

Deafness is a health issue

Deaf people face many day-to-day challenges in the hearing world, including discrimination and reduced access to services. Mental illness among deaf people is about four times greater than in the general population.

In addition to those who are deaf from birth, many Australians lose their hearing as a result of workplace noise or age. More than a third of people aged 50 and over have a hearing impairment.

Both deaf and hearing-impaired people face major challenges that can lead to greater levels of mental illness and stress. These include:

- depression
- loss of confidence
- withdrawal, isolation, and loneliness
- exclusion from family and social activities
- irritability and anger
- frustration and embarrassment
- a feeling that they are being ignored
- high levels of fatigue.

These people often have trouble doing ordinary things, like phoning a friend, contacting the bank, booking a taxi, ringing the doctor or organising a plumber.

They can sometimes be reluctant to admit to their deafness or the severity of their hearing loss and feel embarrassed about asking friends or family to make calls for them.

As a professional health worker, you may find it hard to contact deaf or hearing-impaired clients because they feel unable to take phone calls.

The National Relay Service provides a solution

The National Relay Service (NRS) is a government initiative that provides a phone service for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. The NRS can help your deaf or hearing-impaired clients:

- retain their social and business networks
- make new contacts
- maintain their independence and self-confidence
- contact agencies and employers.

The NRS also makes it easier for family, friends, support services, businesses and government agencies to keep in touch with your clients.



Making a call is easy

The NRS:

- is simple to use – thousands of people use the service every week
- usually costs no more than a local phone call – even when calling interstate or to a mobile phone
- is staffed by specially trained relay officers who are obliged by law to observe the strictest levels of confidentiality.

How it works

When your client makes a call through the NRS there will be another person involved in the call known as a 'relay officer'. Relay officers are the central link in any phone call. They relay exactly what is said by both parties. They are there to help a call go smoothly, but do not change or interfere with what is being said.

The idea of relaying a conversation through a third party can seem a bit daunting at first. But it's surprising how quickly people who use the service find that relay officers become 'invisible'. Your client simply contacts an NRS number or connects through the internet to start the call. They can ring anyone, anywhere, 24 hours a day.

Some basic equipment

If your client cannot hear or use their voice, then they will need to have either:

- **internet access** through a computer or smartphone to make an **internet relay** call.
- a **mobile phone** to make an **SMS relay** call.
- a **TTY** which is a phone with a small keyboard and screen that allows the user to type a message and read what is being said in reply. It is straightforward to use and, in most cases, a TTY can be rented for about the same cost as an ordinary phone.

In an emergency

The NRS includes a dedicated text-based emergency phone relay service for TTY users providing direct access to the police, fire brigade and ambulance. The relay officer helps your client call the appropriate service and stays on the line during the call.

Internet relay users, SMS relay users or those with speech difficulties using an ordinary phone, can call the Triple Zero (000) emergency service through the NRS.

Contacting your client

Once your client is an NRS user, you can contact them simply by calling the relay service on an ordinary phone.

More information

We can:

- give you more information about the service and equipment that might be needed
- tell you about our free information and training sessions
- send brochures and other information to anyone you feel could benefit from the service
- deal directly with your clients if you prefer that.

Contact us by:

- phone: **1800 555 660** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm Eastern Standard Time)
- email: **helpdesk@relayservice.com.au**
- SMS: **0416 001 350**
- mail: 21A Elliott Street, Balmain, NSW 2041

See our website www.relayservice.gov.au for a wide range of information about relay calls.

The National Relay Service is an Australian Government initiative funded by a levy on eligible telecommunications carriers.



An Australian Government Initiative



A phone solution for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment
www.relayservice.gov.au