communication barriers for Virginia veterans by allowing them to stay connected with their family, friends and employers. Initial response to the change has been extremely positive and will be coordinated with local veteran organizations.

In response to the ongoing concerns of consumers who are unable to attain communications access in health care settings, VDDHH has initiated efforts to engage the Department of Health, the Department of Health Professions and interpreters in a multi-faceted approach to increase the provision of qualified interpreters in health care in Virginia.

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To further ensure the availability of qualified interpreters in a wide range of environments, VDDHH must ensure that VOAS maintains its position as a valid and reliable assessment. To do this, the agency must proceed with the development of new materials on a regular basis.

Outreach Services must continue to seek ways to maximize access to technology and training with limited resources.

Information Technology

VDDHH is a member of the Disability Services Agency (DSA) group with IT planning coordinated by the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). In-scope IT services are provided by VITA/NG. Oversight of in-scope services and "out of scope" IT services and management are provided by IT staff located at DARS. IT projects are planned and implemented across all of the Disability Services Agencies, under the leadership of DARS. In addition to the broader IT projects, VDDHH must complete work on the transition from an Access based database in ISP to a SQL Server database.

Workforce Development

The nature of services provided by VDDHH makes it critical that the agency consider two separate sets of workforce skills. First, the agency must consider the administrative/management/technical/customer service skills necessary to do the job. These include computer skills, written and oral communication skills, office technology skills, organizational skills, and interpersonal skills. In every instance though, the agency must also consider a second set of workforce skills: those related to providing services to and working in an environment with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This skill set includes sign language skills, knowledge of deaf culture, disability-specific technology skills (e.g. Relay and TTY use). Each position in the agency is evaluated for the degree to which an individual entering that position must have this second, unique set of skills. Some positions require only minimal familiarity upon hire while others require in-depth knowledge and understanding. The agency generally experiences low turnover, however, at least 5 current employees (including the director and two of the three program managers) are eligible for full retirement. Succession planning will be an essential focus over the next two years to ensure continuity of operations. Targeted recruitment has proven helpful in identifying qualified candidates who bring the necessary skill set to the agency.

Physical Plant

VDDHH currently participates in the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) lease of office space in the Forest Office Park. This lease provides the agency with sufficient accessible space for the current needs.