

April 13, 2020

**RE: COVID – 19 and Accessible Communication for Canadians with Hearing Loss**

To Whom It May Concern:

A few weeks ago, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA), reached out to you about the importance of accessible communication and to remind all levels of government, government agencies and broadcasters of the importance of providing captioning and/or sign language interpretation for the millions of Canadians that rely on this form of communication accessibility to obtain lifesaving and critical information. CHHA is pleased that many have taken steps to ensure accessible communication and that there is an increased presence in the use of sign language interpreters for the Deaf community and those who use a sign language and that open and closed captions are becoming more widely adopted.

We are writing to you today as it has come to our attention that a voice recognition software has been used in circumstances to provide captions. And while voice recognition software is increasingly being used to caption news programs, sporting events and other live TV programs, it's still a relatively new technology, and there are many factors which can affect the quality of the captions produced using the technology. **The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association strongly opposes the use of voice recognition in an emergency situation to relay critical and lifesaving information.**

**For persons who hard of hearing**, emergency information provided in the audio portion of programming must be provided either using closed or open captioning if open captions (captions that are visible to all viewers) cannot be employed immediately, then, as a temporary measure, a textual graphic, key, or crawl will be displayed. This information must contain all emergency measures, phone numbers, addresses, and evacuation procedures as necessary. Broadcasters must contact a real-time caption service provider to provide live open captions as soon as possible. Full and adequate accessibility is a human right and that all levels of government have an obligation to ensure their messages are delivered accurately to all their constituents, regardless of disability.

Thank you for your tireless efforts during these uncertain times in protecting Canadians; however, we ask that you remember the importance of quality and accessible communication accessibility that should be provided during these times.

It's no exaggeration to say that lives can depend upon accessible communications when presenting real-time information during emergency situations.

Sincerely,

Marilyn J. Kingdon, BPA | President and Chair of the Board

**Canadian Hard of Hearing Association | CHHA**

[www.chha.ca](http://www.chha.ca) | 613.526.1584 | [mkingdon@chha.ca](mailto:mkingdon@chha.ca)

901-75 rue Albert St. Ottawa ON K1P 5E7