

Telecommunications Relay Service

The Federal Communications Commission requires that all local exchange companies (LECs) offer Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS).

What is TRS?

TRS allows people with hearing or speech disabilities to communicate via the telephone. Communications assistants (CA), relay the content of calls between users of teletypewriters (TTYs) and users of traditional handsets (voice users). For example, a TTY user may telephone a voice user by calling a TRS provider (or "relay center") where a CA will place the call to the voice user and relay the conversation by transcribing spoken content for the TTY user and reading text aloud for the voice user.

Does the law require TRS?

Yes, TRS is required by Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and to the extent possible, must be "functionally equivalent" to standard telephone services.

When can telephone customers use TRS and how do they access the service?

TRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the same as voice service. People can access the TRS service by voice or text telephones by dialing the TRS number for their state (which is often found in the information section of phone directories). The TRS access number is usually a toll-free number.

Are calls made through TRS free of charge?

No, while the inbound call to the TRS center is a toll-free call, the TRS users will be billed for the completed call to the party they ask the TRS center to call through the relay, as if the TRS user had placed the same call through the voice network. The TRS users will pay the same rates as a voice telephone user for the same type of call. TRS users cannot be charged extra because they are using TRS.

How does a phone company provide TRS?

There are various telecommunications vendors that provide TRS service. Your state has a contract with one of these vendors and a telephone company goes through that vendor to set up the service. Sprint is the largest provider of TRS in the United States.

What is the function of a CA?

The function of the CA is to transliterate conversation from text to voice and from voice to text. A CA is an employee of the TRS provider.

Do CAs receive special training?

TRS providers are responsible for ensuring that CAs are sufficiently trained to meet the communication needs of individuals with hearing and speech disabilities, that CAs have competent skills in typing, grammar, spelling, interpretation of typewritten American Sign Language (ASL), and possess familiarity with hearing and speech disability cultures, languages and etiquette.

Can TRS customers be assured that their calls will remain confidential?

Except as authorized by section 705 of the Communications Act, 47 U.S.C 605, CAs are prohibited from disclosing the content of any relayed conversation regardless of content and from keeping records of the content of any conversation beyond the duration of a call. CAs are also prohibited from intentionally altering a relayed conversation and must relay all conversation verbatim unless the relay user specifically requests summarization. The exception to this would be if the relay user was using the service for illegal purposes.

What types of calls can people make with TRS?

Consistent with the obligations of common carrier operators, CAs are prohibited from refusing single or sequential calls or limiting the length of calls utilizing relay services. TRS shall be capable of handling any type of call provided by common carriers. Providers of TRS are permitted to decline to complete a call because credit authorization is denied. Also, due to some technical difficulties with completing calls made through coin telephones, TRS users, under an alternative plan adopted by the industry, can currently make local TRS calls through a coin phone free of charge. Toll calls made through a coin phone can be made with a calling card or pre-paid phone card.

How long does it take to process a TRS call?

TRS centers are required by FCC rules to have adequate staffing to provide callers with efficient access under projected calling volumes. Except during network failure, TRS must answer 85 percent of all calls within 10 seconds, and no more than 30 seconds shall elapse between receipt of dialing information and the dialing of the requested number. Today, CAs use sophisticated terminal equipment to enhance call delivery, and TRS providers may offer features such as "call profiling" that hasten the call set-up times.

How do customers obtain a Teletypewriter (TTY)?

Every state has a program in place for obtaining a TTY. Your telephone company should have a state TRS number to

give individuals who inquire about a TTY phone. Generally, if individuals have the need for the TTY they can get one at no charge.

How are TRS services funded?

Costs for intrastate TRS (i.e. TRS calls made within a state) are paid by the states. The states usually recover intrastate TRS costs through a very small surcharge applied to the telephone bills of all telephone customers in a state. Costs for interstate TRS (that is, TRS calls that cross state lines) are paid through the Interstate TRS Fund, a shared-funding mechanism that is funded by contributions from all interstate carriers in the United States. The National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) currently administers the Interstate TRS Fund.