

CALLER

THE COMMONWEALTH

Virginia Relay: Telecommunications services for people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deafblind or have difficulty speaking

Winter 2024

Tablets Available Soon!

TTY consumers in Virginia will soon be able to use iPads as an alternative telecommunications solution since the VDDHH Technology Assistance Program is adding tablets to its list of available assistive devices.

"Tablets will be the alternative telecommunications solution available through TAP for TTY users to transition to Real-Time Text in light of the analog to digital transition," said Brittany Howard, Technology Assistance Program Manager for the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

VDDHH has ordered the iPads and is reserving the first set for those who are currently in need of an alternative TTY. Subsequent tablet orders will be available to all applicants.

VDDHH offers the iPads on a Loan-to-Own (L2O) basis—like it does for its other assistive equipment—allowing recipients up to 30 days to decide whether to keep, exchange or return the device. The tablets do not come with any pre-loaded apps but users will be able to download them. In fact, VDDHH has a Smart Apps packet to offer consumers a list of various assistive communication apps to download.

To qualify for TAP, you must be Deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled or have a combination of hearing and vision loss. Additionally, you must be a Virginia resident and meet income eligibility requirements based on household income and family size.

While Android tablets are not offered yet they could be in the future. "We anticipate adding Androids later so individuals can have an option that works for them," said Brittany.

If you have questions on how to apply, visit to vddhh.virginia.gov for more information.



Looking to Become a Relay Partner?

Businesses that are unfamiliar with Virginia Relay occasionally hang up on Relay calls when they hear a Virginia Relay Communication Assistant (CA) on the line. That is because the CA is sometimes mistaken for a solicitor or marketer. The calls sound similar, with a short pause, but the CA will quickly speak on behalf of the caller.

Virginia Relay Partner is a free program designed to eliminate hang-ups many Relay users experience by educating businesses on how to identify, receive and place Relay calls. The program is available to all Virginia-based businesses. Other than a telephone, no special equipment is required to participate.

The Business Opportunities

By familiarizing yourself with Relay calls, you can avoid missed connections with Relay users—and open new opportunities for your business at the same time:

- Connect with thousands of Relay users, including Virginia's booming senior population.
- Increase sales
- Grow customer loyalty among Relay users
- Generate referrals from satisfied Relay users



Plus, Free Marketing Support!

As a Virginia Relay Partner, the thousands of Relay users across the Commonwealth will know that your company welcomes their calls—and their business. Your contact information will be listed online with other current Partners, and available on user search queries. Both online and through community outreach, Virginia Relay users will be encouraged to support your business.

If you're interested in learning more about how to become a Relay Partner, contact Outreach Coordinator Melanee Rodriguez at melanee.rodriguez@hamiltonrelay.com.

Getting Connected

Access to affordable phone and internet services is essential to staying connected in today's world. Every day, we rely on these services to connect with healthcare providers, potential employers, educational programs and loved ones. The federal government has two programs that offer a discount to qualified households — Lifeline and the Affordable Connectivity Program.

Lifeline offers a monthly discount toward a qualified household's phone or internet service. To learn more about the qualifications and how to apply, visit LifelineSupport.org, email LifelineSupport@usac.org or call 800-234-9473.

The **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** provides a discount toward broadband service for eligible households, which can also receive a one-time discount to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet from participating providers. To learn more about the benefit, including eligibility and enrollment information, visit GetInternet.gov or call 877-384-2575.



IS SPEECH-TO-SPEECH RIGHT FOR YOU (OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW)?

In 1990, Dr. Robert “Bob” Segalman introduced Speech-to-Speech (STS) as a service that would enable individuals with speech difficulties the opportunity to fully participate in telephone communication. The service grew out of his attempts to be understood over the telephone as someone with cerebral palsy. As a result of his work, there is now a service that someone who has difficulty speaking can use to connect over the phone.

STS Relay involves a specially trained Communication Assistant (CA) who is familiar with the speech patterns of a wide variety of individuals who have difficulty being understood. Special telephone equipment is not needed for Speech-to-Speech calls since STS users may use their own voice or an AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) device to communicate.

Here’s how it works:

- Dial 711 or 866-221-6784
- Provide the STS CA the number you wish to call, plus any special instructions.
- The CA will ask the person you are calling if they are familiar with STS. If the person is not, the CA will explain how STS works before the conversation begins.
- The CA will repeat your part of the conversation in short phrases unless you request otherwise. The CA will work closely with you to ensure your entire conversation is understood and will clarify anything that is not clear before repeating.
- Say Go Ahead or GA each time you are finished speaking and are ready for a response. The conversation will proceed in this manner until the call is complete.
- To end your call, say GA to SK or simply say Goodbye.

To learn more about Speech-to-Speech, visit vddhh.virginia.gov.

Virginia Relay is Also Available in Spanish

¿Hablas Español? If you or someone you know needs a Spanish relay connection, there are options available in Virginia. Our state employs bilingual Communication Assistants (CAs) to process Spanish relay calls, which can be translated between Spanish and English—as long as the person being called is also within the state.

When using a TTY, users type what they want to say, and the CA facilitates the call by reading the message aloud. When the recipient responds, the CA then types the reply in its entirety. Next, the TTY user will read that message on the TTY screen upon its receipt. CAs do not comment, answer questions or participate in any way beyond facilitating the call.

CAs act as trustworthy individuals who are legally prohibited from disclosing conversation data thereby calls remain confidential. No records or recordings of these calls are made.

Spanish TTY users can either dial 711 and ask to connect with a Spanish-speaking CA, or they may call 800-855-8200 to connect directly with a CA.



To learn more about Virginia Relay
Call: 866-894-4116 (Voice) | 866-246-9300 (TTY)
Visit: www.varelay.org
Email: varelay@hamiltonrelay.com
Write: 1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203
Henrico, VA 23229-5012



Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203
Henrico, Virginia 23229-5012

Visit us at www.varelay.org

Find Us on Facebook!

Virginia Relay and VDDHH both have Facebook pages! Just type “Virginia Relay” or “VDDHH” in the search field and click the “Like” button at the top of the page to get regular updates on Virginia news, events and more.



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Enter to Win!

We would like to thank the loyal readers of The Commonwealth Caller. To enter the drawing, scan the QR code below or visit bit.ly/VA-relay-prize



Save the Date: Town Hall Meeting

As phone lines transition from analog to digital and technology continues to evolve, Relay services and the equipment used is also changing. We want to make sure our users know about all the options available to them.

Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Virginia Relay are hosting a town hall meeting to engage with Relay users and ensure that all users are aware of the recent changes in the Relay industry. There will also be an opportunity to share comments, concerns and ideas.

Two online sessions will be held on Thursday, March 28 – one at 11:30 a.m. and one at 6:30 p.m. Please mark your calendar to join us! More details to come.

Town Hall
Meeting