



# ANNUAL REPORT

# NCDHH

Nebraska Commission  
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



# 2021





**OUR VISION**

*Access For All*

**OUR MISSION**

*We Advocate to  
Create Opportunities  
by Raising  
Awareness Through  
Collaboration*

# BOARDS & COMMITTEES

## Full Commission Board

Consists of nine members who are appointed by the Governor subject to approval by the Legislature. Statute 71-4720 requires that a majority of the Commission members who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing shall be able to express themselves through sign language. The Commission members shall include three Deaf persons, three Hard of Hearing persons and three persons who have an interest in and knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues. The Commission was created to improve the quality and coordination of existing services for deaf and hard of hearing people and development of new services when necessary.

## Mental Health Advisory Committee

A special advisory committee is appointed by the Commission. Created to ensure full access of comprehensive mental health, alcoholism, and drug abuse services are available for Nebraskans who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

## Interpreter Review Board

Created to develop guidelines and regulations for assuring competencies for sign language interpreters. Regulations were crafted and approved to include assurances that sign language interpreters have and maintain minimum levels of competency to interpret for state entities, courts, police and probation officials.

## Telecommunication Relay Service Advisory Committee

Mandated in 1990 to appoint members to serve on the Relay Advisory Committee administered by the Nebraska Public Service Commission. The Committee advises the Public Service Commission on matters related to the telecommunications relay system, the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program and its operations.

## LEAD-K Advisory Committee

Governor Ricketts signed LB 965 into law. LEAD-K stands for Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids. The bill establishes a language assessment program for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Under LB 965, an advisory committee was created. The role of the advisory committee is to compile data, identify existing resources already developed and made available for use by families, local education agencies, individual family service programs or individual education plans.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Updated Agency Strategic Plan
  - A 2021 initiative from the Full Board was to prepare, analyze and research feedback from stakeholders on updating the Agency Strategic Plan, including Mission, Vision and Goals
  - NCDHH requested suggestions and feedback from the community through surveys, virtual town hall meetings and VLOG submissions
  - Meetings were facilitated by Nebraska DAS Administrator, Serenity Kinney
  - Strategic planning is important for an agency to continue to define and update the vision and goals for the future. This process helped NCDHH stay focused on the agency mission and improve advocacy performance. The revised strategic plan can be found on the NCDHH website

- Advocacy Support for Deaf Wrestler, Paul Ruff

- NCDHH has provided support, resources and advocacy for Paul Ruff, a Deaf wrestler from Gering, Neb. Paul lost the 2021 Nebraska State Wrestling Championship due to a referee not accommodating his communication needs.
- The American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska and National Association of the Deaf released a formal statement in December 2021 on behalf of Paul, issuing a demand letter to the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA), calling on NSAA to take specific action.



- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Omaha Zoo / Scottsbluff Discovery Center
  - One of the agency's annual outreach events is to invite Nebraska families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing to the Omaha & Scottsbluff zoos to raise awareness along with fun games, information, and a Deaf-Connect story reading.

# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- CODA Movie Showing at Dundee Theater in Omaha, Neb.
  - A sold out show for folks to come out and see the premiere of the award-nominated film “CODA” – a film on a child of deaf adults (CODA) navigates through a hearing world with deaf parents
- Communication Access at Omaha Eppley Airfield
  - NCDHH Advocacy Specialist, Ashley Wulf, collaborated with Omaha Eppley Airfield officials on advocating for the need for better communication access accommodations for travelers who are deaf or hard of hearing within their facility
  - Notable enhancements include video relay service kiosks and more signage displays
- Dr. Frank Turk Excellence in Education Award for 2021 Recipient: Sue Petersen
  - The Dr. Frank Turk Excellence in Education Award is an annual recognition award for educators in the community who have made significant contributions to the improvement of education for students in Nebraska who are deaf or hard of hearing
  - Sue Petersen is a teacher of the Deaf in Ralston Public Schools and has dedicated many years to the involvement and advocacy of students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Peterson is known for her encouragement and inspiration for students while having a positive influence on their lives
- Nebraska State Senators Stinner & Wishart receive Golden Torch Award
  - Sen. John Stinner & Sen. Anna Wishart were presented the NCDHH Golden Torch Award by NCDHH Board Chair, Candice Arteaga and Vice Chair, Bob Feit, for their contributions and advocacy to the deaf and hard of hearing communities
  - Sen. Stinner was involved in the advocacy for the re-opening of the NCDHH Scottsbluff office and supporting appropriation funds that benefit the deaf community
  - Sen. Wishart was influential in her leadership with legislation supporting Video Phones inside Lincoln Libraries and advocacy toward recognizing ASL as an official language in Nebraska



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Produce and release Nebraska Olmstead Plan Video
  - The Nebraska Olmstead Plan is a law that requires the Department of Health and Human Services to create a plan to provide services to people with disabilities in an integrated setting
  - The purpose of the video is to educate and inform individuals on how the use of technology, resources and information can allow for inclusion and communication access in work, education, and everyday lives for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Lincoln Saltdogs & Scottsbluff Pioneers
  - Thrilled to be able to meet at the ballpark, the deaf and hard of hearing community always enjoys this event with advocacy and America's favorite pastime- baseball!
  - NCDHH works with stakeholders and community members to promote awareness and advocacy for Nebraskans who are deaf and hard of hearing while enjoying a baseball game
- NCDHH Night at Tri-City Storm Hockey Game
  - NCDHH Advocacy Specialists, Kathy Scusa & Aaron Rothenberger, had a great turnout at an awareness event held at the Tri-City Storm Hockey game in Kearney, Neb.
- American Rescue Act Funds for Nebraskans
  - NCDHH submitted written and oral testimony to the Nebraska Legislature Appropriations Committee on recommendations for the American Rescue Act Funds for Nebraskans who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Virtual and In-Person Presentations & Workshops
  - As NCDHH navigated a year post the arrival of COVID, the agency planned and coordinated both virtual and in-person informational presentations and advocacy
    - Behavioral Health in a Pandemic: A virtual workshop presentation with Dr. Scot Adams, discussing challenges with behavioral health and well-being while adapting to an ever-changing world
    - Deaf Interpreter Training: A workshop for individuals who are interested in becoming a deaf interpreter
    - Interpreter Workshop "Ethics and Values – What Guides our Decisions?" Planned and coordinated by NCDHH Interpreter Program Coordinator, Sharon Sinkler, with presenter Amber Tucker & "Demand Control Schema: An Introduction to the Normative Ethics of Interpreting" with renowned presenter, Dr. Robyn K. Dean



# NCDHH SERVICES

NCDHH works continuously with individuals including but not limited to: Nebraska residents, organizations, stakeholder representatives, educational representatives, parents and more. An NCDHH team member works with each client or organization to educate, inform, and/or provide assistance on our services. Services include training, presentations, attending booths & conferences, 1-on-1 meetings, assistive technology, hearing aid banks, educational support in schools, behavioral health, communication access support and more.

As we come out of another year amid the global COVID-19 Pandemic, NCDHH was able to advocate, assist and support through many different avenues.

6,242  
People  
Assisted

146  
Presentations

37  
Booths

# HEARING AID BANKS

## NSTEP

NCDHH works with the Barkley Memorial Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, HearU Nebraska, Sertoma, and the Nebraska Lions Foundation to provide hearing aids to individuals who qualify. HearU Nebraska provides hearing aids to children ages birth-18. Sertoma is an international organization providing refurbished hearing aids to individuals 65+. The Nebraska Lions Foundation promotes the collection, refurbishing and distribution of donated hearing aids to Nebraska residents ages 19-64. Applications to these programs are available through the Commission.

Sertoma  
Hearing Aid Bank

111  
Applications  
Approved

97  
Applications  
Denied

Nebraska  
Lions Foundation

37  
Applications  
Approved

44  
Applications  
Denied

The State of Nebraska offers the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP). The goal of this program is to provide monetary assistance to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf/Blind, and Speech disabled Nebraskans to use for the purchase of specialized telephone equipment such as amplifiers, signaling devices, captioned telephones and mobile phones. Our advocacy specialists work with clients to assist them in finding the technology to best meet their unique needs and assist individuals in their application process.

81  
Applications  
Processed  
by NCDHH

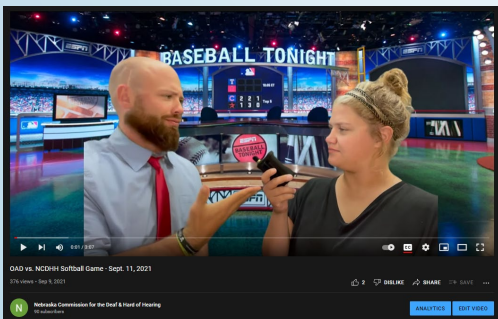




*In the ever-evolving world we live in, social media has been a great tool and resource NCDHH uses to communicate with stakeholders, the community, and representatives around Nebraska as well as nationwide.*

*Social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube have been a fundamental part of our agency mission and vision to advocate for full access as well as keeping the community engaged.*

**Top Facebook Post of 2021:**  
**69,116 people reached & 491 shares-**  
**Paul Ruff and his experience with the**  
**Nebraska State Wrestling Championship.**  
NCDHH Advocacy Specialist, Susan Whitaker, worked with Paul and his family, providing support and resources on how he can advocate for his rights during the state wrestling match where full communication access was not provided



### **YouTube VLOGs in 2021:**

- NCDHH Advocacy Specialist Podcast Series
- NCDHH vs OAD Softball Challenge
- Accessibility Updates with Omaha Eppley Airfield
- Updated NCDHH Strategic Plan
- Disability Employment Video

# STAFF DIRECTORY

# NCDHH

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