

I'm Marcia Brooks. I work at Perkins School for the Blind on the iCanConnect program, also known as the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program. And this is USH Talks. Thank you to the Usher Syndrome Coalition for the opportunity to highlight this wonderful resource for people with both significant hearing and significant vision loss who meet disability and income eligibility guidelines.

Everything in this presentation is on the iCanConnect website, which is [icanconnect.org](http://icanconnect.org), including how to find your local contact and to see if you qualify.

The overview-- iCanConnect provides free equipment and training to people with both significant hearing and significant vision loss who meet federal disability and income eligibility guidelines. iCanConnect helps program participants connect with friends, family, community, and the world.

The goals of the program are to promote increased independence, to reduce isolation, to enhance social interaction. And iCanConnect is for distance communication, which means it's not for face-to-face communication. The program supplements but does not supplant, or take the place of, other resources.

Now, how did this wonderful program come to be? The background-- it's part of this landmark 2010 federal law known as the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act, otherwise known as the CVAA. It updates the nation's communications requirements for accessibility.

And some refer to it as the digital version of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA. iCanConnect is administered by the Federal Communications Commission, the FCC. And the program has local contacts, so it is a national program with local contacts. The program is permanent as of July 1, 2017, after a five-year pilot.

Where's it available? For eligible US residents in 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and US Virgin Islands. The FCC certifies one organization in each. Find your local contact by going to [icanconnect.org](http://icanconnect.org) or call 800-825-4595.

The eligibility requirements for the program are the applicant must have significant combined vision and hearing loss that causes difficulty in attaining independence in daily life activities. Now, for people with a progressive diagnosis such as Usher syndrome, the FCC generally gives guidelines that are meant to maximize the opportunity to train somebody with the diagnosis.

In other words, the diagnosis has hopefully not progressed to the point that it would otherwise later on. Want to maximize that training window. If somebody is recently diagnosed but does not have significant combined vision and hearing loss, that would mean that there would be some consideration as to whether the person would yet be

eligible. That's something to explore with your local program contact.

The two prongs for the eligibility are the disability eligibility, and then the second is the income eligibility. And that requires household income less than 400% of the federal poverty rate or that the applicant qualifies for a low income assistance program such as SSI and Medicaid. These are all listed on the program website.

Once the applicant is accepted into the program, iCanConnect provides an individual assessment to inform the suitable equipment and software that's appropriate for the individual's hearing and vision loss, the distance communication goals they hope to accomplish such as perhaps texting with grandkids or friends or using a mobile device.

Those are the things people come to us and say they'd like to be able to do. So in the assessment, they'll figure out what's the right equipment. They'll consider also the existing equipment and technical skills that the person may have. And then iCanConnect provides training, equipment, and interpreters as needed.

What iCanConnect does not provide is equipment for use in classroom or workplace. That goes back to what we said earlier. iCanConnect is not supposed to take the place of other programs. So here, the iCanConnect would not take the place of the obligations a school or workplace would have for accessibility.

iCanConnect doesn't provide phone service or internet service, but it does provide the devices that use those services. It can't provide training or repairs on non-iCanConnect equipment the person may already have. Program does not provide teaching Braille or teaching typing and does not provide hearing aids or wheelchairs.

Now, each local program organization determines each applicant's eligibility, the amount of equipment and training each person receives, the frequency of replacement. And that's each program's judgment to make to serve as many eligible people as possible with limited funds. So as much as those decisions are made locally, each program still must comply with the FCC's NDBEDP rules and policies.

How to apply-- each state has its own application. There are parts of the application that all states' application must include. You can get the application from your local program. It is likely to be able to be downloaded from [icanconnect.org](http://icanconnect.org). And the submitted applications must include the proof of disability and income eligibility. The applicants must also attest that they won't sell, give, or lend their iCanConnect equipment.

Again, after the acceptance, each person receives an assessment individualized to determine the suitable equipment and software. And again, the considerations are the individual's specific hearing and vision loss, what they'd like to accomplish for distance communications, and what they might already know about equipment. We order the equipment. The equipment is installed. And the training begins.

So what kind of equipment does iCanConnect provide? It's off-the-shelf equipment and assistive technology. That includes phones, mobile devices, computers, Braille devices, signalers, and software. See more examples at [icanconnect.org/equipment](http://icanconnect.org/equipment). Again, each state program makes equipment decisions within the national program guidelines.

So for equipment repair and replacement, for whatever equipment iCanConnect provides a program participant, that will include repairs or replacement for the same or a similar model and additional training if needed. If new equipment is desired, that requires income reverification if it's been more than one year since the income was last verified. Again, each local program determines if and when to upgrade equipment.

So let's talk about the consumer success stories. What wonderful things has iCanConnect helped program participants do? We publish program participants' stories of how iCanConnect has positively impacted their lives. And doing so helps people see how iCanConnect can help them or those they know. It helps them see themselves in the solutions that iCanConnect provides.

See [icanconnect.org/news](http://icanconnect.org/news) for all profiles. We'd like to share a few here to give examples. Dallas Bauer is with his iPad. There's a picture of him with his orange glasses, his orange t-shirt, and his iPad with an orange protecting case. He is with his iPad. He's signing in American Sign Language while he's video chatting.

You can read more about Dallas at [icanconnect.org/news](http://icanconnect.org/news). But Dallas's story really briefly-- he uses his iCanConnect iPad to video chat with his parents whenever he wants. This is a kid who needs the perfect goodbye when he leaves for school. Before he was using his iCanConnect equipment, sometimes he would need to go back home if he didn't think he got the perfect goodbye.

Ever since he got his iCanConnect equipment, he never needs to do that. He can video chat with his parents whenever he wants. He likes to share photos and videos with family and friends. He especially loves doing that with his grandparents. And he likes to use the chat function in virtual games to play with his family, friends, and other players.

Here's another great story for iCanConnect. There is a picture of two ladies. They're both wearing glasses. It's close-up. They're at a baseball game with friends who are deaf-blind. Now, both of these ladies-- Yolanda Burnett is at the left and Mary at the right-- they're both iCanConnect program participants who reconnected once they were using their iCanConnect equipment. And again, they went to a baseball game that they organized online with friends who were deaf-blind.

Yolanda uses email and social media with her iPhone and iPad. She connects with her children, grandchildren, and friends, including, she was so delighted to be able to reconnect with her former classmates. And she

participates in an online group for people who are deaf-blind. And the baseball game was one example of making friends and attending outings through that group.

Here's a picture of Billy Pickens. He is sitting at a desk. He is using his Braille device. His laptop's in the background. So Billy Pickens, living at college, said, "I like having options for how I communicate with people." He uses a Braille notetaker with professors and classmates. He uses an iPhone and refreshable Braille display with family and friends. He said, "iCanConnect has given me access to the world around me."

Here's a picture of Jan Attridge. She's using her CapTel phone. She's smiling. She's holding the handset to her phone. You can see the CapTel screen with the text on it. And there is a light above the CapTel phone. Jan's an artist who lives far from the city, hours away.

The onset of her hearing and vision loss made it hard for her to keep in touch with family and friends. Now, she uses a CapTel captioned phone and amplified phone. She uses a mobile phone to share pictures she takes with family, friends, and business contacts.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of things iCanConnect has done to help people connect with friends, family, local community, and the world. So learn more about iCanConnect and find your local contact at [www.icanconnect.org](http://www.icanconnect.org) or call 800-825-4595.