



Broadcasting Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 2008-8 Telecom Public Notice CRTC 2008-8

Ottawa, 10 June 2008

Notice of consultation

Unresolved issues related to the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services to persons with disabilities

Reference: 8665-C12-200807943

The Commission initiates a proceeding to address unresolved issues related to the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services to persons with disabilities. The Commission invites detailed comments, with supporting rationale, on proposals for improving the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services, including those provided via the Internet and/or to mobile devices. The proceeding will include a public consultation, which will begin on 17 November 2008 at the Conference Centre, Phase IV, 140 Promenade du Portage, Gatineau, Quebec. With advance notice, those participants who wish to participate in the public consultation via one of the Commission's regional offices may do so.

In order to make the proceeding as accessible as possible, the Commission will provide a real time closed captioning feed of the public consultation over the Internet (i.e. audio stream) in English and French. In addition, special arrangements may be made in advance for those participants that will require communications support in order to participate in the public consultation.

Introduction

1. An estimated 4.4 million Canadians – one out of every seven in the population – reported having a disability in 2006.¹
2. Further, the disability rate in Canada increases steadily with age. In 2006, 43.4 percent of persons over 65 reported having a disability, and more than half (56.3 percent) of persons over 75 reported having a disability.²

Background

3. The Commission regulates the Canadian telecommunications and broadcasting industries with the goal of fulfilling the Canadian telecommunications and broadcasting policy objectives. These objectives are set out in the *Telecommunications Act* and the *Broadcasting Act*, respectively.

¹ Source: The 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey: Disability in Canada (Statistics Canada) (PALS). PALS is Canada's national survey that gathers information about adults and children whose daily activities are limited by a physical, mental, or other health-related condition or problem.

² Source: PALS 2006.

4. The Canadian telecommunications policy objectives include rendering reliable and affordable telecommunications services of high quality accessible to Canadians in all regions of Canada³ as well as responding to the economic and social requirements of users of telecommunications services.⁴ When exercising its powers and performing its duties under the *Telecommunications Act*, the Commission is required to do so in accordance with *Order Issuing a Direction to the CRTC on Implementing the Canadian Telecommunications Policy Objectives*, P.C. 2006-1534, 14 December 2006 (the Policy Direction).
5. The Canadian broadcasting policy objectives include the development and safeguarding of a Canadian broadcasting system that serves the needs and interests and reflects the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men, women, and children⁵, including equal rights, as well as providing programming accessible by persons with disabilities, as resources become available for that purpose.⁶
6. The Commission has issued many determinations with the goal of reducing the obstacles to the delivery and receipt of communication services and improving the accessibility of these services to persons with disabilities.
7. Through its determinations, the Commission has established a policy framework for broadcasting services with respect to persons with disabilities focusing on areas such as closed captioning, described video, targeted accessibility services, and the presence, portrayal, and participation of persons with disabilities. Some of the Commission's recent related determinations are listed below. This policy along with recent determinations relating to broadcasting services are described in more detail in Appendix A.
 - In Broadcasting Public Notice 2007-54⁷, the Commission set out a new closed captioning policy whereby French and English television broadcasters must caption 100 percent of their programs over the broadcast day.
 - In Broadcasting Public Notice 2006-47⁸, the Commission approved the licensing and mandatory distribution on digital basic service of The Accessible Channel, a national, English-language digital specialty television service that will provide 100 percent of its programming in open format described video.

³ Paragraph 7(b) of the *Telecommunications Act*.

⁴ Paragraph 7(h) of the *Telecommunications Act*.

⁵ Section 3(1)(d)(iii) of the *Broadcasting Act*.

⁶ Paragraph 3(1)(p) of the *Broadcasting Act*.

⁷ *A new policy with respect to closed captioning*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2007-54, 17 May 2007.

⁸ *Regulatory framework for mobile television broadcasting services*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2006-47, 12 April 2006.

8. With respect to telecommunications services, in Telecom Decision 2008-1⁹, the Commission approved the use of deferral account funds¹⁰ by incumbent local exchange carriers¹¹ (ILECs) for certain initiatives to improve access to telecommunications services for persons with disabilities. Commission-approved ILEC initiatives included the following: establishing a single point of contact for persons with disabilities to receive customer service tailored to the specific needs of the customer; conducting research into the needs of persons with disabilities during the development process of new products and services; establishing an accessibility committee; incorporating inclusive design considerations in service development; developing specific inclusiveness guidelines; and working with wireless device manufacturers to procure accessible wireless handsets. These determinations are described in more detail in Appendix B.
9. For a list of other recent telecommunications and broadcasting determinations related to improving access for persons with disabilities, refer to the related documents section of this Public Notice.

Call for comments

10. With this Public Notice, the Commission initiates a proceeding to address unresolved issues related to the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services (including broadcasting services provided via the Internet and/or to mobile devices)¹² to persons with disabilities.
11. The Commission notes that, as a result of this proceeding, it could impose additional obligations on some or all telecommunications service providers and broadcasting undertakings.¹³
12. The Commission invites comments on how it can improve, where appropriate, its established determinations¹⁴ in the following areas as they relate to improving access and inclusion for persons with disabilities:

(1) Video relay service

(2) Teletypewriters (TTYs)

⁹ *Use of deferral account funds to improve access to telecommunications services for persons with disabilities and to expand broadband services to rural and remote communities*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2008-1, 17 January 2008.

¹⁰ In *Regulatory framework for second price cap period*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2002-34, 30 May 2002, as amended by Telecom Decision CRTC 2002-34-1, 15 July 2002 and *Implementation of price regulation for Télébec and TELUS Québec*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2002-43, 31 July 2002, each ILEC was required by the Commission to establish its own deferral account. As such, deferral account funds are used in a territory-specific manner.

¹¹ Incumbent local exchange carriers are those telecommunications service providers that were the original monopoly telecommunications service providers in their respective operating territories.

¹² Broadcasting services provided via the Internet and/or to mobile devices are also referred to as new media broadcasting services or new media broadcasting undertakings. Some, but not all, broadcasting services provided to mobile devices are provided via the Internet.

¹³ As defined in the *Broadcasting Act*, the term "broadcasting undertaking" includes a distribution undertaking, a programming undertaking and a network.

¹⁴ For a list of the Commission's established determinations that relate to accessibility issues, refer to appendices A and B to this Public Notice.

- (3) Captioning
 - (4) Described video
 - (5) Customer service and support
 - (6) Emergency services
 - (7) Portrayal and employment of persons with disabilities
13. The Commission also invites detailed comments, with supporting rationale, on proposals for otherwise improving the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services, including those provided via the Internet and/or to mobile devices.
14. Comments provided to the Commission should, where applicable,
- (a) clearly state which of the Commission's established determinations should be modified (and how) in order to improve accessibility;
 - (b) be listed in order of priority;
 - (c) note the groups of stakeholders¹⁵ who might be affected by any proposed solution as well as the potential impact on these groups (i.e. in qualitative and quantitative terms);
 - (d) address timeframes for implementation for any proposed solution;
 - (e) address the source of the Commission's authority to implement any proposed solution; and
 - (f) provide estimates of costs as well as suggest funding models that support any proposed solutions.
15. To assist in increasing the awareness of the issues faced by persons with disabilities with respect to telecommunications and broadcasting services, the Commission hired an independent consultant to produce a report on these issues. The report, *Stakeholder Consultations on Accessibility Issues for Persons with Disabilities*, dated April 2008, represents the views of the consultant, not the Commission, and does not dictate the outcome of this proceeding.
16. The Commission notes that it does not regulate terminal equipment or the design and manufacture of communications devices intended for accessing telecommunication or broadcasting services.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Commission invites comments on which measures, short of regulating terminal equipment, would improve the accessibility of telecommunications and broadcasting services to persons with disabilities.

¹⁵ In this context, stakeholders could include any person or group that might be affected by a decision.

¹⁶ The Commission notes that certification of terminal equipment is the responsibility of Industry Canada. In Telecom Decision 2007-20, the Commission stated that standards are more comprehensively determined by entities such as the Canadian Standards Association and/or Industry Canada.

Procedure

17. Due to the nature of this proceeding, the Commission considers it appropriate to issue directions on procedure, which shall govern the conduct of the proceeding and prevail over the standard telecommunications and broadcasting procedures.

Procedures for participation

18. The Commission will hold a public consultation, beginning on Monday, **17 November 2008** at the Conference Centre, Phase IV, 140 Promenade du Portage, Gatineau, Quebec, to address the matters set out in this Public Notice. The hearing is expected to last 10 business days. Arrangements may be made to allow participants to participate in the public consultation from the Commission's regional offices. The addresses of the Commission's regional offices are set out in paragraph 39 of this Public Notice.
19. In order to make the proceeding as accessible as possible, the Commission will provide a real time closed captioning feed of the public consultation over the Internet (i.e. audio stream) in English and French. The audio stream will be available at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca>.
20. Concurrent with the issuance of this Public Notice, the Commission will issue interrogatories to certain telecommunications service providers and broadcasting undertakings. The deadline for submitting responses to these questions is Thursday, **10 July 2008**.
21. The Commission invites persons or groups to provide initial comments to the Commission by Thursday, **10 July 2008**. Initial comments should address the issues set out in paragraphs 10 to 14 and 16 of this Public Notice, and include, where applicable, the information set out in paragraph 22.
22. To assist the Commission in striking an appropriate balance between ensuring an efficient public consultation and providing access to as many different points of view and areas of expertise as possible – as well as to assist the Commission in ensuring that the necessary communications support is provided at the public consultation – persons or groups that wish to make an oral presentation at the public consultation should refer to paragraph 28 of this Public Notice and are to address the following items at the beginning of their initial comments, where applicable:
 - (a) note their request to make an oral presentation at the public consultation and provide clear reasons as to why an oral presentation is appropriate;
 - (b) indicate whether they wish to make their oral presentation in Gatineau or in one of the Commission's regional offices (and, if the latter, which regional office); and
 - (c) indicate whether they will require communications support to participate in the public consultation, for example, assistive listening devices or sign language interpretation; if so, provide details on the communications support required.

23. The Commission will inform those persons or groups that request to participate in the public consultation whether their request has been granted on or before Thursday, **31 July 2008**. The Commission reserves the right to group participants of similar views together for the purpose of presenting their views at the public consultation.
24. The Commission may issue further questions, by Thursday, **31 July 2008**, to telecommunications service providers, broadcasting undertakings, and some or all of the persons or groups who provided initial comments. The deadline for submitting responses to these questions is Tuesday, **2 September 2008**.
25. The Commission invites persons or groups to provide reply comments to the Commission by Thursday, **2 October 2008**. Reply comments should be limited to responses to initial comments and to answers to Commission questions previously submitted by other participants.
26. The Commission will issue a letter, by Friday, **26 September 2008**, to those participants that have been granted a request to appear at the public consultation. This letter will describe the organization and conduct of the public consultation.
27. The Commission invites persons or groups to provide final reply comments to the Commission by Monday, **12 January 2009**. Final reply comments should be no longer than 20 pages. The receipt of final reply comments will close the record of the proceeding.

Procedures for filing comments

28. You can send your submissions to the Secretary General of the Commission:
 - by using the on-line Intervention/Comments Form; or
 - by mail to CRTC, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N2; or
 - by fax to 819-994-0218.
29. Submissions longer than five pages should include a summary.
30. Please number each paragraph of your submission. In addition, please enter the line *****End of document***** following the last paragraph. This will help the Commission verify that the document has not been damaged during transmission.
31. Due to the nature of this proceeding, it is very important that, where possible, submissions be filed electronically in HTML format to allow them to be read by screen-readers. Text documents submitted using "Microsoft Word" and spreadsheet documents submitted using "Microsoft Excel" are also acceptable. However, electronic comments should not be submitted in PDF format.
32. The Commission will not formally acknowledge submissions. It will, however, fully consider all submissions, and they will form part of the public record of the proceeding, provided the procedures set out in paragraphs 18 to 31 of this Public Notice have been followed.

33. Where a document is to be filed or served by a specific date, the document must be actually received, not merely sent, by that date.

Important notice

34. Note that all information that you provide as part of this public process, except information granted confidentiality, whether sent by postal mail, facsimile, email or through the Commission's website at www.crtc.gc.ca, becomes part of a publicly accessible file and will be posted on the Commission's website. This information includes your personal information, such as your full name, email address, postal/street address, telephone and facsimile number(s), and any other personal information you provide.
35. The personal information you provide will be used and may be disclosed for the purpose for which the information was obtained or compiled by the Commission, or for a use consistent with that purpose.
36. Documents received electronically or otherwise will be put on the Commission's website in their entirety exactly as you send them, including any personal information contained therein, in the official language and format in which they are received. Documents not received electronically will be available in PDF format.
37. Please note that the information you provide to the Commission as part of this public process is entered into an unsearchable database dedicated to this specific public process. This database is accessible only from the web page of this particular public process. As a result, a general search of the Commission's website with the help of either the Commission's search engine or a third-party search engine will not provide access to the information which was provided as part of this public process.
38. The Commission encourages participants to monitor the public examination file and the Commission's website for additional information that they may find useful when preparing their comments.

Examination of public comments and related documents

39. Submissions may be examined or will be made available promptly upon request at the Commission offices during normal business hours:

Toll-free telephone: 1-877-249-2782

Toll-free TDD: 1-877-909-2782

Central Building
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
1 Promenade du Portage, Room 206
Gatineau, Quebec J8X 4B1
Tel.: 819-997-2429
Fax: 819-994-0218

Metropolitan Place
99 Wyse Road, Suite 1410
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B3A 4S5
Tel.: 902-426-7997
Fax: 902-426-2721

205 Viger Avenue West, Suite 504
Montréal, Quebec H2Z 1G2
Tel.: 514-283-6607

55 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 624
Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M2
Tel.: 416-952-9096

Kensington Building
275 Portage Avenue, Suite 1810
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2B3
Tel.: 204-983-6306 – TDD: 204-983-8274
Fax: 204-983-6317

Cornwall Professional Building
2125 – 11th Avenue, Suite 103
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3X3
Tel.: 306-780-3422

10405 Jasper Avenue, Suite 520
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3N4
Tel.: 780-495-3224

580 Hornby Street, Suite 530
Vancouver, British Columbia V6C 3B6
Tel.: 604-666-2111 – TDD: 604-666-0778
Fax: 604-666-8322

Secretary General

Related documents

The following list of related documents is not exhaustive.

Telecommunications

- *Enhanced community notification service*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2008-37, 2 May 2008

- *Use of deferral account funds to improve access to telecommunications services for persons with disabilities and to expand broadband services to rural and remote communities*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2008-1, 17 January 2008
- *Action plan for the review of Commission regulatory measures in light of Order in Council P.C. 2006-1534*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2007-51, 11 July 2007
- *Access to certain telecommunications services by persons who are blind*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2007-20, 30 March 2007
- *Access to specially developed services, equipment, and information by persons who are blind*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2007-19, 30 March 2007
- *Bell Aliant Regional Communications, Limited Partnership and Bell Canada – Application to extend certain time frames to equip pay telephones with teletypewriter units, established in Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-47*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2007-12, 27 February 2007
- *Reconsideration of Regulatory framework for voice communication services using Internet Protocol*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-53, 1 September 2006
- *Statement of consumer rights*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-52, 29 August 2006
- *Forbearance from the regulation of retail local exchange services*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-15, 6 April 2006, as amended by the Governor in Council's *Order Varying Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-15*, P.C. 2007-532, 4 April 2007
- *Message relay service in a VoIP environment – Follow-up to Decision 2005-28*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-12, 16 March 2006
- *Disposition of funds in the deferral accounts*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-9, 16 February 2006
- *Regulatory framework for voice communication services using Internet Protocol*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2005-28, 12 May 2005, as amended by Telecom Decision CRTC 2005-28-1, 30 June 2005
- *Follow-up to Access to pay telephone service, Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-47, 15 July 2004: Requests to recover costs associated with upgrading pay telephones with teletypewriter units*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2005-23, 14 April 2005

- *Access to pay telephone service*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-47, 15 July 2004
- *Bell Canada – Exemption from the automatic directory assistance call completion charge*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2004-6, 5 February 2004
- *Part VII application by the Advocates for Sight Impaired Consumers to amend TELUS Communications Inc. General Tariff item 308, Operator Services*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2003-61, 10 September 2003

Broadcasting

- *Distribution of video description by Class 1 cable broadcasting distribution undertakings (BDU), direct-to-home BDUS and satellite relay distribution undertakings*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2007-101, 12 September 2007
- *A new policy with respect to closed captioning*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2007-54, 17 May 2007
- *Exemption order for mobile television broadcasting undertakings*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2007-13, 7 February 2007
- *Commission's response to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' final report on the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2006-77, 19 June 2006
- *Regulatory framework for mobile television broadcasting services*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2006-47, 12 April 2006
- *Exemption order for new media broadcasting undertakings*, Public Notice CRTC 1999-197, 17 December 1999

This document is available in alternative format upon request, and may also be examined in PDF format or in HTML format at the following Internet site: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca>

Commission's policies with respect to accessibility in broadcasting

Closed captioning: Access for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing

The Commission set out a new policy with respect to closed captioning¹ in May 2007 (Broadcasting Public Notice 2007-54). Under this new policy, French and English television broadcasters are required to caption 100 percent of their programs over the broadcast day. The Commission applies this requirement when television licences are renewed.

Given the challenges of captioning in French-language and for new or not-for-profit broadcasters, the Commission is prepared to tailor the 100 percent requirement as necessary. The Commission advised broadcasters that any requests for exceptions to the policy will require the broadcaster to demonstrate, with specific and detailed supporting evidence, including financial information, that it is impossible for it to meet the 100 percent captioning requirement and that a tailoring is necessary.

Recognizing that the quality of captioning is a growing concern, the Commission has asked the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) to coordinate the establishment of French and English-language working groups to develop and implement universal standards and to propose and implement concrete solutions with respect to other aspects of captioning quality, including mechanisms aimed at reducing errors and technical malfunctions (Broadcasting Public Notice 2007-54). The Commission approved the CAB's action plan on the quality of closed captioning last February and expects the results of the working groups to be filed in November 2008.

Described video: Access for persons who are blind or whose vision is impaired

For broadcasters, the Commission has established, through conditions of licence, a progressive approach to video description² with requirements ramping up over the licence term. These conditions of licence generally require 2 hours of described video per week during Year 1 of the licence term, increasing to 3 or 4 hours per week by the end of the licence term.

Cable and satellite distributors are subject to requirements to provide their subscribers with access to the described video offered by broadcasters. In September 2007 (Broadcasting Public Notice 2007-101), the Commission confirmed the requirement that all described video associated with programming services that are distributed digitally be "passed-through" to subscribers, with the pass-through to be implemented by September 2009. Class 1 cable

¹ Closed captioning provides an on-screen textual representation of the audio component of a television program.

² "Video description" or "described video" refers to the narrative description of a program's key visual elements for the purpose of allowing persons who are blind or who have a visual impairment to understand what is occurring on the screen. In providing video description, a narrator offers information on visual cues such as settings, costumes, body language or other purely visual information. Description is normally provided on the secondary audio program (SAP) channel. Audio description provides the voice-overs of textual or graphic information displayed on screen, which all broadcasters must provide, to facilitate access for persons with visual impairments.

distributors are also required to pass-through described video associated with programming services distributed on an analogue basis. These distributors may apply for a condition of licence relieving them from this requirement on the condition that they provide complimentary set-top boxes that enable access to described video on a digital basis to subscribers who are blind or who have a visual impairment.

Targeted accessibility services

The Commission has authorized two audio services for persons with visual impairments: the national reading services of VoicePrint and La Magnétothèque. The Commission requires distributors that operate in English-language markets to carry the VoicePrint service. In July 2007 (Broadcasting Decision 2007-246), the Commission also approved the licensing and mandatory distribution on digital basic service of *The Accessible Channel*, a national, English-language digital specialty television service that will provide 100 percent of its programming in open format described video.

Presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming

In 2004, the Commission called upon the broadcasting industry to examine issues surrounding the presence, portrayal and participation of persons with disabilities in television programming. The CAB submitted, in September 2005, its final research report and developed various initiatives, tools and recommendations in response to the gaps identified by the research.³ A key outcome of this research has been the development of the *Equitable Portrayal Code*, which sets standards for the equitable portrayal of persons with disabilities (among other groups). This new code, which is a condition of licence for all broadcasters, can be found in Broadcasting Public Notice 2008-23.⁴

The reflection and inclusion of persons with disabilities is also integral to the Commission's policy on cultural diversity in broadcasting.⁵ As part of its policy on diversity, the Commission requires individual broadcasters to file corporate plans at the time of their licence renewals, as well as annual progress reports on initiatives to reflect Canada's diversity (ethnocultural minorities, Aboriginal peoples and persons with disabilities) in their programming and business operations. The CAB also files with the Commission annual reports on its cultural diversity initiatives.

³ The Commission's response to the CAB's research can be found in Broadcasting Public Notice 2006-77.

⁴ *Equitable Portrayal Code*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2008-23, 17 March 2008.

⁵ *Commission's response to the report of the Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television*, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2005-24, 21 March 2005.

Commission's policies with respect to accessibility in telecommunications

Telecommunications services for persons with disabilities mandated by the Commission

There are various services for persons with disabilities that have been mandated by the Commission. Message Relay Service (MRS) is an operator service that allows people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing, or who have speech impairments, to place calls to standard telephone users via a teletypewriter (TTY) (also called a text telephone), an electronic device that enables text communication via a telephone line. Typed messages are relayed as voice messages by an MRS operator, and vice-versa. MRS must be made available by all telephone companies that provide local residential telecommunications services. Registered telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) users also benefit from a 50 percent discount off Basic Toll Rates (long distance calls charged according to the Basic Toll Schedule). Certain telephone companies also offer various long distance discounts to their customers with disabilities.

Persons who are blind or visually impaired have the option to receive bills, bill inserts and information setting out the rates, terms and conditions of a service in an alternative billing format, for example in Braille, large print, or electronic version. Alternative billing formats must be made available, upon request, as a condition of offering any telecommunications service to a consumer.

Two further services are Directory Assistance (DA) and Automatic Directory Assistance Call Completion (ADACC). Persons with disabilities who are registered as having a disability with their telephone company can receive free DA and free ADACC to assist with finding and dialing telephone numbers. All telephone companies that provide directories also provide free DA to persons with disabilities, and certain other companies offer free or discounted DA to their customers with disabilities.

The Commission also mandated various requirements for pay telephones. When replacing or upgrading or when installing new pay telephones, all telephone companies must provide the following functions to assist persons with disabilities:

- key pads with larger buttons spread further apart;
- usual numbers and letters on the dial pad;
- bright, contrasting-colour coin and/or card mechanisms;
- a feature that enables the user to start the call over if a mistake is made;
- a screen displaying context-sensitive dialing instructions in larger size;
- a card-reader for a variety of telephone cards; and
- voice prompts to assist in placing calls or using features.

In addition, access for the physically disabled must be provided and the pay telephones must be hearing aid compatible. There are also requirements for pay telephones to include a minimum number of TTY-equipped payphones.

Use of deferral account funds to improve access to telecommunications services for persons with disabilities

In Telecom Decision 2008-1, the Commission approved the use of deferral account funds by incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) for certain initiatives to improve access to telecommunications services for persons with disabilities.

The ILECs' submissions included a variety of proposals to improve accessibility to telecommunications services within their territories for persons with a range of disabilities, including visual, mobility, dexterity, cognitive, hearing, and speech disabilities. The Commission approved proposals by

- Bell Canada, Saskatchewan Telecommunications (SaskTel), and TELUS Communications Company (TCC) to introduce Internet Protocol (IP) Relay, a text-based tool that would allow persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking to communicate through the telephone system with hearing persons through a relay agent.
- Bell Canada and TCC to introduce Video Relay Service (VRS), a service that would allow a person using sign language and another person using voice to communicate through a relay agent via high-speed Internet and a video camera.
- Bell Canada to redesign the underlying application for its Voice Activated Dialing (VAD) service.
- TCC to enhance its Directory Assistance service to allow persons with disabilities to request information on the basis of the category of a business and/or its approximate location without having to provide precise spelling or pronunciation. TCC to roll-out its Enhanced Directory Assistance (EDA) service free of charge to its special-needs customers.
- SaskTel for an initiative that would provide improved access to certain telecommunications services for persons with sight and mobility disabilities, and could help support independent living for persons with cognitive disabilities.

- MTS Allstream Inc. (MTS Allstream), SaskTel, and TCC to improve accessibility to their websites, including adding accessible information on products and services for customers with visual, physical, hearing, and speech disabilities as well as information about other telecommunications products and services that they offer. Bell Canada to recover the costs of already implemented accessibility improvements to its website.
- Bell Canada to establish a single point of contact for persons with disabilities to receive customer service tailored to the specific needs of the customer.
- Bell Canada to conduct research into the needs of persons with disabilities during the development process of new products and services.
- SaskTel to provide free teletypewriter (TTY) units to all Transition Houses in Saskatchewan.
- TCC to introduce three internal programs to improve accessibility to its telecommunications services for persons with disabilities: a TELUS Accessibility Committee; the incorporation of inclusive design considerations in its service development and the development of specific inclusiveness guidelines; and its work with wireless device manufacturers to procure accessible wireless handsets.

Each of the ILECs also proposed to set aside any unallocated portion of their accessibility funds for future accessibility initiatives as follows. The Commission approved proposals by

- Bell Canada and MTS Allstream to set aside the remaining funds for specific initiatives, to be identified at a later date, to improve access to telecommunications services by persons with disabilities.
- TCC to develop the technological platform necessary to enable various services using IP and presence-based technologies. TCC would use deferral account funds only for that portion of the design, development, and implementation of services that would ensure accessibility for TCC's customers with disabilities.
- SaskTel to form a partnership with the Government of Saskatchewan's Office of Disability Issues to develop telecommunications services to better the way of life of persons with disabilities.