



Offering Keys to Communication

# VDDHH

## The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communications Access Project

### *Virginia Relay – Your Communication Connection*

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) prepared this document as part of the Communications Access Project. For more information on the Communications Access Project, please contact Leslie Hutcheson, VDDHH Policy and Planning Manager at [Leslie.Prince@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:Leslie.Prince@vddhh.virginia.gov) or (804) 662-9703 (V/TTY).

**Virginia Relay** is available to all Virginia residents. The Relay service enables telephone conversations between standard voice telephone users and people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech-impaired and use a TTY, Voice CarryOver Phone or Hearing Carryover Phone. Just pick up your telephone and dial 7-1-1, and you automatically reach a Communications Assistant (CA) at Virginia Relay.

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### **What is Relay Service?**

Virginia Relay, a public service offered by the Commonwealth of Virginia, enables standard telephone users to communicate with deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, or speech-disabled people who use a TTY (text telephone).

Virginia Relay processes over a million and a half calls annually. The relay service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, enabling people who have hearing and/or speech loss to stay in touch with anyone who uses a telephone.

Relay users pay no set-up charges or fees for local calls, and there is no limit on the number or length of calls a user may make.

### **How can my state agency benefit from Virginia Relay?**

State agencies can benefit from Virginia Relay in two ways. Many state agencies have employees, clients or customers who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or speech impaired. Using Virginia Relay to communicate with these employees and citizens makes sense. Virginia Relay enables the Commonwealth of Virginia to broaden its employment and advancement opportunities by hiring and promoting employees who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and/or persons with speech disabilities. These individuals are able to conduct official telephone duties and responsibilities through the services offered Virginia Relay. Also, constituents who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and/or have speech disabilities can use the relay services to conduct business, ask questions and inquiry about agency services via Virginia Relay. Telephone communications is an important aspect of everyday life for all State employees and all citizens of Virginia!

### **How does Relay work?**

Virginia Relay works by connecting calls between a person who is deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind and who uses a TTY and a hearing person who uses a standard telephone. The person using the TTY types his or her conversation and the message is read to the other party by a Communications Assistant (CA). The CA then relays the hearing person's exact words by typing them back to the TTY user. The TTY user reads the text of the conversation as the CA types it.

If a person is hard of hearing or late-deafened and prefers to speak for themselves, they can use the Voice Carry Over (VCO) relay feature. VCO allows people who are deaf or have a hearing loss but can speak, to voice their conversation directly to the hearing person. The CA then types the hearing person's response to the VCO user. The VCO user can use either a TTY or a VCO phone.

If a person has limited speech capabilities but can hear, they can use the Hearing Carry Over (HCO) relay feature. HCO is designed for speech disabled people who want to hear the people they are calling (or from whom they receive a call), yet they need the CA to voice what they type on their TTYs.

Another relay feature allows a person whose speech may be difficult to understand to communicate over the telephone with the help of a specially trained CA. No special telephone is needed to use the Speech to Speech relay feature.

### **Why does Virginia offer relay service?**

Relay Service is required by Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and to the extent possible, must be “functionally equivalent” to standard telephone services. Interstate, intrastate and international call processing is available through Virginia Relay.

### **When can I use Virginia Relay?**

Virginia Relay is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the same as voice phone communications. You can access Virginia Relay as a voice user or TTY by dialing the easy access number, 7-1-1. 7-1-1 access is toll free.

### **What number do I dial to reach Virginia Relay?**

Want to call someone who uses a TTY? Just pick up the telephone and dial 7-1-1.

In many government buildings with PBX telephone systems, the employees must first dial an access code to get an outside line. For example, if your access code to dial an outside telephone number is “9”, then you would dial “9-711” to reach Virginia Relay.

The State Corporation Commission (SCC) approved 711 service for the Commonwealth of Virginia on June 26, 2000. The Commonwealth was proactively ahead of the FCC mandate for nationwide 711 dialing to be provided by all telecommunications carriers in the United States, including wireline, wireless, and payphone providers, by October 1, 2001.

The existing Virginia Relay toll free numbers, 800-828-1120 (TTY) and 800-828-1140 (Voice), remain available for those customers who desire to continue using them. If you want to use Virginia Relay while traveling out of state, you should dial the 800 number. Dialing 711 outside of Virginia will connect you to that state’s relay service.

Before 7-1-1 access was available, there were different telephone numbers assigned for use in each state, making relay service confusing and difficult for customers. In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ordered that 711 be assigned as a national code for Relay Service use.

### **What is 7-1-1?**

Just as you can call 4-1-1 for directory assistance, and 9-1-1 for emergency assistance, you can now dial 7-1-1 for easy access to Virginia Relay. The use of 711 abbreviated dialing provides easier access to relay services for both TTY (text telephone) and voice users.

The FCC adopted new rules requiring all telecommunications carriers in the United States, including wireline, wireless, and payphone providers to activate 7-1-1 Relay dialing by October 1, 2001. The Commonwealth of Virginia was proactive and implemented 7-1-1 dialing on June 26, 2000. The State Corporation Commission adopted 7-1-1 access for Virginia in the Final Order of Case No. PUC000045.

### **What is the role of a Communications Assistant (CA)?**

Communications Assistants are always available, 24 hours 7 days a week. A CA is an employee of Virginia Relay who transliterates (relays word for word) text to voice and voice to text between two users of relay service. The CA is responsible for relaying the content of calls between users of text telephones (TTYs) and users of standard telephones (voice user). For example, a TTY user may telephone a voice user by calling Virginia Relay, where a CA will place the call to the voice user and relay the conversation by transcribing spoken content for the TTY user and reading text aloud for the voice user.

### **Are the calls that I make through Virginia Relay kept confidential?**

Calls made through Virginia Relay are strictly confidential. It is illegal in Virginia for a Communications Assistant (CA) to disclose the nature, content or any information regarding your conversation. No record of your conversation, or its content, is ever kept. Once your conversation is over, it is automatically deleted at the end of each call.

### **Does it take long to set up and process a relay call?**

Virginia Relay is required by FCC rules to have adequate staffing to provide relay users with efficient answer performance. Except during network failures, Virginia Relay must answer 85% of all calls within 10 seconds. Virginia Relay uses state-of-the-art telecommunications equipment to enhance the call delivery, and users are offered the relay feature “Relay Choice Profile” to speed up call set-up times and make their life easier.

### **What is a “Relay Choice Profile”?**

The “Relay Choice Profile” allows Virginia Relay users a way to set up their own personalized profiles so that they can benefit from more of the features traditionally offered to standard telephone users.

You can also speed up your relay calls by letting Virginia Relay know your preferences and the CAs will be able to set up your call faster. All the information that you provide by filling out the Relay Choice Profile form will be kept confidential. By using Relay Choice Profile you have the opportunity to select your communications preference (TTY, Voice, VCO, HCO, etc.), long-distance carrier, regional service carrier, a 20 number memory dial list, and other features.

A profile is unique to a telephone number. If you place relay calls from your home telephone number and you also place calls from your business telephone, you will need to fill out two Relay Choice Profile forms.

You may obtain a Relay Choice Profile form by calling VDDHH toll free on 1-800-552-7917 (V/TTY).

### **How are relay services funded?**

The Commonwealth of Virginia pays costs for intrastate relay services (calls made within the Commonwealth of Virginia). The Commonwealth recovers intrastate relay costs through a 16 cents surcharge (per telephone line) that is applied to the telephone bills of all telephone customers in Virginia. This surcharge appears on your phone bill as “Relay Service Surcharge” or something similar. Costs for interstate relay services are paid through the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Fund, a shared-funding mechanism that is funded by contributions from all interstate telecommunications carriers in the United States. The National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) administers the Interstate TRS Fund.

### **Is there a Virginia Relay web site?**

The web site for Virginia Relay is <http://varelay.org>. Shown below is the “new Virginia Relay logo.”



### **How can I use Virginia Relay to call coworkers or citizens of Virginia who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and/or people with speech disabilities?**

The Virginia Relay was established not only for the people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and/or people with speech disabilities, but for hearing people as well. As a hearing State employee, you may find yourself needing to call peers, coworkers or employees who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deafblind, and/or persons with speech disabilities on a regular basis. You may also need to communicate with Virginia citizens that need your agency’s assistance or services who use the Virginia Relay for their communication needs. The Virginia Relay is available to assist. Just pick up your telephone and dial 7-1-1. Don’t forget – you might need to dial “9” before 7-1-1 to get an outside line. A Communications Assistant (CA) at the Virginia Relay will answer your call. The CA will be ready to relay the call between you, a hearing person, and a person who uses a text-telephone (TTY). There are several different kinds of relay calls that you might want to know more about. For instance, you may call a person who is deaf but who has good speech skills by using Voice Carry Over. Or you may call a

person who is hearing but has a speech impairment by using Hearing Carry Over or Speech-to-Speech Relay. For more information about these specialized calls, contact VDDHH.

### **How do I file a complaint or commendation on service I received from Virginia Relay?**

Your feedback is very important to us. If you have a complaint on how your relay call was processed or if the CA was fantastic and you want to tell us, just go to the VDDHH home page, [www.vddhh.org](http://www.vddhh.org), under the Virginia Relay Service menu item and complete an on-line consumer input form. Remember to include the CA's number that you were given at the beginning of the call when you give us feedback. This information helps us to discuss your feedback with the CA who handled your call. After completing the form, please print a copy and mail it to VDDHH, 1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203, Richmond, VA 23229-5012 or fax it to us at (804) 662-9718.

Also, you may send your feedback to us via email at [frontdesk@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:frontdesk@vddhh.virginia.gov). If you would prefer to talk with someone in our agency concerning how your call was processed, please call Clayton Bowen at (804) 662-9704 (V/TTY) or (800) 552-7917 (V/TTY).

### **Virginia Relay Contact Information**

For more information on Virginia Relay, you can talk to Clayton Bowen, VDDHH Business Manager  
(804) 662-9704 (V/TTY)  
(800) 552-7917 (V/TTY)  
E-mail: [clayton.bowen@vddhh.virginia.gov](mailto:clayton.bowen@vddhh.virginia.gov)

### **Quick Links to Sites of Interest**

[AT&T Relay Services](#) – AT&T is the current contractor providing relay services in the Commonwealth.

In June 2000, The State Corporation Commission issued a [press release announcing the final order for 7-1-1](#) access in Virginia.

The Federal Communications Commission has authority over the implementation of relay services across the country. The FCC maintains [a web site full of information about relay services](#).

[VDDHH Home Page](#)

[National Association of the Deaf](#)

[The Virginia Association of the Deaf](#)