People with both hearing and vision loss have long felt limited or even locked out of using the telephone as their unique communication needs make talking over the phone a challenge. New services currently in development from CapTel are designed to unlock the telephone for people with low or no vision who cannot hear over the phone.

CapTel captioning service allows people with hearing loss to read text captions of what’s said to them during telephone conversations, much like the captions on TV. Those same telephone captions will soon be available to people with low or no vision through a variety of large display or braille output devices.

How it works: As a caller speaks over the phone, his or her words are transcribed into captions that appear on the CapTel user’s phone. For people with low vision, the captions can be displayed on a large screen HD TV or on a Visual Display CCTV (Closed Circuit Television System) device at an enlarged font size with multiple high contrast colors for easy reading. For those who are DeafBlind, the captions can be read on a dynamic braille display. This allows CapTel users who have both hearing and vision loss to be able to read what the caller says, then speak and respond like any other phone conversation.

These new CapTel services are scheduled for release later this year. For more information, visit online at www.CapTel.com/braille, e-mail Braille@CapTel.com, or contact the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) through the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) at frontdesk@vddhh.virginia.gov or 804-662-9502 (V/TTY).

CapTel captioning service allows people with hearing loss to read text captions of what’s said to them during telephone conversations, much like the captions on TV.
According to The Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), senior citizens (age 55+ years) living with combined vision and hearing loss make up the largest number of people who are DeafBlind in the United States. Paige Berry is coordinator of Senior Adult Services for HKNC, and she works out of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Paige assists seniors, families, and service providers nationwide in developing a greater understanding of the abilities and needs of older adults who are DeafBlind or who are experiencing age-related vision and hearing loss.

One of the biggest initiatives Paige oversees is the Confident Living Program (CLP). Held twice each year at HKNC in New York, CLP brings together a group of six seniors for five days of peer support and education for coping with life with vision and hearing loss. The week consists of one-hour classes that cover everything from orientation and mobility to communication and technology, and includes presentations by professionals including an audiologist, an optometrist, and an elder law attorney.

“CLP is not necessarily about training, but it’s about providing a peer support group and lots of information and resources,” says Paige. “It is often life-changing to just be together with people who understand how the combination of vision and hearing loss affects daily life. Through CLP, seniors gain new tools to empower them to take control of their lives again.”

Participation in CLP costs $1,300 plus travel, but many consumers are able to receive assistance in payment from their state vocational rehabilitation program or Independent Living for the Older Blind program. Paige also works with state organizations across the country to offer CLP “On the Road” to groups who cannot travel to New York.

According to Paige, the most important thing for seniors with hearing and vision loss to know is that even if they think their hearing or vision loss is minor, there may still be helpful resources available.

“We want to encourage our seniors, no matter how minor or significant their loss of vision or hearing may be, to always ask if there is help available, because there might be,” she says. “Our goal is to empower the consumers to not give up, or push the ‘pause button’ on life because of vision and hearing loss later in life. Anytime we can do something to make it a little easier, a little better, a little more empowering for them, then we’ve done our job.”

To find out more about HKNC’s Senior Adult Services, please visit www.hknc.org or contact Paige Berry at paige.berry@hknc.org.
For people who are DeafBlind, one of the biggest challenges of communication is perceiving and interpreting another person’s body language. Without this critical information, a DeafBlind person can feel left out of the conversation, especially when among a group of people. But Haptic Communication, or Haptics, is a new approach to communication that relies on the sense of touch, and makes interaction easier and more efficient for people who are DeafBlind and their families, friends, interpreters and others.

When using Haptics, a DeafBlind person receives real-time, spontaneous information about the environment around them. The interpreter relays this information through a series of non-verbal, tactile signs performed on the person’s back, arm or leg. This touch gives better quality to discussions and interactions by helping the DeafBlind person better understand the other person’s behavior, emotions, and other non-verbal cues.

Ann Olliff, vice president of the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB), explains that Haptics can be especially useful for a DeafBlind person who is participating in a workshop or presenting to an audience. The interpreter is able to create a “map” on the DeafBlind person’s body to help explain the setup of the room and where people are seated. When someone in the room has a question, the interpreter can quickly convey who is talking by pointing to them on the map. The DeafBlind person can also receive real-time feedback about the emotions and interest levels of people in the group, like when someone bursts into laughter, or yawns from boredom.

“Haptic communication gives the presenter who is DeafBlind total access to both the audience and the environment,” Ann says.

Haptics can help anyone with combined hearing and vision loss to feel more confident in their environment and participate more actively in conversations. For more information, contact VADB at www.vadeafblind.org.

To the staff of the Virginia Relay Center and the City of Norton:

For 24 years, Virginia Relay has partnered with AT&T and the city of Norton to provide quality telecommunications access for Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking through the Virginia Relay Center. Because of the professional expertise, compassion and commitment of the Relay Center’s staff, Virginia has always been on the forefront of telecommunications technology and service for the local deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. The communications assistants at the Virginia Relay Center have provided a life-changing service for the people of Virginia, and been vital contributing members of the local community.

Virginia Relay extends our heart-felt thanks to AT&T, the employees of the Virginia Relay Center and the City of Norton for their years of dedication to our mission. You will always be a part of our legacy as Virginia continues to be a model for the rest of the country to follow in providing Relay users with the best features and the best quality services.
According to the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind, there are about 16,000 people living in Virginia with some degree of combined vision and hearing loss. Persons who are DeafBlind vary greatly in their background and experiences. For example, one individual may have lived his or her entire life blind or visually-impaired, and then begin to lose hearing later in life. Another individual may have lived his or her life deaf or hard-of-hearing, but now is losing vision due to glaucoma, macular degeneration, or another health condition. Other individuals may have had full hearing and vision for most of their lives, but are now experiencing some age-related loss of both. Each of these people will have different needs to communicate and live independently at home and/or in the workplace.

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VDBVI) provides services and resources which empower individuals who are blind, vision-impaired or DeafBlind to achieve their desired levels of employment, education and personal independence. Elizabeth Spiers is the program director for DeafBlind services at VDBVI and recently provided an overview of the agency’s services for individuals living with combined vision and hearing loss. These services include:

**Rehabilitation Training/Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation**

Elizabeth and her colleague, Christine Day, work throughout Virginia to meet with people who are DeafBlind and help assess how their combined vision and hearing loss is impacting their lives, both at home and at work. They then make personalized recommendations and help connect each person with service providers and programs to obtain adaptive equipment, services and training that will help them to communicate more easily and live and work independently. VDBVI works closely with rehabilitation teachers, education service coordinators and/or vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide written results and recommendations and assist in providing services for customers who are DeafBlind. To receive rehabilitation teaching/independent living or vocational rehabilitation services, you must have an open case with VDBVI.

**iCanConnect Virginia**

iCanConnect is a national program that distributes no-cost telecommunications equipment to people who are DeafBlind and low income. In Virginia, VDBVI identifies and assesses applicants to make sure they are good candidates for the program and makes recommendations for the telecommunications equipment that is best suited for each person’s needs. When the equipment is ordered, VDBVI helps install it in the consumer’s home, and provides the necessary training and tutoring to make sure they understand how to use it. iCanConnect applicants do not need an open case with VDBVI to receive equipment. To apply, please visit www.icanconnectvirginia.org.

**Community Outreach and Education**

Elizabeth and Christine regularly offer presentations for people who would like to know more about DeafBlindness. They also provide training to other agencies and organizations working with this population.

**Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired**

Located in Richmond, the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired provides training programs in a classroom setting to help people learn more about living independently with vision loss. Lessons include orientation and mobility, Braille, cooking, personal and home management, keyboarding and technology skills, job readiness skills, vocational evaluations, adult basic education, health education, and more.

For more information about any of VDBVI’s DeafBlind services, or to request a presentation, please contact Elizabeth Spiers at Elizabeth.spiers@dbvi.virginia.gov or 410-371-3133 (Voice/TTY) or 804-325-1282 (Voice/Videophone).
Technology is making all the difference in Sherrod’s life. The 26 year old Virginia man relies on his email, Facebook and the Internet to keep connected.

“Technology really does make things possible for me to continue daily living.”

Sherrod is deaf and has extremely low vision, a result of a genetic disorder of the nervous system that causes tumors or masses to grow. The condition first presented when Sherrod was a teenager. The condition keeps him close to home most of the time, but thanks to his new computer and Zoom Text magnification software, Sherrod is able to communicate with friends and family.

Sherrod received the equipment—and one-on-one training on how to operate it—through iCanConnect, the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, which provides a wide array of communications equipment, from braille readers to laptops to smartphones, at no cost to low-income people with significant hearing and vision loss.

Sherrod calls iCanConnect a “perfect start” for people who are DeafBlind. He has even been able to take correspondence courses from the Hadley School for the Blind.

“Having a computer and other equipment allows you to have access to the world and what it may provide,” he says. “Doing things from my computer makes it a lot easier for me, rather than going through the frustration of writing things down by hand.”

To learn more or to apply, visit www.icanconnectvirginia.org, call 1-800-552-7917 (v/tty) or email frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov.

An easy way to turn more calls into loyal customers.

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Find out more about Virginia Relay: www.varelay.org
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Representing Speech-to-Speech (STS) Relay Users

William Hess
Representing Voice Carry-Over Users

Betti Thompson, VRAC Chair, 2015-2017
Representing Internet (IP) Relay Users

Ann Ollif
Representing Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADBl)

Arva Priola
Representing Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Helen Justice
Representing Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD)

Valerie Luther
Representing Captioned Telephone Relay Users

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VDDHH Outreach Programs

Teresa Feeney, AT&T
Virginia Relay Center Manager

Brenda Neely, AT&T
Virginia Relay Center

Lauren Cramer, Hamilton Relay
Hamilton Relay Account Manager

Stephanie Ulmer, Hamilton Relay
Virginia CapTel Outreach Coordinator

Celebrate Communication 2015
May 16, 2015
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Northern Virginia Community College
Annandale Campus | Annandale

2015 Disabled American Veterans Department of Virginia Annual Convention
June 4-7, 2015
Holiday Inn Tanglewood | Roanoke

Art of Aging Expo
June 10, 2015
Fredericksburg

VDOE Opening Doors Conference
June 23, 2015
Session for Parents and Students
June 24-25, 2015
Sessions for Professionals
Charlottesville

59th Biennial Virginia Association of the Deaf Conference
June 25-27, 2015
Holiday Inn Valley View | Roanoke

Camp Loud and Clear
July 10 - 11, 2015
Holiday Lake 4-H Center | Appomattox

Remote Area Medical Expedition (RAM)
July 17 – 18, 2015
Wise County

Challenge Discovery Projects
Family Fun Day
August 15, 2015
Henrico

Fall 2015 Virginia Relay Advisory Council Meeting
October 8, 2015
Henrico