



Hear Entendre Québec

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Hear Québec Warns: Lack of Accessibility Might Harm the Most Vulnerable Population

(Montreal - 26 March 2020) - "On Monday, March 16, our graphic designer who has severe hearing loss, was experiencing cold symptoms. Since he cannot use the phone, a family member called for him," Hear Québec Executive Director Heidy Wager said. "He is one of the lucky ones since he had assistance in a time like this."

Hear Québec, a non-profit organization serving the English-speaking community with hearing loss, has raised concerns about accessibility during this pandemic. While the government is working tirelessly to ensure that information is passed to all Canadians daily, some Canadians - many of them seniors - are also trying to reach those resources and are unable to because of their hearing loss.

Hearing loss affects at least **30% of persons over 65**, and the percentage of hearing loss increases with each decade of life (Hosford-Dunn, 2015). Most fatal cases of COVID-19 are among the senior population. The system does not currently support the hearing loss population. They are not being properly informed, nor do they have access to medical assistance regarding COVID-19. The services are not fully accessible and the most at risk senior population (those with hearing loss) are being forgotten.

Being properly informed about how to protect yourself is the first line of defense. Captions on all live broadcasts would allow this population to be informed. Some TVs are equipped with this function, but enabling it requires some technical knowledge.

There is also a lack of usable resources for those with hearing loss who experience symptoms. There are some services available, such as Bell Relay Service (711 for TTY to Voice), which requires a special device for receiving calls and a knowledge of how the service functions. This is not a quick solution to the problem of providing this crucial resource to the hearing loss population.

Having different avenues for communication, such as text or email, would increase access to this at-risk population. Some organizations for the deaf, such as the [Institut Raymond Dewar](#), are providing cell numbers for people to text and email addresses to contact in order to fully inform their clients.

Hear Québec is doing the same by keeping its members aware of all information pertaining to the pandemic situation and providing them with needed assistance during these times. Unfortunately, the organization cannot reach non-members with hearing loss who might be facing difficulties in reaching medical assistance related to COVID-19, including calls to 811. Hear Québec urges the Canadian Government to take action to provide captioning, texting, and email resources for this population.

For more information please contact

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION: Hear Québec (formerly known as CHIP) is Montreal's only non-profit organization serving the English-speaking community with hearing loss. Hear Québec has been providing programs and services to those affected by hearing loss for 40 years. Hearing loss is often referred to as an invisible disability. Many people are also unaware of their own risk of becoming hard of hearing. Presentations about noise-induced hearing loss are just one of the many ways that Hear Québec is trying to make the world more hearing loss-friendly, aware, and informed about hearing loss.