

# Coronavirus Impact Guidance for Social Care Services

## Deaf BSL Users with additional difficulties



Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) and have additional difficulties are significantly more likely than the general population to have poorer mental and physical health. They are highly vulnerable due to experiencing higher levels of stress and more difficulties accessing information and services. The current crisis may exacerbate their mental health issues and add to their isolation.

This Guidance is designed to assist you and your generic staff teams at a time of crisis.

### What can you do?

- Check if there are local services for Deaf people supporting your service users. In some areas, the local Deaf community is providing support by:
  - Offering face-to-face support at safe distances.
  - Keeping an eye on any vulnerable Deaf users.
  - Providing tuition on how to use FaceTime or WhatsApp in BSL.
  - Delivering a local Newsletter for older Deaf people who don't use digital technology.

- If you already have a current and local arrangement for the provision of sign language interpreters, do use this. Check within your department for guidance on arranging interpreters. If not, then consider this as a priority for those who are housebound but also have smartphones or iPads. For more information contact Sign Live ([signlive.co.uk](https://signlive.co.uk)) or Sign Video ([signvideo.co.uk](https://signvideo.co.uk))
- Establish a list of staff in your organisation who have BSL or Makaton skills for assistance with managing referrals.
- Consider Direct Payments or Personal Budgets to enable this group of people to buy in communication support for interactions with services currently requiring contact by phone
- Also consider funding for Deaf people without tablets or smartphones to enable them access services. (See examples of how volunteers can help).
- Check if your internal information hub (intranet) has information on how to support Deaf BSL users & people with hearing loss. Also check if there has been any guidance from senior medical officers to Social Care providers.
- Check if your council has committed to the BSL Charter with the British Deaf Association, or Louder than Words with Action on Hearing Loss. Your Equalities team is likely to be able to advise you.
- For information about your regional or national Deaf mental health service. See: [bsmhd.org.uk/2020/05/05/new-list-of-mental-health-services/](https://bsmhd.org.uk/2020/05/05/new-list-of-mental-health-services/)

**An example of how to keep Deaf people informed is found here:**  
[hertfordshire.gov.uk/accessibility/british-sign-language-bsl-videos.aspx](https://hertfordshire.gov.uk/accessibility/british-sign-language-bsl-videos.aspx)

Likewise: [facebook.com/HCCSensory/](https://facebook.com/HCCSensory/)

**Case Study:** In one area, a Deaf volunteer checked on a Deaf person to find that that person (no IT access) had not talked with anyone since lockdown – 8 weeks.

*Our aim is to promote mental health wellbeing for Deaf BSL users and People with Hearing Loss – getting the communication right is often crucial for their wellbeing.*

The British Society for Mental Health and Deafness

**bsmhd**

Promoting Positive Deaf Mental Health