



# California Connect

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

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Issued March 1, 2025



**California Public  
Utilities Commission**

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# Program Overview

## PROGRAM MISSION

California Connect is a program of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) that provides access to telecommunication services, devices and assistive technologies for Californians who have difficulty using the telephone. California Public Utilities Code statute refers to the program as California Connect.

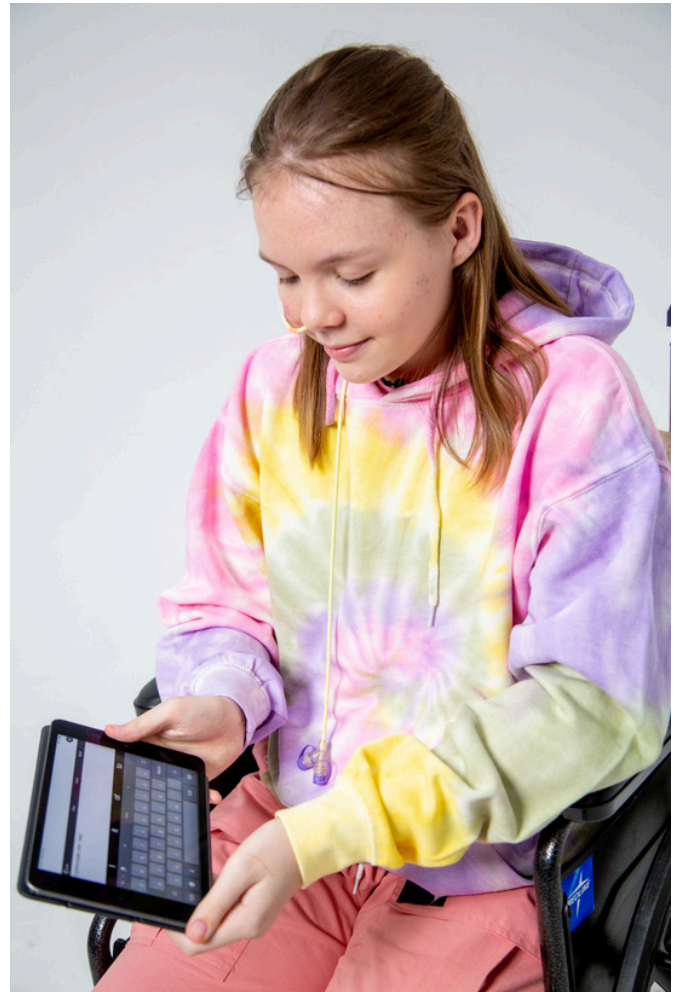
## PROGRAM SUMMARY

California Connect is a state-mandated initiative of the CPUC that provides Californians with hearing, speech, physical, cognitive, visual, and memory disabilities with specialized communications, relay services, and speech assistance programs. California Connect aims to improve the quality of life and create pathways for independent communication by engaging consumers through community-based partnerships. The program helps people with disabilities stay connected with loved ones, complete daily tasks, and access emergency services. Relay Services and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices facilitate communication with life-saving services such as 911 and 988. 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)

For more information, please visit the program website at [www.CAConnect.org](http://www.CAConnect.org).

The CPUC submits this annual report pursuant to California Public Utilities Code Section 914.5 (a) and summarizes accomplishments of California Connect during FY 2023-2024.



Young woman using tablet as an AAC device.

# Key Achievements

In FY 2023-2024, the California Connect program continued to provide Californians with vision, hearing, speaking, mobility, or cognitive disabilities cost-free communications tools that allow them to connect effectively with the world around them. The program acknowledges there is no one-size-fits-all solution to providing accessible communication services and devices to individuals with disabilities, and that often individuals may need a combination of equipment and services to navigate their lives.

Securing the most effective combination of accommodations can be time consuming and burdensome. California Connect offers a suite of programs and equipment specific to individual communication needs such as adaptive phones, speech assistance, captioned telephones, and other modified communication devices. To accomplish this, California Connect incorporates three distinct programs:

## Equipment Distribution Program

Provides specialized communications equipment to support specific needs for people with disabilities in five disability categories – vision, hearing, speaking, mobility, or cognitive.

- **In FY 2023-2024, the program provided equipment for 6,170 new customers.**

## Relay Services

Connects trained operators with people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled, where the operators relay conversations back and forth over the telephone.

- **In FY 2023-2024, the relay service was used for 297,805 calls.**

## Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Provides funding for speech-generating devices and accessories to people with speech disabilities through Voice Options, a program run in collaboration with the Department of Rehabilitation.

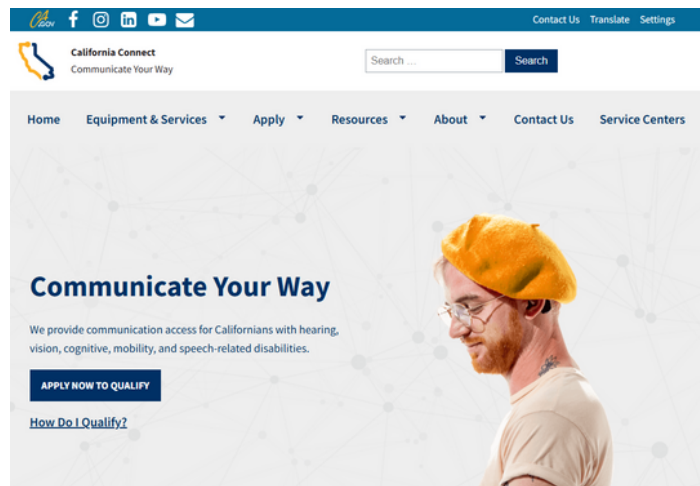
- **In FY 2023-2024, the program provided 885 long-term device iPads and 1,262 short-term device iPads to Voice Options participants.**

## Marketing

Throughout FY 2023-2024, California Connect made concerted efforts to streamline and consolidate resources and services to ensure the consumer experience was accessible and intuitive. These efforts included:

- Consolidation of CaliforniaPhones.org and DDTP.org into one easy-to-navigate website, and CAConnect.org.
- An online application which launched in late March 2024.
- The ability to accept electronic signatures from both consumers and medical professionals online, as opposed to requiring a physical signature. This significantly decreased the wait time between application approval and equipment distribution.

Marketing efforts focused heavily on website improvements and engagement. The program welcomed 123,825 new website users—a 90% increase from the previous year. The program ran eight core marketing campaigns, four focusing on increasing awareness of services such as Remote Conference Captioning and Voice Options. A particularly successful campaign was the venture into Over-the-Top advertisements, which include commercials through streaming services like Hulu and Peacock. This four-month campaign resulted in 4,651,916 impressions and a video completion rate of 97%.



CAConnect.org website

166,989 Website Sessions

123,825 New Website Users

4,651,916 Video Impressions

97% Video Completion Rate

## Outreach

Making information available and accessible to eligible participants is essential to increasing participation and delivering services to those that need it. To further our reach and engage with more diverse communities, the program conducted outreach efforts to community-based organizations (CBO) across the state to develop marketing partnerships in which all organizations could promote the other partnered CBOs' services that may meet the individuals' needs. Several organizations expressed interest in an informal arrangement and six agreed to a formal partnership and are featured on our community-based-organization page: [caconnect.org/cbo](https://caconnect.org/cbo).

By strategically placing advertisements in locations where diverse communities typically seek trusted and culturally relevant information, and by strengthening relationships with CBOs, the program succeeded in establishing meaningful connections with new audiences who could greatly benefit from its services and resources. This inclusive outreach initiative also included the training of 3,235 participants in Bring Your Own Device smartphone training programs and 371 outreach presentations and field visits throughout California. Figure 1 shows the consumer-focused activities from 2021-2024.

On November 02, 2023, the CPUC initiated Rulemaking (R.) 23-11-001 to consider revisions and updates to California Connect. To better serve the needs of people with disabilities, the rulemaking addresses changes to the communications landscape since the inception of the program, including participants' needs and the advancement in telecommunication technologies. The rulemaking solicited comments from various stakeholders, including telecommunications companies, ratepayer advocates, and non-profit organizations. The CPUC held eight Public Participation Hearings (PPHs), both in-person (Roseville, Clovis, and Buena Park) and virtual. The CPUC plans to hold technical workshops to further address specific issues.



Service Center ribbon cutting

3,235 Training  
Participants

371 Outreach  
Presentations

Figure 1 shows the consumer-focused activities through various channels including equipment distribution, contact center operations, field services, and educational initiatives for fiscal years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024.

**FIGURE 1: CONSUMER-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES BY YEAR**

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
<b>NEW CUSTOMERS ADDED TO THE EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM</b>	3,931	3,633	6,170
<b>CONTACT CENTER CALLS HANDLED (INBOUND &amp; OUTBOUND)</b>	120,095	122,443	91,409
<b>CONTACT CENTER EMAILS HANDLED (INBOUND &amp; OUTBOUND)</b>	6,545	7,201	6,157
<b>CERTIFICATION FORMS RECEIVED AT THE CONTACT CENTER</b>	3,978	3,008	2,250
<b>CUSTOMER VISITS TO THE SERVICE CENTERS</b>	5,025	5,549 (ii)	4,042
<b>OUTREACH PRESENTATIONS</b>	2,202	1,8549	371 (i)
<b>FIELD ADVISOR VISITS TO CUSTOMERS' HOMES</b>	3,075	2,984	2,866
<b>CONTACT CENTER WEB CHATS HANDLED</b>	3,978	441	220
<b>MARKETING CAMPAIGNS</b>	12	10	8
<b>RELAY CALLS, INCLUDES TRADITIONAL RELAY SERVICES, SPEECH-TO-SPEECH, AND CAPTIONED TELEPHONE SERVICES</b>	1,335,624	598,836	297,805 (i)
<b>BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE TRAINING SESSIONS</b>	298	486 (ii)	1,121 (i)
<b>BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE TRAINING PARTICIPANTS</b>	590 (iii)	2,558	3,235

- i. The data presented may be incomplete due to the vendor's contract concluding prior to the compilation of this report. As a result, figures were derived from miscellaneous reports, and some information may not have been accessible, potentially leading to inaccuracies.*
- ii. Due to COVID surges, Service Center visits fluctuated dramatically. Many consumers elected to wait for services.*
- iii. COVID fluctuations continued to impact on the efforts to conduct in-person BYOD training. However, there was an increase in webinar training, and attendance increased significantly from the prior fiscal year.*

# Program Performance

## EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM

The Equipment Distribution Program (EDP), formerly known as California Telephone Access Program (CTAP), support Californians whose disabilities affect their day-to-day communications and prevent them from using a standard telephone. The CPUC regularly updates its equipment, services, and distribution strategies to effectively meet consumers' needs. The Equipment Program Advisory Committee (EPAC) advises the CPUC by recommending new distributed equipment, which currently includes:



### **ChatterVox Amplio Voice Amplifier**

A lightweight voice amplifier that individuals who speak at low volume can use when communicating with others.



### **BeHear Access II Amp Headset**

A Bluetooth enabled hearing amplifier to enhance a person who is hard of hearing's experience with in-person conversations, mobile calls, streaming audio, and looped venues.



### **HomeAware 2**

Consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing can connect the HomeAware 2 to their landline phone. When a phone call is incoming, the device will amplify the ringer up to 105 decibels, flash lights, and vibrate to alert the user to a call.



**Bellman and Symfon Visit Smart Home Products:** The program now offers a portfolio of interconnected equipment that deaf and hard of hearing consumers can use throughout their homes to alert them to sounds like phone calls, doorbells, phone messages, fire alarms, and babies crying. This portfolio includes:



### **Bellman & Symfon Mobile phone sensor**

This sensor activates when a mobile phone or tablet screen lights up, alerting deaf and hard of hearing users to phone calls or incoming messages.



### **Bellman & Symfon Portable Receiver**

This lightweight portable device uses different colored LED lights to alert the user of different sounds. As it is wireless, users can bring it with them to their porch or balcony.



### **Bellman & Symfon Flash Receiver**

This receiver uses different colored LED lights to alert users to different audio stimuli.



### **Bellman & Symfon Bed Shaker Receiver**

This bed shaker generates vibrations powerful enough to wake even the heaviest sleeper when it's alerted to a sound like a phone call, doorbell, or fire alarm.

The program also continued distributing equipment from previous years such as:

- Panasonic KX-TGM450S amplified cordless phone (181 average customers, monthly distribution)
- Clarity XLC2+ amplified cordless phone (55 average customers, monthly distribution)

In FY 2022-2023 the program administered a pilot program for people who are blind or have low vision (a total of 51 participants) to test two different cellular phones for program consideration. The Moto G Power with Synaptic Solution, which is an Android-based smartphone with Synaptic Solution pre-installed software that provides a simple accessible interface, and the MiniVision2+, which is a basic cellular phone that speaks everything, uses voice commands, and is a simple accessible phone (no email or web browser). Ultimately, the participants shared that they were not satisfied with either device primarily because they found them difficult to use, also they recommended that the pilot be extended to determine how much training is required for blind or low-vision consumers to use a specialized cellular phone.



Quattro 4.0 Adaptive Bluetooth System from ClearSounds

Figure 2 illustrates the total equipment distributed by the program distribution center to program customers through contact center orders, service centers, field advisors, and outreach specialists.

**FIGURE 2: TOTAL EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTED BY THE PROGRAM DISTRIBUTION CENTER TO PROGRAM CUSTOMERS THROUGH CONTACT CENTER ORDERS, SERVICE CENTERS, FIELD ADVISORS, AND OUTREACH**

Senate Bill # / Public Utility Code		Type	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
<b>SENATE BILL 60 EQUIPMENT PUBLIC UTILITIES CODE SECTION 2881 (C) (1985)</b>	Amplified Phones		10,772	6,844	6,172	4,610
	Other Phone Sets including cordless, CapTel®, big-button, speaker, and picture phones		2,566	1,711	1,376	1,024
	Accessories including switches, cords, headsets, amplifiers, adapters, and Artificial Larynxes		4,793	4,112	3,251	2,754
<b>SENATE BILL 60 EQUIPMENT TOTAL</b>			<b>18,131</b>	<b>12,667</b>	<b>10,799</b>	<b>8,388</b>
<b>SENATE BILL 597 EQUIPMENT PUBLIC UTILITIES CODE SECTION 2881 (A) (1979)</b>	Voice Carry Over		13	19	15	4
	Teletypewriter and Telebraille		68	58	46	33
	Accessories including light flashers, vibrating alerts systems, and large visual displays		45	49	24	18
<b>SENATE BILL 597 EQUIPMENT TOTAL</b>			<b>126</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>			<b>18,257</b>	<b>12,793</b>	<b>10,884</b>	<b>8,443</b>

## CALIFORNIA RELAY

California Connect offers no-cost telephone relay service for people who have hearing or speaking disabilities. Callers connect with specially trained operators who relay telephone conversations back and forth between those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled and anyone with whom they wish to communicate by telephone. To connect to the Relay Service, a person simply dials 711 or uses a designated toll-free number from their landline phones. This intra-state relay service is available through telecommunications providers, including Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service providers. 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 want to use this service.

**Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech (VA STS):** A service in which a person uses a webcam or videophone with Skype 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 over the phone during conference calls may want to use this service.

In FY 2023-2024, these California Relay Services continued to be essential communication platforms:

Traditional Relay Service  
served more than  
**177,503 Calls**

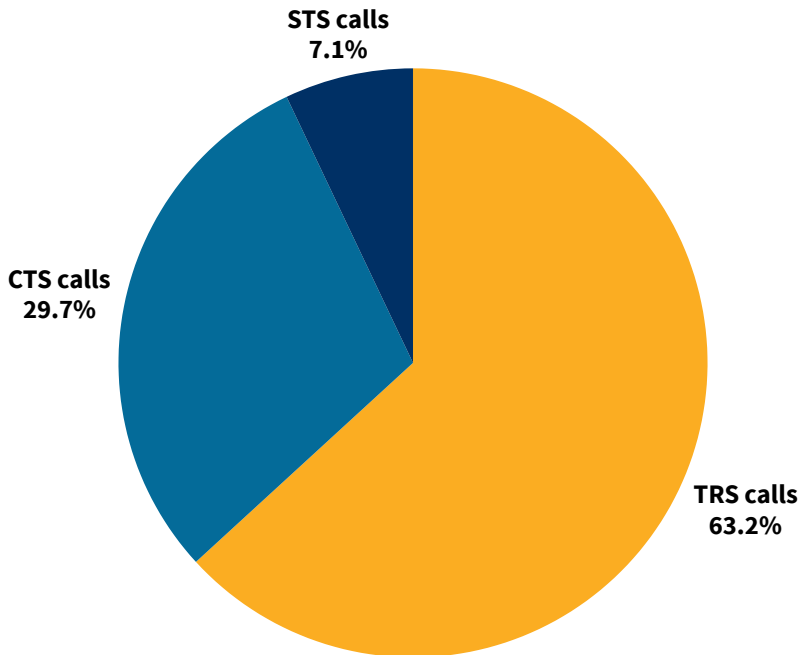
CapTel Service Accounted  
for more than  
**83,564 Calls**

Speech-to-Speech  
Processed approximately  
**19,821 Calls**



The charts below show a year-over-year comparison of the Relay Service call breakdown with a slight shift in the percentage of calls from TRS to CTS.

## Fiscal Year 2023 - 2024



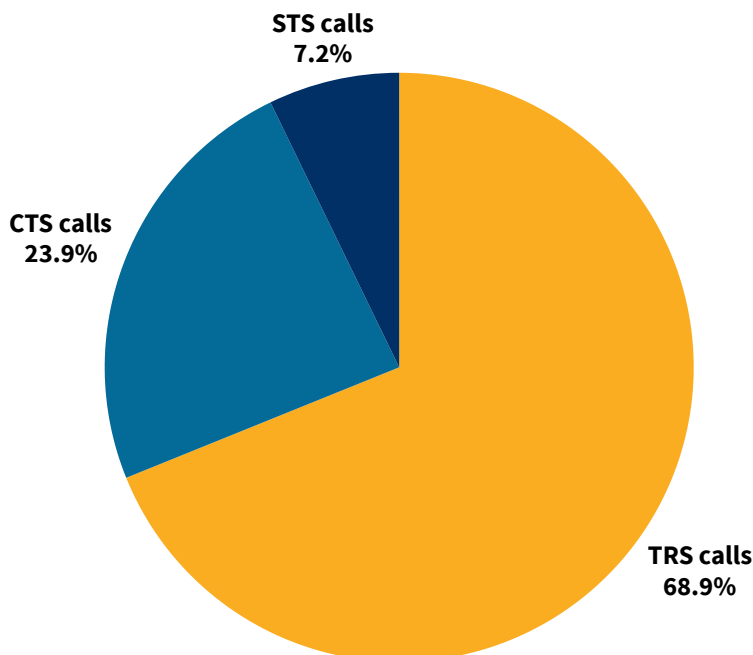
<b>TRS CALLS</b>	177,503
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	352,896
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>63.19%</b>

<b>CTS CALLS</b>	83,564
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	282,934
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>29.75%</b>

<b>STS CALLS</b>	19,821
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	63,601
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>7.06%</b>

<b>RCC CALLS</b>	9
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	840
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>0.003%</b>

## Fiscal Year 2022 - 2023



<b>TRS CALLS</b>	412,474
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	477,909
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>68.88%</b>

<b>CTS CALLS</b>	143,218
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	474,211
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>23.92%</b>

<b>STS CALLS</b>	43,144
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	474,211
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>7.21%</b>

<b>RCC CALLS</b>	6
<b>CALL MINUTES</b>	240
<b>% OF TOTAL CRS CALLS</b>	<b>0.001%</b>

# AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

On October 2, 2011, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. enacted Assembly Bill (AB) 136, which amended Public Utilities Code Section 2881 to include the provision of Speech Generating Devices (SGD), also known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). The legislature mandated the CPUC to establish regulations for the implementation of the AAC program by January 1, 2014, which includes:

- Inclusion of Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) 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 SGD, accessories, mounting systems, and specialized telecommunications equipment.
- Broadening the range of equipment offered by the program to include SGD, 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 1,613 individuals with speech disabilities. In the fiscal year 2023-2024 the program received 347 applications and approved 93% 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 telecommunications equipment) and full funding requests (where the insurance provider denied coverage or for individuals without healthcare insurance).

Applicants seeking funding for AACs must undergo an evaluation by a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) 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 an SLP, and instead opt to self-select an assistive device or technology, the CPUC initiated a pilot program in collaboration with the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, named "Voice Options". This multiphase pilot was initiated 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 ten demonstration centers.

347 Applications  
Received

93% Applications  
Approved

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

To date, at least 3,666 people have entered the short-term loan program since Voice Options has been housed under the Department of Rehabilitation. Throughout the Fiscal Year 2023-2024, the Department of Rehabilitation provided to Voice Options participants:

- 885 long-term device iPads
- 1,262 short-term device iPads

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

## Program Testimonials



I really appreciate what you're doing, for making things easier for my mom.  
Thank you.



I am grateful for what you do and how patient all of you are.



I am extremely appreciative with the customer experience you provided. I was hesitating to sign up my mother to the program but you have put my mind at ease. It was comforting to speak to you today.

# Program Implementation and Financial Status

In FY 2023–2024, 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 2023-24, ending with a fund balance of \$73.2 million. The ending balance demonstrates effective fiscal management and program sustainability.

Revenue remained stable, with regulatory fees (surcharges) generating \$68.5 million, representing the primary funding source. The program also earned \$4.0 million in investment income from surplus money investments. Additionally, there was a planned reduction of \$25 million due to a loan adjustment.

On the expenditure side, the program maintained efficient operations while delivering essential services. Major expenses included \$13.8 million for program administration and \$2.7 million for contact center and warehouse operations. The California Relay Service required \$2.5 million, while the California Telephone Access Program utilized \$1.9 million. Speech assistance services, including Speech Generating Devices and Voice Options, accounted for approximately \$1.3 million combined.

Notable cost efficiencies were achieved in administrative operations, with CPUC administrative charges of \$2.4 million representing approximately 4% of total expenditures.

**\$47.6M**  
Total Revenue

**\$73.2M**  
Ending Balance



The table below shows the financial statement of revenues, expenditures, and fund balance for FY 21-22, FY 22-23, and FY 23-24.

**FIGURE 5: STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENDITURES, AND FUND BALANCE (IN THOUSANDS)**

	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24
<b>BEGINNING BALANCE</b>	37,087	64,201	83,457
<b>PRIOR YEAR ADJUSTMENTS &amp; FUND ASSESSMENT ADJUSTMENTS</b>	7,989	4,065	1,705
<b>ADJUSTED BEGINNING BALANCE</b>	45,076	68,267	85,162
<b>REVENUE</b>			
<b>REGULATORY FEES (SURCHARGES)</b>	42,497	61,737	68,560(i)
<b>INVESTMENT INCOME - SURPLUS MONEY INVESTMENTS</b>	228	2,020	4,073(ii)
<b>ESCHEAT - UNCLAIMED CHECKS, WARRANT, BONDS &amp; COUPONS</b>	24	0	0
<b>TRANSFERS &amp; OTHER ADJUSTMENTS</b>	0	0	0
<b>REVENUE TRANSFER FROM CORONAVIRUS RELIEF FUND</b>	-66	0	0
<b>LOAN FROM CHCF-B TO CALIFORNIA CONNECT <i>iii</i></b>	25,000	0	-25,000
<b>OPERATING TRANSFER TO GENERAL FUND</b>	12	0	0
<b>TOTAL REVENUES, TRANSFERS &amp; OTHER ADJUSTMENTS</b>	67,695	63,757	47,633(ii)
	FY 21-22	FY 22-23	FY 23-24
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>			
<b>CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION ADMIN CHARGES</b>	2,508	2,331	2,393
<b>DEAF AND DISABLED TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR</b>	22,380	20,152	13,793(i)
<b>DEAF AND DISABLED TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM CONTACT CENTER AND WAREHOUSE</b>	6,000	5,143	2,729(i)
<b>DEAF AND DISABLED TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM MARKETING SERVICE PROVIDER</b>	2,275	2,373	3,433(i)
<b>OTHER DEAF AND DISABLED TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM CONTRACTS INCLUDING LEASE PAYMENTS, AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND ATTENDANTS</b>	2,096	2,277	1,311(i)
<b>CALIFORNIA RELAY SERVICE</b>	7,887	3,842	2,457(i)
<b>CALIFORNIA TELEPHONE ACCESS PROGRAM</b>	1,073	1,798	1,870(i)
<b>SPEECH GENERATING DEVICES</b>	787	815	343(i)
<b>VOICE OPTIONS</b>	963	2,692	832(i)
<b>ADVISORY COMMITTEES- TELECOMMUNICATION ACCESS FOR THE DEAF AND DISABLED ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE AND EQUIPMENT PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE</b>	23	56	3,656(i)
<b>LOCAL ASSISTANCE</b>	91	54	54(i)
<b>CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY</b>	552	552	77
<b>PRO RATA</b>	1,902	1,604	552(i)
<b>FINANCIAL INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR CALIFORNIA (FI\$CAL)</b>	0	0	0
<b>SUPPLEMENTAL PENSION</b>	33	33	33
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	48,569	48,567	59,618(i)
<b>ENDING FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>64,202</b>	<b>83,457</b>	<b>73,178(i)</b>

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

ii. The expenditure data is reported by Fi\$Cal Commitment Control Report.

iii. California Connect experienced a fund balance deficit for the 2021-22 Governor's Budget due to devolving intrastate revenue base with the surcharge rate set at .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 to maintain a positive fund balance in 2022-2023. California Connect has paid back the loan.

In FY 23-24, pursuant to Public Utility Code Section 914.5(a), the CPUC continues to evaluate options to manage program expenses and increase program efficiency.

## **Surcharges**

The program's funding continues to be sustained through a dedicated surcharge, which is assessed and collected by telecommunications companies, including VoIP providers. This surcharge is presented on customer bills and applied to intrastate charges on customer bills of all telecommunication 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 legislatively enacted state budget.

Beginning April 1, 2023, California moved from six separate surcharges to one flat rate to fund California's six universal service programs, including California Connect. As a result, California phone bills are more transparent and include one flat-rate surcharge of \$1.11 per access line. The CPUC periodically adjusts this surcharge to ensure providers do not overcollect based on the allocations designated to fund each of the six universal service programs.

## **Limits or Restrictions**

The decline in landline device usage contributed to decreased call activity within the Relay Services. The decrease can also be attributed to customers switching from intrastate Relay Service to Inter-State Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) funded by the Federal Communications Commission. This transition offers a broader range of choices, including Internet, wireless services, and other consumer services.

## **Means Test**

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 (income qualification) necessary to control program costs. Relay Service does not impose any additional costs on the user. Users pay the same equal access charges for standard telephone services as other customers.

## **Efficient Distribution of Equipment**

All equipment within the California Connect program is procured in strict adherence to state contracting and procurement regulations, which include the utilization of competitive bidding processes. These measures ensure the state secures equipment at reasonable prices. Furthermore, the program has several initiatives, outlined below, to streamline equipment distribution.

## Public Events

The CPUC's Primary Program and Contractor Administrator, California Communication Access Foundation, hosted public events for participant enrollment and equipment distribution. For example, events held at the Event/Part-Time Service Center in San Jose are conducted in collaboration with certifying agents who can provide certification on-site, expediting the application and distribution processes. This streamlined approach reduces the time between disability certification and equipment receipt. Additionally, California Connect tracks distributed equipment and provides additional consumer support to minimize returns and exchanges.

## Evaluations

For Captioned Telephone equipment, prospective users are required to undergo evaluations prior to receiving the equipment. This evaluation process identifies alternative equipment options, ensuring that customers are matched with the most suitable devices to meet their specific needs. The evaluation is instrumental in preventing the misuse of Captioned Telephone service by individuals who would be better served by amplified phones.

## New Equipment

The program remains dedicated to seeking out new and innovative equipment to include in its offerings. For instance, amplified cordless phones with Bluetooth capabilities, compatible with owners' cell phones, have been added to the program. The Panasonic Amplifier Cordless Phone has emerged as a popular choice, with over 42,570 units distributed since its introduction in July 2017. Additionally, the program conducted Bring Your Own Device smartphone training to educate consumers and others about accessibility features on widely used smartphones like the iPhone and Android devices. These training events are designed to assess and evaluate specific applications for individual smartphones, with 3,235 participants trained during the Bring Your Own Device this fiscal year. These events, along with other small-scale distribution events, help the program to identify efficient ways to distribute equipment.

## Service Centers

During FY 2023-2024 California Connect operated through 13 service centers, six of which were part-time. The service centers provide assistance and support to customers who select their equipment in person. The program established partnerships with community-based organizations across the state, placing part-time service centers within the community-based locations. This geographic outreach served to promote the program without the substantial expense associated with establishing independent full-time service centers.

During this reporting period, the contract governing the locations of California Connect's service centers was awarded to a new vendor. As a result, all service centers had been relocated at the end of FY 2023-2024. You can learn more about the new locations at [caconnect.org/service](https://caconnect.org/service).

## 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 to not only meet but 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 serves as a valuable resource for users with speech disabilities, enabling them to utilize 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 Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech.

## 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 (SGD)

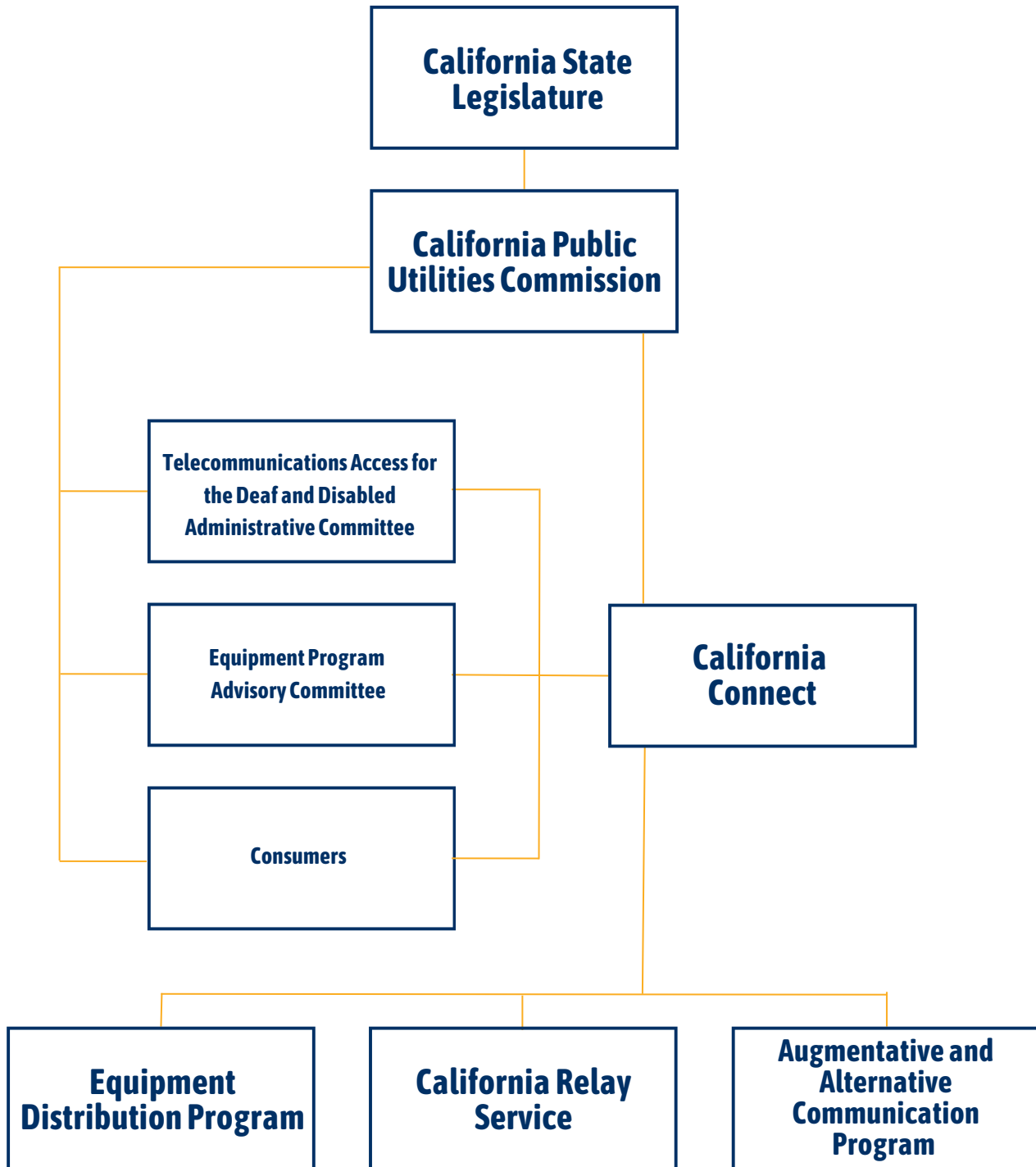
Pursuant to Assembly Bill 136, California Connect is the provider and funder of last resort for SGDs considered Durable Medical Equipment. Current access to California Connect program funding for SGDs is limited to those applicants assessed by a speech-language pathologist for an SGD classified as Durable Medical Equipment.

## Technology

To keep up with the ever-evolving digital communications landscape, California Connect regularly assesses new technologies to integrate into the program to better serve its consumers. Legislature established two advisory committees, the Telecommunications Access for the Deaf and Disabled Administrative Committee (TADDAC) and the Equipment Program Advisory Committee (EPAC), which are led by members of the target consumer base to evaluate new equipment and submit recommendations for program improvement. During FY 2023-2024, based on the recommendations by these advisory committees, California Connect specifically focused on promoting and testing Real Time Text and Remote Conference Captioning.



# Program Structure



# Advisory Committee Rosters

## Telecommunications Access for the Deaf and Disabled Administrative Committee



**Katie Wright**  
Chair



**Louie Herrera**  
Vice Chair



**Devva Kasnitz,**  
Mobility Representative



**Frances Reyes Acosta**  
Spanish Services



**Jesse Acosta**  
Veteran Representative



**Kevin Siemens**  
Speech-to-Speech Representative



**Richard Ray**  
Deaf Representative



**Robert Sidansky**  
Deaf Representative



**Christopher Bartulo**  
CPUC Advocates Office Representative

# Equipment Program Advisory Committee



**Steve Longo**  
Chair



**Antoinette Warren**  
Vice Chair



**Danyelle Cerillo**  
Blind, Low-Vision Representative



**Janice Armigo Brown,**  
Hard-of-Hearing Representative



**Judith Viera**  
Deaf Representative



**Monique Harris**  
Mobility Representative

# CONTACT INFORMATION

## Customer Contact Center

Phone lines open Monday – Friday: 8 AM to 6 PM, except holidays

- Phone/VP: 1-800-806-1191
- Email: [info@caconnect.org](mailto:info@caconnect.org)
- Mail: P.O. Box 30310; Stockton, CA 95213
- Fax: 1-800-889-3974
- TTY:1-800-806-4474

## California Relay Service Dial 711

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

- Email: [relay@caconnect.org](mailto:relay@caconnect.org)
- Teletypewriter / Voice Carry Over / Hearing Carry Over: 1-800-735-2929
- English: 1-800-735-2929
- Spanish: 1-800-855-3000
- Speech-to-Speech: English/Spanish: 1-800-854-7784
- Voice:
  - English: 1-800-735-2922
  - Spanish: 1-800-855-3000
- Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech: 1-800-855-7400
- Customer Service - Captioned Telephone English: 1-888-402-4018
- Customer Service - Captioned Telephone Spanish: 1-877-330-0156

## California Relay Service, Caption Telephone, and Speech-to-Speech General Inquiries

- **English:** 1-866-409-0178

## Augmentative and Alternative Communication Information

- **English:** 1-800-900-3985
- **Email:** [ddtp-sgd-application@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:ddtp-sgd-application@cpuc.ca.gov)



## Service Centers

All service centers are open for an individual appointment Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m.- 5:00 p.m.

- **Sacramento:** 1610 Arden Way, Suite 195 Sacramento, CA 95815
- **Orange:** 2100 W. Orangewood Avenue, Suite 201, Orange, CA 92868
- **Riverside:** 1485 University Ave, Suite B Riverside, CA 92507
- **Arcata:** 670 9th St., Suite 1 Arcata, CA 95521
- **Bakersfield:** 1401 Commercial Way Suite 210 Bakersfield, CA 93309
- **Barstow:** 128 E Buena Vista St. Barstow, CA 92311
- **San Diego:** 635 Camino Del Rio S., Suite 101 San Diego, CA 92108
- **Claremont:** 131 S Spring St. Claremont, CA 91711
- **San Jose:** 1889 Concourse Drive San Jose, CA 95131
- **Merced:** 3337 G St., Suite C Merced, CA 95340
- **San Luis Obispo:** 3426 Empresa Drive, Suite 120 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
- **Santa Rosa:** 1550 Airport Blvd., Suite 206 Santa Rosa, CA 95403
- **Sonora:** 14520 Mono Way, Suite 110 Sonora, CA 95370
- **Redding:** 2440 Athens Avenue Redding, CA 96001



\*The service centers listed here were not those that are represented in this report. As of August, 2024 we have relocated all our service centers to better meet the needs of Californians with disabilities.

# Appendix

## LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND

In 1979, the California Legislature enacted Public Utilities Code Section 2881, codifying the CPUC's existing program for the deaf and disabled. Section 2881 required the CPUC to design and implement a program to provide telecommunication devices to deaf and hard of hearing customers. Subsequently, the Legislature expanded the program's services, creating additional services for the CPUC. This program, now called California Connect, performs several functions mandated by Section 2881 et seq.

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Provides telecommunication devices to certified deaf and hard of hearing users (Section 2881 (a)).

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Directs wireless equipment to become a permanent part of the California Connect Program (Decision 10-11-033).

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Provides a dual-party relay system, now called the Relay Service, to connect Teletypewriter users with any other telephone user (Section 2881 (b), added in 1983).

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Provides specialized telecommunications equipment to individuals certified with hearing, vision, speech, cognitive, and mobility disabilities (Section 2881 (c), added in 1985).

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Provides Speech Generating Devices as a provider of last resort and adds Speech Language Pathologists as California Connect certifying agents (Sections 2881(d) and 2881(e)(1), added in 2011 through Assembly Bill 136 (Ch. 404, Beall).

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Provides authority for the California Public Utilities Commission to transfer advisory oversight of the Teletypewriter Placement Program to the California Connect Program and its advisory committees (Sections 279(a) and 2881.2, added in 2003 and 2001, respectively).



In 1989, pursuant to Decision (D.) 89-05-060, the CPUC established a structured framework for the California Connect program. This framework serves to ensure effective oversight of the mandated programs, which include both the Equipment Distribution Program and the Relay Service, facilitating telephonic communication between individuals with hearing abilities and those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled through operator-assisted relay telephone conversations.

The CPUC administers the program through contractual agreements with multiple vendors. The selection of vendors follows a competitive bidding process, adhering to the contracting and procurement requirements of the State of California.

The program maintains a contract with a Primary Program and Contractor Administrator to oversee compliance with policies, procedures, and directives.

