

Ten practical ways to make events more hearing accessible

A coffee morning, residents' meeting, family event or conference can become difficult very quickly if somebody cannot hear what is being said. Accessibility starts before anyone enters the room.

BEFORE	DURING	WHEN NEEDED
Ask what people need and share information in advance.	Control noise, lighting, seating and turn-taking.	Provide the right communication support, technology or interpreter.

Care homes host all kinds of events. Some are informal, such as quizzes, coffee mornings and family celebrations. Others are more structured, including residents' meetings, training, presentations and community events. The scale changes, but the basic principle does not. People need a fair chance to hear, understand and take part.

There is no single accessibility package that every event requires. A small activity for six residents will need something different from a large conference. The sensible starting point is to ask who is attending and what support they need, then make proportionate arrangements.

1. Ask about communication needs before the event

If people are registering in advance, include a straightforward question about accessibility or communication needs. For resident activities, this may simply be part of care planning or a conversation with the person. Do not assume that every person with hearing loss needs the same adjustment.

Someone may ask for a hearing loop, captions, a quieter seat, written information, a BSL interpreter or simply a clear view of the speaker. Knowing in advance gives you time to arrange the right support.

2. Give people useful information beforehand

Share the agenda, timings, location and any key papers before the event where possible. Written information gives people a reference point if they miss part of what is said. Use plain English, readable text and good contrast. For a presentation, consider sharing the slides in advance or afterwards.

3. Think about the room, not just the programme

A lively room may be enjoyable, but it can be extremely difficult for a person with hearing loss. Choose the quietest appropriate space and reduce avoidable background noise. Soft furnishings, carpets and curtains can help absorb sound. Avoid running a television or background music while people are expected to listen to a speaker.

4. Make sure people can see who is speaking

Good lighting supports lipreading and facial cues. Avoid strong backlighting. Arrange seating so people can see the speaker and, where possible, one another. In a smaller meeting, a circle or semi-circle often works better than rows because it is easier to identify the next speaker.

BEFORE PEOPLE ARRIVE

Stand in the room where attendees will sit. Can you see the speaker's face clearly? Can you hear them over the ventilation, music or corridor noise? Is the hearing loop switched on and tested? A two-minute check can catch most obvious problems.

5. Manage turn-taking

People speaking over one another is difficult for everyone and especially hard for somebody relying on lipreading, a hearing aid, captions or an interpreter. Ask people to speak one at a time. In a larger meeting, use a microphone for audience questions and repeat or summarise questions before answering.

6. Train staff and volunteers on the basics

Anybody greeting attendees, running an activity or holding a microphone should understand a few simple communication habits. Get the person's attention, face them, speak clearly, do not shout, reduce background noise and be ready to repeat or rephrase. Staff should also know how to use any hearing loop, microphone or assistive device available.

7. Offer quieter spaces where you can

Networking and social time can be harder than the formal presentation because several conversations happen at once. A quieter area gives people an alternative place to talk. For residents, the same principle applies to busy celebrations or large group activities. Participation should not depend on being able to cope with the noisiest part of the room.

8. Use assistive listening technology where it helps

Hearing loops, personal listeners, remote microphones and other systems can reduce the effect of distance and background noise. The exact technology will depend on the venue and the people attending. The important point is that it needs to be working, tested and understood by staff. A loop that is installed but never switched on is no adjustment at all.

9. Use captions or speech-to-text support when appropriate

Captions can be helpful for presentations, online sessions and larger events. Automated captions have improved, but they are not perfect, particularly with unfamiliar names, accents or background noise. For some events, a speech-to-text reporter or other professional support may be more appropriate. Ask the person what they need rather than assuming an automated transcript is sufficient.

10. Arrange BSL interpretation when it is required

For some Deaf people, British Sign Language is their first or preferred language. If a BSL interpreter is required, book a qualified interpreter with enough notice and make sure they are visible, well lit and positioned where the attendee can see both the interpreter and the speaker.

KEEP IT PROPORTIONATE

Not every coffee morning needs captions and an interpreter. Not every large event can rely on good lighting and a front-row seat. The adjustment should match the person, the event and the communication need.

After the event, ask what worked

Accessibility improves when providers learn from experience. A quick question to residents, relatives or attendees can reveal practical issues that organisers did not notice. Perhaps the microphone was too quiet, the captions lagged, the room was too dark, or a quieter seating area worked particularly well. Record what you learn so the next event starts from a better position.

JOIN US ON 17 NOVEMBER

Small Changes. Big Difference. brings together practical articles, campaign resources and further information on improving hearing support in care homes. The campaign culminates in a national event in London on 17 November 2026, bringing senior care leaders together to turn the ideas in this series into practical commitments.

[Visit the campaign hub and register your interest](#)

Sources and further reading

1. **RNID, Make your meetings deaf aware** - Guidance on planning, technology, turn-taking, captions and communication support. [View source](#)
2. **RNID, Communication tips for health and social care professionals** - Practical communication guidance. [View source](#)
3. **RNID, Guidance for residential care homes** - Advice on environments, loops and assistive technology. [View source](#)
4. **GOV.UK, Reasonable adjustments: a legal duty** - Overview of the Equality Act duty to make reasonable adjustments. [View source](#)