

CCP Summary — November 20, 2024

Meeting information

Title	Consumer Consultation Panel (CCP) for Canadian Administrator of VRS (CAV)
Date	November 20, 2024, from 13:00 to 16:00 Eastern Time
Type	Consultative meeting
Location	Zoom
Subject	Improving CAV's Customer Service
Present	<p>Chris Kenopic, Facilitator</p> <p>CAV Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suzanne Laforest, CEO and Executive Director • Diane Unterschultz, Administrative Assistant • Paula Bath, Director of Regulatory Compliance and Strategy • David Egan, Director of Customer Service • Wissam Constatin, Community and Events Manager (Zoom Moderator) <p>CCP Members or Representatives (Present)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natasha 'Courage' Bacchus, (Ontario Deaf Sports Association) • Richard Belzile (Canadian Association of the Deaf) • Anthony Cashin, (Canada Deaf Grassroots Movement) • Benoît Landry (Association des personnes vivant avec une surdité de Laval) • Terri Noit, (DeafBlind Planning Committee) • Christopher Ramharry (Toronto International Deaf Film and Arts Festival) • Connie Russell, (Silent Voice Canada Inc.) • Pengchao Shao, (Greater Vancouver Association of the Deaf) <p>CCP Members or Representatives (Absent)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Todd Tobin (Ontario Cultural Society of the Deaf) • Jeffrey Beatty, (Deaf Wireless Canada Committee)
Interpreters	English-ASL, ASL-LSQ
Additional notes	Meeting Languages: ASL, LSQ, English

Disclaimer:

This document is provided for informational purposes only. It does not necessarily represent the view points of CAV. It is intended to provides a clear and accurate high-level summary of the topics discussed and removes identifying detail of participants. It is not a verbatim transcript or intended to provide quotes of participant comments. In the event of translation errors or any concerns with accuracy, please signal your concerns to: publications@cav-acs.ca.

Introduction

The Consumer Consultation Panel (CCP) meeting was held with nominated members from CAV registered stakeholder groups from the Deaf community to discuss Canada VRS. A nonpartisan facilitator, Chris Kenopic, was invited to facilitate the meeting. The facilitator started introductions and explained the meeting agenda and process. A summary of the meeting will be shared publicly with names removed. The CCP will be fore a term of two years and meet twice per year.

Theme: Improving Customer Service

The focus of the discussion about ways to improve CAV's customer service department. The meeting opened with CAV providing general updates. Next, discussion questions were given relating to the theme of improving customer service. Then, before the end of the meeting, an open discussion was held on any topic a member thought important for CAV to address.

Early Morning Platform Resets

The daily VRS platform maintenance reset at 5:00 a.m. has been removed.

Newly Elected Board Member

Paula Wesley from British Columbia has joined the Board for a three-year term.

CAV Celebrated its 8th Anniversary

In September 2024, the CAV team traveled to Vancouver for its eight-year anniversary celebration. Hosting CAV's anniversary in different provinces is intended to develop relationships with different representatives across the provinces.

CAV Supplier Summit and DeafBlind Training

In October 2024, CAV hosted its annual provider summit. The event also included training on how to improve service provision targeting the DeafBlind communities.

Request for Information (RFI) Process Underway for VRS Providers

The RFI process will be ongoing until December 31, 2024. The goal is to test the market and gather information on the interest of various VRS companies in providing the technical platform for Canada VRS. The next step would be to possibly move forward will be deciding whether to move forward with the platform.

Video Interpreter (VI) Quality Program Updating

CAV's Director of Operations for Video Interpreter Providers will be coordinating a project looking into the quality of video interpreting services across Canada VRS. The project will summarize the challenges VRS customers users are experiencing. There will be further quality standardization implemented across all four Video Interpreting Providers (VIP).

New Facebook Page

CAV has launched its new Facebook page. It is open to the public and allows comments to be posted from the community.

Dedicated Canada VRS Numbers Increasing

CAV is currently reaching out to various organizations and more direct 10-digit VRS numbers are becoming available.

Six-Digit Code Initiative

At times current dedicated 10-digit numbers for Deaf and hard of hearing people are being used by hearing people to jump the queue when calling companies such as the CRA. CAV, in collaboration with the CRA, is looking into a new initiative that will replace the 10-digit number with a 6-digit code. This new code will be connected to the Canada VRS system and allow all VRS calls to pass through.

Customer Service Hours and Ticketing

CAV has established a new ticket policy that will ensure clients are kept informed of the status of their submitted tickets. Also, the customer service working hours will remain the same at 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. EST. The CAV team is exploring expanding the working hours in the future.

Customer Service Team Transferring to CAV

For the past eight years, customer service was the responsibility of IVèS. It is being transferred over to CAV as of January 1, 2025. This will provide more direct communication between CAV and Canada VRS customers.

Discussing General Questions from Members

A member asked if it will be possible for the Canadian Association for the Deaf (CAD) to have a direct number with VRS. CAV shared that only relay services (not Deaf to Deaf direct calling services) is available at this time.

A member asked if there will be a way to combine personal cell phone numbers with VRS numbers, to have one number and not two. CAV responded that this functionality is not available at this time, but feasibility could be looked at for the future.

A member asked if the six-digit code is for the banks, for example? CAV explained that the six-digit code will be the same code for Deaf and DeafBlind callers. The purpose of the code is to alert the company receiving the incoming call that it is from VRS. This approach will overcome some security challenges and allow Deaf VRS callers to have shorter wait times.

Another member agreed that currently when calling through VRS there are a lot of issues getting through to banks, especially RBC. CAV noted that it is aware of this issue and is in discussions with different companies to improve VRS customer experience.

A member asked why in the past when calling an international number with a TTY phone, the charges were billed to Deaf people through their telecommunications service provider (and appeared on their bill) whereas with VRS calls VRS customers are required to use an international calling card and direct billing is not available.

CAV explained that it does not have a billing system that is able to bill VRS customers directly. However, the CRTC requires VRS customers to pay the international calling fees. CAV recognizes that obtaining calling cards is becoming more difficult and CAV has started work to improve this. In 2025, this is an active project and CAV will find the best solution with the CRTC. CAV will inform VRS customers when changes occur.

Group Questions & Discussion – Improving Customer Service

Question 1: How would you describe your current experience with our customer service team?

A member said that some community members have difficulty navigating English on the website and suggested to have information available in more languages or using different visual methods. The member also explained a preference for customer service to reduce the number of follow-up emails sent to VRS customers after making a service call. CAV replied asking if making calling customer service more easy on CAV's website would that make it easier for VRS customers? The member confirmed it would.

Another member asked if CAV is connected to the CRA and is having discussions with them about quality of service. The member noted that the VRS platform often takes time to load and the process to reach an VI could be smoother. CAV replied that better training is needed for all third-party companies that have added dedicated VRS phone lines. In the future, CAV will produce such training and set timelines for refreshing it.

A member said it is important to have Black VIs interpret for Black VRS customers to allow for appropriate interpretation during the call.

Another member suggested allowing VRS customers to swipe through a list of VIs and to choose one for their call instead of having to tell the VI on the line that they want to be transferred to someone else. CAV replied that many VRS customers have made similar comments, in particular during the recent CRTC regulatory review. This approach is challenging because of scheduling interpreters. CAV is considering different ways to satisfy the need for VRS customers.

Another member agreed and hopes that CAV will be able to resolve this challenge of matching a caller to a preferred interpreter. The member noted that maybe it is possible to partner with different interpreting agencies to do this. CAV replied that that American VRS companies do not provide the ability for callers to choose preferred interpreters due to similar scheduling challenges, and CAV will need to work look further into this issue.

Question 2: How can CAV improve customer service quality?

A member said that sometimes it can be difficult to see interpreters when the background or shirt is dark and the interpreter's hands don't contrast their background enough to be clearly visible. CAV replied that it will take this feedback and will look into this issue further with their VI providers.

Another member agreed and said that that some VI backgrounds are not suitable for the DeafBlind community. The member also mentioned that on VRS calls sometimes there are also reflections of light or the VI's clothing styles are distracting, and this creates challenges. CAV replied that it has just completed a DeafBlind VRS needs assessment and will take the members feedback back to influence new standards and requirements for VIs.

A member suggested adding an option to rate the interpreter immediately after the call ends, and have the feedback be sent to CAV via email. CAV added that a 1 to 5 numeric rating system of a VI may not provide enough information to be valuable. However, in the event of a poor rating perhaps adding an automated survey send to the VRS customer to solicit more in-depth feedback.

Another member said that VRS calls sometimes are disconnected and the VRS customer need to call in again. Improvement is needed in that area. VRS callers should be able to return to the call quickly and VRS customers should not need to navigate and place a new call. One way could be to have the VIs ID listed in the call history, so we can call them back. Additionally, the VRS app needs to have the 9050 customer service number listed more visibly for ease of calling.

Another member agreed and suggested that VRS customers should be able to perform an automatic redial to the same company and get the same interpreter in the case of a dropped call. The members also suggested having a toggle for ASL, LSQ, and DeafBlind services.

A member said that it would be good to add a message that when someone calls CAV's customer service after hours to advise the caller that customer service is currently closed.

Question 3: How can CAV improve VRS ticket management?

CAV provided a brief overview of the VRS ticket management system. Every time a user contacts customer service through any means, a ticket is opened and the issue is tracked. A Level 1 (L1) representative creates a ticket and notes all the actions taken to fix the issue. If they are not able to fix it, they send the ticket to Level 2 (L2). The L2 representative checks that all the steps have been followed and may send the ticket back to L1 if they have new recommendations. If the ticket is in L2 and there are no additional solutions found, they send the ticket to Level 3 (L3), which is the programming and development level. If the ticket is in L3 it generally means something needs to be programmed differently in the application. During this escalation process, CAV tries to make the ticket progress as transparent as possible. However, at the development level tickets can take months to be closed.

CAV asked attendees how CAV can improve its communication with VRS customers during ticket escalations.

A member reported that he was helping someone with a ticket recently, collected a significant amount of information for customer service, and it was not clear what the status of the ticket now was, whether the ticket was with development, or if he will receive a call back. CAV replied that the goal is to ensure that the customer service representative is getting all the information at the first call, to eliminate repeated calls with the VRS customer. Also, the VRS customer should be informed when the ticket is moved to L2 and L3, and if it is closed. CAV measures how long tickets have been open, which also provides information for improvement. The tickets are in French and English, and CAV would like to make ASQ and LSQ available as well, so VRS customers are able to respond in their first language.

Another member noted that sometimes the waiting time for getting resolutions to some tickets/issues is long and asked if there will be better quality service in the future or a new version of the app. CAV responded that the ticketing platform will remain the same for now. However, the customer service staff team will be transferred to CAV in 2025.

Another member asked if there is a follow up call for tickets, it will be in English or ASL. CAV replied it is working on ensuring agents can communicate in ASL and LSQ as needed and have communication through video available instead of only text-based emails in French and English. The goal is to have sign language video responses capabilities to be developed in 2025.

A member asked if it is possible for the customer service representative to access her computer remotely and demonstrate how to fix the issue visually. CAV responded that this functionality is already available on PC and Mac with an internet connection.

A member said that the VRS technical troubleshooting day that CAV hosted was very beneficial. The member suggested making it an occasional event. CAV added that these technical troubleshooting events will be posted on Facebook for the community to see. And that, yes, CAV is planning to host more technical staff join conferences and events to host trouble shooting clinics.

Question 4: How can CAV make VRS calls more accessible?

A member said that some interpreters do not have enough experience with DeafBlind people, leading to issues such as not being able to understand the user's signs or other communication systems. CAV responded that CAV will be offering training to the four VIPs and all of CAV staff, including customer service representative. CAV is investigating how interpreters can improve their skills to be able to match DeafBlind consumers and their needs. CAV is hoping that the experience will improve with time and the new training opportunities being set up in 2025, as well as feedback being collected on how to improve these skills.

A member asked why the airport still uses TTY and whether it is possible to set up a VRS phone at the airport. CAV responded that there have been discussions on setting up VRS at airports. However, there are still groups which use TTY, such as seniors and hard-of-hearing people. Therefore, access to TTY must remain available.

Question 5: What information does CAV need to make more available on their website?

A member suggested having different background and font colour options for the website and ensuring those controls to adjust the visual accessibility are at the top of the website page to ensure they are easily found versus having them at the bottom of the page where they would be harder to find. CAV responded that the website currently has those accessibility options available and has noted the member's suggestion to move those controls to the top of the webpage for ease of findability. CAV also noted that it is planning to add more video resources in ASL and LSQ for both technical troubleshooting and self-help information. Thus, if customer Service is not open, VRS customers should be able to access a wide array of self-help materials easily.

Another member reported a few concerns. The chat icon on the website is ambiguous to whether it is a text chat or video chat. Only once you click on the button do you see that either is an option, but the icon isn't clear. Also, information about the new 9-8-8 mental health phone number needs to be better advertised and promoted. And lastly, Deaf prisoners do not currently have access to VRS. CAV noted the concerns and clarified that it is only possible to have live text or live video chat when customer service is open. CAV also noted that a few people have contacted regarding the lack of access to VRS in prison, and CAV is in discussions with diverse groups, including American VRS service providers, and is researching how it can be addressed.

CAV reminded members that if they have feedback about website accessibility to please contact CAV's customer service so that improvements can be made.

A member suggested adding a feature to switch easily between VRS accounts; for example, for individuals who have separate personal and business accounts. CAV replied that this feature is available but on the Next Generation PC and MAC app only at this time.

Open Discussion

A member suggested that it would be beneficial to have English and ASL beside each other on the website instead of having to search for the ASL video version.

Another member reported that sometimes VIs go on break while they are on hold, which leads to the call being disconnected. The member also noted that sometimes VIs need to switch out in the middle of a serious discussion, which seriously disrupts the conversation because the new VI does not have background information. The member asked if it is possible for the video interpreter to wait until the conversation has finished and expressed a need for DIs (Deaf interpreters) to be more readily available. CAV noted that interpreters switching out is an issue that has been reported. Video Interpreter Providers (VIPs) sometimes have a schedule that they must follow. CAV cannot guarantee that VIs will not switch out; however, CAV can investigate options for a smoother transition. For example, the leaving VI can take a few seconds to explain the conversation to the incoming VI. CAV reiterated its policy with VIs that a VI is to stay on a call for a minimum of 10 minutes. Interpreters should be able to call the user back if the call disconnects, but sometimes there is a platform issue which prevents the video interpreter from doing so. CAV is working toward a more dependable platform. CAV further added that platform stability is CAV's priority to make sure the disconnections are eliminated. CAV is implementing tracking software to understand where the disconnections occur.

Another member agreed with the suggestion to have ASL/LSQ next to the English/French on the website, although it would be good to have a toggle between ASL and LSQ to avoid having both displayed at the same time.

A member reiterated that they agree that VRS call disconnection issues happen often and that video interpreters switching mid-conversation is stressful during the call. The member also expressed the need for Video interpreters who are Deaf and the ability to include a Deaf video interpreter if communication with the original interpreter is not working. CAV replied the CRTC will soon be publishing its new Regulatory Policy for Canada VRS. CAV will review any new requirements for the VRS service, consult with stakeholders and update the strategic plan to reflect the decisions.

A member reported that his Chromebook does not support Canada VRS calling, so he is not able to use VRS unless he is at home. CAV responded that CAV launched a Request for Information (RFI) process and it includes requesting details from VRS providers about VRS calling using a web-based platform which would allow a Chromebook to be used to make VRS calls through a web-based portal. CAV needs to wait until this process is complete to know more about this possible future development.

Closing

CAV closed the meeting by saying that a participation survey will be sent to meeting attendees, and a summary of the meeting will be circulated (without names) to ensure comments were captured accurately.