



California Connect

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California Connect

Program Mission and Overview

Program Mission

California Connect, also known as the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program,¹ is a public purpose program that empowers Californians who are deaf or have disabilities to connect with the world by providing equipment and services that enable them to communicate independently. The program’s mission is to support its community members' needs so they can live fulfilling lives without compromise.

Program Overview

California Connect is a state-mandated California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) initiative that provides Californians with hearing, speech, physical, cognitive, visual, and memory disabilities with specialized communication services, telephone relay services, and speech assistance programs. California Connect aims to improve quality of life and create pathways for independent communication by engaging consumers through community partnerships. The program helps people with disabilities stay connected with loved ones, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices facilitate communication with essential services such as 911 and 988, housing, transportation, social services, medical and financial assistance services.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over four million Californians have a disability (roughly 11% of the state’s population). Disability prevalence rises with age – almost half of Californians ages 75 and older have a disability indicating that the need for accessible communication will continue to grow as the population ages.² People with disabilities also experience higher rates of poverty in that approximately 26% of working-age disabled Californians live below the poverty line, nearly double the rate for those without disabilities.³ By providing no-cost equipment and services, California Connect helps bridge this affordability gap, ensuring that income limitations do not prevent individuals from obtaining essential communication tools. See Table 1 below for an overview of Californians with specific disabilities:

¹ The Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program is defined in California Public Utilities Code 2881.

² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2023, via <https://www.disabilitystatistics.org>

³ End Poverty in California, Living in Poverty in California: My Experience as a Disabled Person, via <https://endpovertyinca.org>

Table 1. Disability Status of Californians (ACS 2023)⁴

Disability Type ⁱ	Estimated Population	% of State Population
Hearing difficulty	1,171,000	3.0%
Vision difficulty	897,000	2.3%
Cognitive difficulty	1,810,000	4.6%
Ambulatory (mobility) difficulty	2,160,000	5.5%
Self-care difficulty	896,000	2.3%
Independent-living difficulty	1,156,000	3.0%
Total Californians with any disability ⁱⁱ	~4.3 million	~11%

i. The ACS does not list speech disabilities or difficulties in their population breakdown.

ii. The categories listed above add up to more than 11% due to individuals sometimes having more than one disability.

To assist with program oversight, the California legislature created two customer advisory committees:

- Telecommunications Access for the Deaf and Disabled Administrative Committee (TADDAC)
- Equipment Program Advisory Committee (EPAC)

Securing the most effective combination of accommodation can be time-consuming and burdensome. California Connect offers an array of programs and equipment tailored to individual communication needs, including specialized communication devices, speech assistance services, captioned telephones, and assistive technologies. To accomplish this, California Connect incorporates three distinct programs, as described below.

Equipment Distribution Program

The Equipment Distribution Program provides specialized communications equipment to meet the specific needs of people with one or more disabilities. In the fiscal year 2024-2025, the program provided equipment for 1,208 new consumers bringing the total consumers participating in the program to over 650k.

Relay Service

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2023, via <https://www.disabilitystatistics.org>

Relay Service connects trained operators with people who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have a speech-related disability. The operators relay telephone conversations. In FY 24-25, the relay service supported 323,908 calls.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

This program provides funding for speech-generating devices, Voice Options, and accessories to people with disabilities who can benefit from the devices and applications. In FY 24-25, the program provided 1,002 long-term-device⁵ iPads and 1,362 short-term-device iPads.⁶

Program Performance

Equipment Distribution Program

The Equipment Distribution Program, formerly known as the California Telephone Access Program, supports Californians with disabilities whose day-to-day communication is affected and who cannot use a standard telephone. The CPUC regularly updates its equipment, services, and distribution strategies to effectively meet consumers' communication needs. The Equipment Program Advisory Committee advises the CPUC by recommending new equipment to distribute. At the conclusion of the reporting period for this report, the program had a pipeline of 51 communication products under evaluation for potential inclusion. This pipeline represents ongoing market research, vendor relationships, and community feedback regarding emerging communication technologies.

Across California, an estimated 1.17 million people are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing (3.0% of the population), and about 897,000 have vision difficulties (2.3%). Another 2.16 million have ambulatory (mobility-related) disabilities, and 1.81 million have cognitive impairments.⁷ These are conditions that can make using standard telephones challenging, and underscore the critical need for specialized communication devices and services provided by the Equipment Distribution Program.

⁵ After the participant has trialed the short-term device and determined the app that is the best fit, the participant can receive a long-term device iPad with the selected app to be used indefinitely so long as the participant can benefit from the iPad and speech app.

⁶ A short-term device iPad is a loaner iPad for up to 14 days. Participants trial the loaner iPad with various speech apps to determine which app is the best fit.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2023, via <https://www.disabilitystatistics.org>

During FY 24-25 eight new devices were accepted into the program. These include:

BlueParrott S650-XT Bluetooth Headset: A professional headset that delivers clear communication in noisy environments and supports individuals with hearing loss. Noise-canceling technology enhances audio clarity, while hands-free and voice-control functions enable safe, independent access to calls, emergency services, and apps.

HomeAware Security Alert: A home alerting system that integrates with doorbells, alarms, weather radios, and security devices, delivering visual, vibrating, and audio notifications. Smartphone integration ensures users remain connected to critical alerts both at home and away.

Hable Easy - Smartphone Remote Controller: A handheld controller with physical buttons that simplifies smartphone use for individuals with vision or motor difficulties. It enables calls, messaging, and emergency access without reliance on touchscreen gestures, supporting independence for seniors and users with limited dexterity.

Hable One Keyboard: A compact Braille keyboard that allows people who are blind or have low vision to compose messages, access navigation, and contact emergency services discreetly and accurately. This supports workplace communication, texting, and daily independence for individuals who rely on Braille for written communication.

INIU Portable Charger: A lightweight power bank that charges multiple communication and assistive devices simultaneously. It ensures continued access to emergency services, family contacts, and assistive technology while traveling or away from power sources.

Mophie Powerstation Pro AC: A backup battery with AC and multiple charging ports designed for home use during outages. It powers phones, hearing aids, and assistive devices, enabling the user to maintain communication with caregivers, family, and emergency services when traditional power is unavailable.

Rivo3S - Smartphone Keypad Controller: A tactile keypad that provides full smartphone access without touchscreens to people who are blind or have low vision. Features include voice feedback, hands-free calling, and app navigation, ensuring equal access to digital communication and services.

WR120 NOAA Weather and Emergency Alert Radio: An emergency alert radio providing weather, AMBER, and civil alerts in multiple languages with battery backup. Critical for Californians with disabilities during disasters, it can operate independently or integrate with HomeAware to provide visual, audio, and tactile notifications.



WR120 NOAA Weather and Emergency Alert Radio



Rivo3S - Smartphone Keypad Controller

Table 2 presents total equipment distributed by the Equipment Distribution Program to eligible consumers during Fiscal Years 2022–23 through 2024–25. Distribution counts are shown by statutory authority and device type, reflecting equipment provided through the program’s primary fulfillment channels, including contact center orders, service centers, field advisors, and outreach.

Table 2: Total Equipment Distributed by the Program Distribution Center to Program Customers Through Contact Center Orders, Services Centers, Field Advisors, and Outreach

Senate Bill # / Public Utility Code	Type	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Senate Bill 60 Equipment Public Utilities Code Section 2881 (C) (1985)	Amplified phones	6,172	4,610	2,078
	Other phone sets, including cordless, CapTel, big-button, speaker, and picture phones	1,376	1,024	381
	Accessories including switches, cords, headsets, amplifiers, adapters, and	3,251	2,754	1,419

Senate Bill 60 Equipment Total		10,799	8,388	3,878
Senate Bill 597 Equipment Public Utilities Code Section 2881 (A) (1979)	Voice Carry Over	15	4	1
	Teletypewriter and Telebraille (TTY)	46	33	25
	Accessories, including light flashers, vibrating alert systems, and extensive visual displays	24	18	15
Senate Bill 597 Equipment Total		85	55	41
Grand Total		10,884	8,443	3,919

All of the categories above depict a year-over-year drop in equipment distributed to California Connect Customers. This trend can be largely attributed to the type of devices offered by the program, which are primarily landline-based.

Consistent with the nationwide trend where users are transitioning from wireline devices in place of wireless devices, California Connect users are also shifting to technologies that provide accessible functionality but are IP-based or wireless. This has led to a decrease in demand for California Connect wireline equipment and services.

However, the program has taken steps to provide customers with wireless and broadband devices and services. The program transition from wireline to wireless and broadband equipment and services is anticipated to take between one to two years and started in 2025. The transition timeline includes testing, procurement, training, marketing and distribution of the devices. For example, in the Testing and Training Updates section, devices were previously added to California Connect with minimal input from the end-users. The new testing and training model will ensure that users and advisory committee members have input into whether or not the piece of equipment is beneficial for them and members of their community. This approach is anticipated to generate greater demand for California Connect devices since persons with disabilities will have tested the equipment and determined it to be beneficial to their needs.

Also, there is an ongoing proceeding, specifically Rulemaking 23-11-001, that addresses the outdated equipment offered by California Connect. The proceeding includes a Staff Proposal from Communications Division Staff that recommends providing IP-enabled and wireless communication devices such as tablets, smartphones, and mobile Wi-Fi devices. Once more modern equipment is included in the program offerings, an increase in demand is projected starting in 2026.

California Relay

California Connect offers no-cost telephone relay service for people with hearing or speech disabilities. Callers connect with specially trained operators who relay telephone conversations between those who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech-related disability, and anyone with whom they wish to communicate. To connect to the Relay Service, a person dials 711 from their copper wire landline phone to reach the person they are calling. Relay Service includes five service areas:

- **Traditional Relay Service (TRS):** A service in which a teletypewriter (TTY) is used to make telephone calls with the assistance of a specially trained communications assistant. A person with hearing or speech disabilities may want to use this service.
- **Captioned Telephone Service (CTS):** A service in which captions showing what a person is saying are displayed on a screen for someone to read. A person who is deaf or hard of hearing but can speak for themselves may want to use this service.
- **Speech-to-Speech Service (STS):** A service in which a relay operator revoices what a person wants to say in their phone conversations. A person who has speech disabilities may wish to use this service.
- **Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech (VA STS):** A service in which a person uses a webcam or videophone with Jami⁸ to connect with a communications assistant at the Relay call center, who then repeats the caller’s voiced communications to ensure clarity. A person who has difficulty speaking or being understood on the telephone may want to use this service.
- **Remote Conference Captioning (RCC):** A service in which real-time captions are provided over a screen during a virtual conference call so a person can read the text of what all participants are saying. A person who has difficulty hearing or understanding what is being said during conference calls may want to use this service.

The charts below compare the Relay Service call breakdown for Fiscal Years 2022-2023 through 2024-2025.

Table 3: Comparison of Relay Service Call Breakdown

Activity	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Traditional relay service calls	412,474	177,503	234,654
Captioned telephone service calls	143,218	83,564	58,855
Speech-to-speech calls	43,144	19,821	30,399
Remote conference captioning calls	9	6	40
Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech	453	1,131	210

⁸ Jami is a free, decentralized, peer-to-peer (P2P) communication platform for secure and private messaging, voice/video calls, and file sharing.

California is home to a large community of potential relay users. The U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey estimates around 1,171,000 residents have a hearing related disability. There are also many others that have speech-related disabilities. The 324,158 relay calls facilitated in FY 24-25 demonstrate the ongoing demand for accessible telephone communication among these populations. This service remains a critical lifeline, enabling independent communication for work, family, and emergency needs.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

On October 2, 2011, Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. enacted Assembly Bill 136, which amended Public Utilities Code Section 2881 to include the provision of speech-generating devices, also known as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. The legislature mandated the CPUC to establish regulations for the implementation of the AAC program by January 1, 2014, which include:

- Inclusion of speech language pathologists among the authorized agents who can certify individuals' eligibility to receive equipment from the program.
- Expansion of the program's scope, allowing for the provision of Speech Generating Devices (SGDs), accessories, mounting systems, and specialized communications equipment.
- Broadening the range of equipment offered by the program to include SGDs, which, due to their medical nature, were previously beyond the program's purview regarding eligible equipment.

Since 2014, the program has provided services to over 1,976 individuals with speech disabilities. In FY 24-25, the program received 363 applications and approved 87% of these requests. These applications include both partial funding requests (where the applicant's medical insurance covered a portion of accessories, mounting systems, and specialized communications equipment) and complete funding requests (where the insurance provider denied coverage or where individuals have no health insurance).

Applicants seeking funding for AACs must undergo an evaluation by a speech-language pathologist, who, as part of the California Connect application process, provides equipment recommendations. However, recognizing that there may be individuals with speech disabilities who either cannot or choose not to engage the services of a speech-language pathologist, and instead opt to self-select an assistive device or technology, the California Public Utilities Commission initiated a pilot program in collaboration with the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, named Voice Options. This multiphase pilot commenced on January 11, 2017, and concluded on June 30, 2019, during which approximately 600 iPads were distributed for both short-term and long-term loans through 10 demonstration centers.

Based on the positive reception of the Voice Options program, the CPUC, in partnership with the California Department of Rehabilitation through an interagency agreement, launched a third phase of Voice Options on June 15, 2020, to distribute 500 iPads annually to individuals who face speech difficulties.

Throughout FY 24-25, the 28 Voice Option service providers provided 1,002 long-term-device iPads and 1,362 short-term-device iPads to Voice Options participants. To date, at least 4,566 people have entered into the short-term loan program since 2014.

On February 23, 2023, the CPUC issued Decision 23-02-022, which adopted the Voice Options pilot as a permanent part of California Connect.

The broader need for AAC support is significant in that an estimated five million Americans have disabilities that prevent them from relying on speech alone to communicate. By proportion, this suggests nearly 588,000 Californians could benefit from augmentative communication tools.⁹ These figures underscore the importance of programs like Voice Options in providing speech-generating apps to those who would otherwise struggle to be heard.

Program Achievements

This fiscal year was defined by transition and renewal. With several new vendors under contract, each new vendor was tasked with evaluating and targeting their approach to better align with program goals and community needs. This period of change presented both challenges and opportunities, enabling the program to modernize our strategies, introduce fresh perspectives, and lay the groundwork for more effective, efficient community support in the years ahead.

In FY 24-25, the California Connect program continued to provide Californians with disabilities with practical, no cost tools that enable them to connect with the world around them. The program acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to providing accessible communication for individuals with disabilities, and that individuals may often need a combination of equipment and services to navigate their lives around barriers.

Testing and Training Updates

The transition period required redefining how testing products and services was conducted to better serve California's disability communities. Traditional testing models evaluated devices based solely on technical compatibility and functionality, without incorporating usability testing or community input. The program has since restructured its approach to prioritize authentic community feedback, collaborative input processes, and user-centered design. This strategic shift moved us away from isolated technical testing toward an inclusive model that positions community members as active partners in evaluating and introducing equipment and services into the program.

Effective product evaluation and testing requires ongoing dialogue with end users, and not just a single opportunity for users to provide feedback. This determination prompted the development of new methods for community collaboration, idea sharing, and continuous feedback throughout the testing and evaluation

⁹ AAC Counts, What Existing Data Can and Cannot Tell Us About People with Significant Speech Disabilities, via <https://communicationfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/AAC-Counts-Report-Part-2-What-Existing-Data-Can-and-Cannot-Tell-Us.pdf>

lifecycle. As a result, several new initiatives were researched and began development over the reporting period, including a new community platform and learning management system.

Community platform development: Development began in FY 24-25 on an online community platform scheduled for release in 2026. The platform will provide peer forums, educational resources, equipment and service suggestions, a customer learning library, and a pilot program portal to support ongoing collaboration and feedback.

Learning management system development: The program is also designing a new learning management system to serve both internal staff and external participants. Internal modules focus on equipment, compliance, and service delivery, while external content emphasizes practical training and troubleshooting integrated with the community platform.

Marketing Updates

During FY 24–25, California Connect worked to improve the quality of marketing efforts, increase awareness of program initiatives, and support major program modernization transitional changes. Central to these efforts were the production of 15 new accessible videos highlighting program priorities, the relocation of 14 service centers, and a large-scale multi-channel marketing campaign. The results of these efforts, expanded upon below, increased awareness, strengthened community presence, and significantly grew digital engagement and service access across California.

To minimize brand and consumer disruption with regards to service center relocations, California Connect designed and produced signage through 14 different service centers, ensuring consistency across all locations while meeting local requirements. Materials were developed for the old centers to inform visitors of upcoming moves, while simultaneously establishing updated Google Business and Bing Maps profiles for the new sites to ensure easy discoverability. The relocations were promoted through open houses, which served both to familiarize the public with the new facilities and to reinforce the program’s presence in the community. As one component of this broader awareness effort, the digital campaign generated 6,539 impressions and 339 engagements, comparable to the program’s 54 organic posts promoting California Relay during this fiscal year, which produced 6,780 impressions and 201 engagements, despite only 34 posts promoting the service center relocations. These coordinated efforts not only preserved customer engagement during the transition but also generated visibility for the expanded services at the new locations.



California Connect representatives cutting the ribbon to a new service center.



New signage at the San Luis Obispo Service Center

Additionally, the program produced and launched a series of 15 new videos highlighting remote conference captioning, augmentative and alternative communications, new service centers, and general services. These

videos anchored a comprehensive multi-media campaign reaching audiences statewide, including targeted broadcast television, local radio and newspaper, and direct mail initiatives in predominantly rural regions such as Chico-Redding, Eureka, Inland Empire, and Northern San Joaquin Valley. The campaign ran from May 19 through July 13 across multiple channels, including radio, streaming, print, search, and direct mail. By combining compelling visual storytelling with broad distribution, the campaign reached diverse audiences and reinforced the program’s organizational mission. The campaign took place for six (6) weeks in FY 24-25 and two (2) weeks in FY 25-26.

The marketing efforts surrounding these videos generated over 49,000 website visits (a 62% year-over-year increase), 5,600 calls, and more than 300 applications, demonstrating broad engagement across multiple channels.



A photo of a consumer and a service center representative from the multichannel marketing campaign.

In addition to these efforts, California Connect began promoting the availability of the online application, making service access easier for customers who prefer digital options. To this end, the online application saw a total of 1,723 online applications started, 2,358 PDF applications downloaded, and over 29,000 new website visitors. By improving the accessibility and visibility of its online application, California Connect helps people with disabilities to learn about and more easily apply for its services. Digital marketing efforts for this topic generated over 19,000 impressions and 721 engagements. Parallel to this, California Connect laid the groundwork for a community-outreach and partnership campaign, designed to strengthen ties with local private and government entities and establish trusted referral pathways. Though still in its early stages, this initiative reflects a long-term strategy to expand reach and build durable partnerships.

Overall, the program saw:

- Website
 - » During FY 24-25 there were 229,316 active users on CAConnect.org, an 85.1% year-over-year increase
- Search
 - » Google search ads resulted in 6,036,807 impressions, a 224.11% increase over the previous year. Additionally, these efforts resulted in 92,075 clicks, a 90.7% increase over the previous year, and 3,117 conversions, a 65.7% decrease.
- Social media
 - » Facebook had 5,655,082 impressions, a 65.44% YOY increase and grew by 454 new followers.
 - » Instagram ended the year with 902 followers, a 47.9% increase over the previous year and had 909,632 impressions, an 18.37% increase.
 - » LinkedIn, a newly launched profile ended with 120 followers, and had 9,763 impressions.

Outreach Updates

Throughout the year, California Connect identified and verified contacts from 1,308 organizations across California—including 231 in rural areas—to support strategic outreach and account efforts. In FY 25-26 California Connect will begin more concerted efforts to target and track outreach efforts in tribal regions. This emphasis on rural outreach is critical, as the most recent available data indicates that disability prevalence is higher in many rural communities (over 20% of rural Californians have a disability, compared to 17% in urban areas). See the table below. Reaching these areas is essential to address service gaps where accessible resources are often limited. For many rural residents with disabilities, building local awareness and referral networks can dramatically improve their access to California Connect’s services.

Table 4. Urban vs Rural Rates (California 2010) 10

Geography	% of Population with Disability
Urban counties (LA, SF, San Diego, etc.)	≈ 17 %
Rural counties (Siskiyou, Modoc, Humboldt, etc.)	≈ 21 %

¹⁰ State Bar of California, California Commission on Access to Justice, Improving Civil Justice in Rural California: Developing a Framework for Action. San Francisco, CA: State Bar of California, 2010, via https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/0/documents/accessJustice/CCAJ_2010_FINAL_2.pdf?ver=2017-05-19-133105-073

In FY 24-25, California Connect advanced the development of a statewide community resource network by launching a comprehensive, verified database of private and government entities, education, community-based organizations and local service providers. Designed to support strategic outreach, targeted engagement, and data-informed service coordination across California, this evolving tool serves as a critical component of the program’s new outreach infrastructure.

Each entry in the Outreach database includes key operational details such as geographic coverage, service types, population focus, eligibility criteria, and referral protocols. As a dynamic, living resource, the database supports relationship management and collaborative planning.

The Outreach database is intended to serve as a core component to provide critical data and information of the program's strategic plans in identifying organizations and entities to foster mutually beneficial, engagement and relationships. This structured approach will provide a robust, verified foundation of Outreach accounts for collaborative relationships, ensuring that future outreach and engagement efforts are both expansive and grounded in trusted partnerships across the state to include exchange of referrals, cross-training and services.

Customer Engagement

The goal of these combined efforts is to promote awareness of consumer and organizational behaviors that foster strong, long-lasting relationships. Figure 1 shows the consumer-focused activities through various channels, including equipment distribution, contact center operations, field services, and educational initiatives for fiscal years 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-2025.

Table 5: Consumer-Focused Activities by Year

Activity	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Customers receiving new equipment	3,633	6,170	1,208
Contact center calls handled (inbound and outbound)	122,443	91,409	60,659
Contact center emails handled (inbound and outbound)	7,201	6,157	4,859
Applications received	3,008	2,250	1,646
Customer visits to service centers	5,549	4,042	1,204 ⁱ
Outreach presentations	1,845	371 ⁱⁱ	0 ⁱⁱ
Field advisor visits to customers’ locations	2,984	2,866	1,491
Web chats handled	441	220	106

Activity	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Marketing campaigns	10	8	7
Relay calls, including traditional relay services, speech-to-speech, and captioned telephone services	598,836	297,805	323,908
Customer Training Participants	2,558	3,235	0 ⁱⁱⁱ

i. Service center attendance temporarily declined as all locations were either preparing to transition or actively transitioning to new facilities and efforts focused on establishing and promoting the new sites.

ii. Decline in Outreach presentation is a result of transition of contractors, hiring of new staff, implementation of new outreach database and drafting of 2026 Outreach plan. 2026 Outreach plan includes lead generation, account management, and presentations.

iii. Customer training was transitioning from in-person at the service centers to the new Testing and Training contract which includes the implementation and launch of a new Learning Management System (LMS) to include multiple courses, virtual participation and be accessible for all disabilities. The new LMS is scheduled for launch in 2026 with 10 new courses on new products, OS training and new services.

The declining trend across the board for all categories in table 5 is due to factors including the decline in customer activity and distribution of wireline devices and services that is currently available to consumers through the program, the relocation of Service Centers, transition of contractors and hiring and training the new staff at the service centers along with customer' awareness of the new Service Center locations. Communications Division Staff are taking pro-active measures to respond to the customers' demand for wireless and broadband equipment and services which is anticipated to reverse the downward trend.

Program Implementation and Financial Status

In FY 24-25, pursuant to Public Utilities Code Section 914.5(a), the CPUC continued to evaluate options to manage program expenses and increase program efficiency.

The program maintained a strong financial position in FY 24-25, ending with a fund balance of \$39,615,000. The ending balance demonstrates effective fiscal management and program sustainability.

Revenue remained stable, with regulatory fees (surcharges) generating \$38,190,000 representing the primary funding source. The program also earned \$454,000 in investment income from surplus money investments.

On the expenditure side, the program maintained efficient operations while delivering essential services. Notable cost efficiencies were achieved in administrative operations, with CPUC administrative charges of \$4,569,000 representing approximately 6.33% of total expenditure. The California Relay Service required \$3,764,000 while speech assistance services, including speech generating devices and Voice Options, accounted for approximately \$9,713,000 combined.

Table 6: Statement of Revenues, Expenditures, and Fund Balance (in Thousands)

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Beginning balance	64,201	83,457	73,179
Prior year adjustments and fund assessment adjustments	4,065	1,705	0
Adjusted beginning balance	68,266	85,162	73,179
Revenue			
Regulatory fees (surcharges)	61,737	68,560 ⁱ	38,190
Investment income — surplus money investments	2,020	4,072 ⁱⁱⁱ	454
Escheat — unclaimed checks, warrants, bonds, and coupons	0	0	0
Transfers and other adjustments	0	0	0
Revenue transfer from the Coronavirus Relief Fund	0	0	0
Loan from CHCF-B to California Connect ⁱⁱⁱ	0	-25,000	0
Operating transfer to the general fund	0	0	0
Total revenues, transfers, and other adjustments	63,757	47,632 ⁱⁱ	38,644
	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Expenditures			
California Public Utilities Commission admin charges	2,331	2,393	4,569
Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program Administrator	20,152	12,793 ⁱⁱⁱ	33,253 ^{iv}
Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program Equipment Processing Center, and	5,143	2,729 ⁱ	2,353 ^{iv}

	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Field Operations			10,007
Testing and Training service provider	0	0	1,382
Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program Marketing and Outreach service provider	2,373	3,433 ⁱ	2,720 ^{iv}
Other Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program contracts, including lease payments, American Sign Language, foreign language, and attendants	2,277	1,311 ⁱ	628 ^{iv}
California Relay Service	3,842	2,457	3,764 ^{iv}
Speech-Generating Devices	815	343 ⁱ	6,056 ^{iv}
Voice Options	2,692	832 ⁱ	3,657
Advisory committees — Telecommunications Access for the Deaf and Disabled Administrative Committee and Equipment Program Advisory Committee	56	3,656 ⁱ	89 ^{iv}
Local assistance	54	54 ⁱ	210
California State Library	552	77	552
Pro rata	1,604	552 ⁱ	2,968
Financial Information System for California (FI\$CAL)	0	0	0
Supplemental pension	33	33	20
Total expenditures	41,924	30,663 ⁱ	72,208
Ending fund balance	83,457	73,178ⁱ	39,615

i. Source: Preliminary DF303 Detailed Fund Balance Report and Fi\$Cal

iii. The Fi\$Cal Commitment Control Report reports the expenditure data.

lii. California Connect experienced a fund balance deficit for the 2021-22 Governor's budget due to declining intrastate revenue base with the surcharge rate set at 0.5%. Department of Finance approved a one-time loan from California High-Cost Fund-B (CHCF-B) to California Connect. The surcharge rate

was adjusted to 1.1% to address the declining revenue base and maintain a positive fund balance in 2022-2023. California Connect has paid back the loan.

iv. FY 2024–25 expenditure amounts reflect voucher-based expenditures reconciled to the Department of Finance Fund Condition Statement for Fund 0483. Contract categories are reported on a programmatic basis for consistency with prior annual reports, and administrative and operational costs presented based on available expenditure reporting classifications.

Surcharges

The program's funding is sustained through a dedicated surcharge assessed and collected by communications companies, including VoIP providers. This surcharge is presented on customer bills and applied to intrastate charges for all communication service providers. The CPUC maintains active oversight over the fund balance, revenues, and expenses associated with California Connect. This oversight ensures that the surcharge remains sufficient to meet the financial requirements specified in the California Connect budget, in accordance with the state budget enacted by the Legislature.

Beginning April 1, 2023, California moved from six separate surcharges to a single flat rate to fund its six universal service programs, including California Connect. As a result, California phone bills are more transparent and include one flat-rate surcharge of \$0.90 per access line. The CPUC periodically adjusts this surcharge to ensure providers do not over collect based on the allocations designated to fund each of the six universal service programs.

On June 27th, 2025, Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB142, extending the CPUC's authority to collect surcharge revenue, up to a total of one hundred million dollars per year, with the current surcharge structure remaining in effect until December 31st of 2034.

Means Test

California Connect does not impose any costs on the user. Users pay the exact equal access charges for standard telephone or network services as other customers. California Connect meets the demand of the number of consumers applying for services and equipment. As such, the Commission does not consider a means test necessary to control program costs.

Efficient Distribution of Equipment

All equipment within the California Connect program is procured in strict compliance with state contracting and procurement regulations, including competitive bidding. These measures ensure that the state secures equipment at reasonable prices. Furthermore, the program has several initiatives, outlined below, to streamline equipment distribution.

Evaluations

To ensure efficient and effective device recommendations, prospective users of the Equipment Distribution Program must complete an evaluation before receiving equipment. This process helps identify the device and feature set that best fits each individual's communication, usability, and network needs, and also prevents misuse of services by ensuring that customers are not provided equipment that would be better served by an alternative solution. For applicants seeking Speech Generating Devices, the program provides a 14-day trial period during which they may test their preferred applications to determine which AAC best supports their communication style and daily activities.

In addition to these front-end evaluations, consumers may request an in-home visit from a California Connect representative to assist with setup, configuration, and basic training. These visits ensure that devices are properly tailored to the user's needs from the start and significantly increase the likelihood of successful adoption and continued use.

New Equipment

The program remains dedicated to seeking new and innovative equipment to include in its offerings. In collaboration with the Equipment Program Advisory Committee, two key initiatives were undertaken: 1) find more modern, broadband, wireless, and assistive technology equipment, and 2) find equipment that would allow Californians with disabilities to receive emergency notifications and to have reliable communication access in emergencies. As a result, a total of eight devices were added to the program, four of which are focused on receiving emergency notifications.

In June 2025, 24 new devices were identified for formal testing in collaboration with the Equipment Program Advisory Committee. These devices will be evaluated by committee members and the California Connect Testing and Training team throughout 2025 and 2026. Testing results will inform recommendations for program expansion, focusing on equipment that provides enhanced communication access and modernized solutions for California's disability communities.

Service Centers

California Connect determined that Californians with disabilities did not live near previous offices and that more individuals could benefit from the program's offerings by relocating all service centers to more strategic locations. There are currently 14 full-time service centers and one part-time service center. In choosing the new locations, the following variables were considered:

- Demographics and populations of the surrounding area
- Access to public transit
- Physical accessibility of each location (proximity of accessible parking spots, curbs, ramps, elevators, etc.)
- Proximity to complementary service providers

- Mix of urban, tribal, and rural locations

Additionally, many consumers need more than one service, and careful consideration was given to finding locations close to independent living centers and disability action centers, so customers can easily access multiple service providers in one trip. In some cases, this involves co-sharing a location with service providers or providing part-time hours – a solution that will be implemented in the coming year, with the first location in Fresno.

Through this strategic shift, consumers in need will have easier access to California Connect’s service center staff. These staff are trained to provide personalized assessments and recommendations for all consumers, ensuring they receive the appropriate device or service for their needs.

Relay Quality Standards

The Relay Service contract mandates the inclusion of both federal and state-mandated service quality standards as compulsory requirements. The contracted provider is obligated not only to meet but to surpass all federal standards to ensure the delivery of high-quality relay services and more efficient call processes.

Moreover, the Relay Service contract also stipulates that the provider must undertake initiatives to enhance awareness of speech-to-speech services. Speech-to-speech is a valuable resource for users with speech disabilities, enabling them to use the relay service more effectively and potentially reducing the time required to initiate a call. To assist consumers in making the best use of Speech-to-Speech, the program has introduced a training line and visual assistance.

Tracking Federal Programs

The federal government funds three additional relay services to access the telephone network:

- Video Relay Service
- Internet Protocol Relay
- Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service

Currently, the state and federal programs are complementary and funded through separate revenue sources. California Connect continues to leverage federal programs by promoting public awareness and accessibility of federal programs.

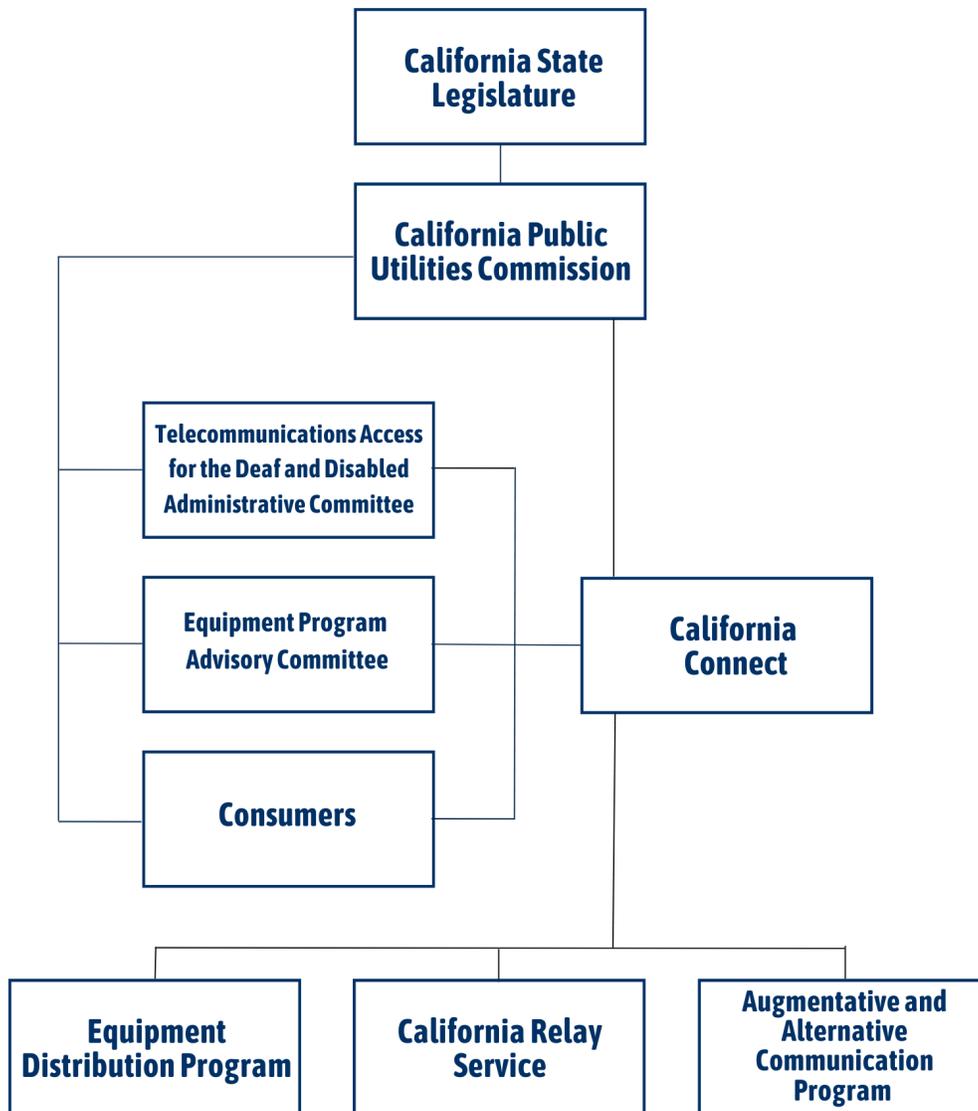
Speech Generating Devices (SGDs)

Pursuant to Assembly Bill 136, California Connect is the provider and funder of last resort for SGDs that are considered durable medical equipment. Current access to California Connect program funding for SGDs is limited to applicants who are assessed by a speech-language pathologist and whose SGDs are classified as durable medical equipment.

Technology and Training

To keep up with the ever-evolving digital communications landscape, California Connect regularly assesses new technologies to integrate into the program and better serve its consumers. In addition to close collaboration with the two community advisory committees, during this period, new training and customer support methods were evaluated to increase long-term adoption rates. To foster ongoing dialogue and enable continuous feedback, several key technological developments were initiated, including a accessible, intuitive and engaging community platform that allows participation in consumer forums, online learning, device recommendations, equipment testing, and more. The introduction of this program will allow for more efficient consumer onboarding and troubleshooting.

Program Structure



Organizational chart

Advisory Committee Rosters

Telecommunications Access for the Deaf and Disabled Administrative Committee

- Jesse Acosta, at-Large Seat — Veteran
- Christopher Bartulo. CPUC Public Advocates Office
- Kevin Siemens, Disability Seat — Speech-to-Speech Community Representative
- Louis Herrera, Disability Seat — Blind/Low-Vision Representative
- Katie Wright, Chair — Late-Deafened Community Representative
- Robert Sidansky — Deaf Community Representative
- Francis Reyes Acosta — at-Large Seat, Spanish Services Community Representative

Equipment Program Advisory Committee

- Janice Armigo Brown — Hard of Hearing Community Representative
- Judith Viera — Deaf Community Representative
- Danyelle Cerillo, Disability Seat — Blind/Low-Vision Community Representative
- Antoinette Warren — Senior Community Representative
- Steve Longo, Chair — Deaf Community Representative
- Monique Harris, Disability Seat — Mobility Impaired Representative

Contact Information

Customer Contact Center

Phone lines open Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., except holidays

- Phone/VP: 800-806-1191
- Email: info@caconnect.org
- Mail: P.O. Box 30310, Stockton, CA 95213
- Fax: 800-889-3974
- TTY: 800-806-4474

California Relay Service — Dial 711

English/Spanish for all modalities, or call one of the following numbers:

- Voice: 800-855-7100

- TTY: 800-855-7100
- STS: 800-855-7300
- CapTel: 866-399-9050

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

- Phone/VP: 800-806-1191
- Email: info@caconnect.org
- Mail: P.O. Box 30310, Stockton, CA 95213
- Fax: 800-889-3974
- TTY: 800-806-4474

Service Centers

Full-time service centers are open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., and part-time service centers are open Mondays from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. except for state holidays.



Table 7: Service Center Locations

Service Center Locations	
Arcata Service Center 670 9th St., Suite 1 Arcata, CA 95521	Bakersfield Service Center 1401 Commercial Way, Suite 210 Bakersfield, CA 93309
Barstow Service Center 128 E Buena Vista St. Barstow, CA 92311	Claremont Service Center Service Center for Independent Life 131 S. Spring St. Claremont, CA 91711
Fresno Service Center (Part-Time) Resources for Independence Central Valley 3636 N. First St., Suite 101 Fresno, CA 93726	Merced Service Center 3337 G St., Suite C Merced, CA 95340
Orange Service Center 2100 W Orangewood Ave. Suite 201 Orange, CA 92868	Redding Service Center Disability Action Center 2440 Athens Ave. Redding, CA 96001
Riverside Service Center 1485 University Ave., Suite B Riverside, CA 92507	Sacramento Service Center 1610 Arden Way, Suite 195 Sacramento, CA 95815
San Diego Service Center 2635 Camino Del Rio S., Suite 101 San Diego, CA 92108	San Jose Service Center 1889 Concourse Dr. San Jose, CA 95131
San Luis Obispo Service Center 3426 Empresa Dr., Suite 120 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401	Santa Rosa Service Center 1550 Airport Blvd., Suite 206 Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Sonora Service Center 14520 Mono Way, Suite 110 Sonora, CA 95370	

For more information, please visit the California Connect website at www.CAConnect.org. This annual report is submitted pursuant to California Public Utilities Code Section 914.5 (a) by the California Public Utilities Commission to summarize accomplishments of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program during FY 24-25.

Appendix

Legislative Background

In 1979, the California Legislature enacted Public Utilities Code Section 2881, codifying the California Public Utilities Commission's existing program for people who are deaf and have disabilities. Section 2881 required the California Public Utilities Commission to design and implement a program to provide communication devices to deaf and hard of hearing customers. Subsequently, the legislature expanded the program's scope, creating additional requirements for the California Public Utilities Commission. This program, now called California Connect, also known as the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program, performs several functions mandated by Section 2881 et seq., including:

- Provides authority for the California Public Utilities Commission to transfer advisory oversight of the Teletypewriter Placement Program to the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program and its advisory committees [Public Utilities Code Sections 279(a) and 2881.2, added in 2003 and 2001, respectively].
- Provides specialized communications equipment to individuals certified with hearing, vision, speech, cognitive, and mobility disabilities [Public Utilities Code Section 2881 (c), added in 1985].
- Directs that wireless equipment become a permanent part of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (Decision 10-11-033).
- Provides speech generating devices as a provider of last resort and adds speech language pathologists as Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program certifying agents [Public Utilities Code Sections 2881(d) and 2881(e)(1), added in 2011 through Assembly Bill 136 (Ch. 404, Beall)].
- Provides a dual-party relay system, now called the California Relay Service, to connect Teletypewriter users with any other telephone user [Public Utilities Code Section 2881 (b), added in 1983].
- Provides communication devices to certified deaf and hard of hearing users [Public Utilities Code Section 2881 (a)].

In 1989, pursuant to Decision 89-05-060, the California Public Utilities Commission established a structured framework for the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunication Program. This framework serves to ensure effective oversight of the mandated programs, which include both the California Telephone Access Program, responsible for equipment distribution, and the California Relay Service, facilitating telephonic communication between individuals with hearing abilities and those who are deaf or hard of hearing or who have a speech-related disability through operator-assisted relay telephone conversations.

The administration of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program by the California Public Utilities Commission is accomplished through contractual agreements with multiple vendors. These vendors are tasked with providing services mandated by the Public Utilities Code. It is noteworthy that the selection of vendors typically follows a competitive bidding process, adhering to the contracting and procurement requirements of the state of California.

The California Communications Access Foundation, a nonprofit organization, assumes the role of managing the operations and contracts pertaining to the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program on behalf of the California Public Utilities Commission. They serve as both a primary program administrator and a contractor administrator, diligently implementing policies and directives set forth by the commission. This entails overseeing administrative, management, and operational functions.

It is crucial to emphasize that all policy decisions and discretionary determinations related to the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunication Program are the sole prerogative of the California Public Utilities Commission.