

Guidelines on Best Practice for Service Provision to Deafblind People

Recommendations for Service Planners and Providers

Deafblindness is a unique disability. It means having both a hearing impairment and a vision impairment that is severe enough to affect communication, mobility and access to information and the environment. A deafblind person may have some residual hearing or vision or both but the combination of impairments has a disproportional effect on living and learning. The impact of the dual loss is very significant. In addition, many deafblind people have additional or multiple disabilities and health needs.

Deafblind people are often the most isolated disabled people and are excluded from participation in mainstream activity. Their needs are often marginalised, not prioritised and not met. If deafblind people are to have full human rights then there must be specific planning to address their needs and services that enable their access and participation:

- Deafblindness should be recognised as a category of sensory impairment;
- Plans to identify deafblind people should be put in place and each person should be offered accessible information and an appropriate functional assessment of their needs for support;
- Assessments should be undertaken by someone who is specifically trained to assess deafblind people;
- Issues of work force development to increase specialist knowledge and practice about deafblindness should be addressed;
- Awareness training activities should be available;
- The needs of deafblind people need to be *specifically* addressed when planning services and providing support to disabled people;
- Specialised services should be developed and should be perceived as a valued element of a spectrum of services that are available to the individual and their family. These should include the use of technological solutions and human support;
- The deafblind person and what he/she wants should be at the heart of service planning and provision. There should be recognition that they will need specialist support to participate fully;
- Families should be fully involved and will be the key to supporting infants children and young people as well as adult family members;
- Communication support (one-to one) should be developed and available.

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