

Accessibility & Disability

The wireless industry has been a leader in providing an ever-growing range of choices and opportunities for all consumers, including persons with disabilities. With a diverse array of innovative devices, applications and services, carriers and device manufacturers continue to provide persons with disabilities with accessible products and solutions that meet their needs. A 2009 Wireless Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) survey suggests that more than 80 percent of persons with disabilities own or have access to a wireless communications device and use their wireless device for text-based communications (text messaging, e-mail and instant messaging) and Internet access.

CTIA-The Wireless Association® created AccessWireless.org to provide consumers with the information they need to make informed choices about accessible products and services. AccessWireless.org is a clearinghouse of information about wireless accessibility with tips, links, FAQs and tutorials about wireless accessibility features, applications and Hearing Aid Compatible (HAC) wireless devices. Through the site, CTIA and its member companies collaborate with consumer organizations representing persons with disabilities to assure that consumers have all the information currently available to find and navigate the diverse offerings of accessible wireless communications products and services.

CTIA and the wireless industry are at the forefront of innovation in accessible communications.

- Reasonable and flexible accessibility requirements are a necessity for the wireless industry to continue to design and produce the innovative products and services that persons with disabilities have come to expect.
 - Federal laws require that commercial wireless telecommunications services, such as voice, are accessible to persons with disabilities under the "readily achievable" standard. Although the accessibility community recognizes that not every device or service available must consider every recognized disability to meet the goals of "universal design," wireless products and services offer accessible solutions unmatched by other communications industries.
 - CTIA believes this "readily achievable" standard has successfully allowed industry to address accessibility while responding to market demand for innovative wireless products and services. However, CTIA also understands that reasonable accessibility requirements may be needed to ensure accessibility in expanding and evolving mobile broadband services, such as text, video and IP-based communications.
- Consumer awareness about accessible wireless products and solutions should be the primary goal of policymakers, regulators and representatives of persons with disabilities.
 - CTIA supports federal outreach efforts similar to AccessWireless.org that would provide persons with disabilities with clearinghouse information on the numerous wireless devices with built-in accessibility features, service plans for individuals with disabilities and compatibility with the Assistive Technology (AT) tools used to access wireless communications.
- Since mid-2008 with the first "app" store, there are now hundreds of thousands of apps available to all consumers, vastly expanding the market for accessible specialized and mainstream products and solutions.
 - The wireless industry has transformed from the classic voice-only handheld mobile telephone to a diverse array of all-in-one mobile devices with a rich feature set with accessibility options.
 - Many wireless devices and services offer video capabilities for both commercial and user-generated content. Increasingly, these devices include closed captioning functionality for both streaming and stored media.
- The wireless industry is dedicated to providing wireless devices with Hearing Aid Compatibility (HAC) to all consumers.
 - CTIA and our member companies have successfully worked with representatives from the hearing loss community to develop standards and requirements for wireless device compatibility with hearing aids.
 - CTIA, our member companies and the accessibility community agree that these requirements should be extended to all new wireless devices intended to be held to the ear for voice service.

Through reasonable and flexible accessibility requirements at the federal level, the wireless industry can effectively innovate, preserve collaboration with the accessibility community and ensure no one will be left behind.

For more information, please visit: http://www.ctia.org/advocacy/policy_topics