



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **SPECIALIZED 9-1-1 TEXT SERVICE NOW AVAILABLE FOR DEAF AND SPEECH IMPAIRED RESIDENTS**

Today regional districts in BC's central and southern interior announced the availability of a specialized text service that allows people who are Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired (DHHSI) to communicate with 9-1-1 call-takers by text.

This service is called Text with 9-1-1 (T9-1-1) and is being delivered by E-Comm—the emergency communications centre responsible for answering 9-1-1 calls in the central and southern interior—in partnership with local emergency service agencies. The service is now available throughout the Central Okanagan, North Okanagan, Central Kootenay, Columbia-Shuswap, Okanagan-Similkameen, Thompson-Nicola, East Kootenay, Kootenay-Boundary and Squamish-Lillooet regional districts.

“T9-1-1 is a vital connection to police, fire and ambulance and enables quick communication between a Deaf caller and emergency services,” remarked Gordon Rattray, Treasurer of the Okanagan Valley Association of the Deaf (OVAD). “In the past Deaf people were limited by communication barriers and would have to use phone relay or TTY (telephone typewriter) which would take five or ten minutes longer. The OVAD is very excited to have T9-1-1 in the interior regional districts and we look forward to helping promote the availability of this service with the DHHSI community. We're proud of this enhancement to emergency services that E-Comm provides.”

T9-1-1 allows any DHHSI person who has pre-registered their cellphone with their wireless carrier to communicate with police, fire and ambulance call-takers via text during an emergency. Callers must first place a voice call to 9-1-1 in order to establish a voice network connection and initiate the special messaging technology.

“The Columbia Shuswap Regional District is very pleased to be able to offer this improved level of service that will allow our residents with hearing or visual impairments the ability to call for help said Rhona Martin, Chair, Columbia Shuswap Regional District. “This new service will give a measure of comfort to those requiring this service just knowing that they can now communicate and that someone will answer their call. Please take the time to register for this new service if you should require this type of assistance and help us pass this good news story along by telling those you know about it.”

When E-Comm receives a 9-1-1 call from a DHHSI person who has pre-registered for the service, an alert will trigger at the 9-1-1 centre to indicate there is a DHHSI caller on the line. The 9-1-1 call-taker will then launch the special messaging system, allowing them to communicate with the caller through a special text session. This will ensure they get the emergency service they need.

“Being able to communicate with 9-1-1 using this technology allows for greater access to important 9-1-1 lifelines in the event of an emergency,” added David Guscott, E-Comm president and CEO. “E-Comm is proud to be able to offer this enhanced level of service to our partners in the central and southern interior of B.C.”

**It is important to emphasize that this service is only available to the DHHSI community.**

Voice calling remains the only way to communicate with 9-1-1 services for a person who is not Deaf/Deaf-Blind, Hard-of-Hearing or Speech Impaired. Text messages sent directly to the digits “9-1-1” do not reach emergency services anywhere in Canada. Text with 9-1-1 for the public-at-large is anticipated in the future as the nationwide 9-1-1 infrastructure evolves.

Members of the DHHSI community should visit [www.TextWith911.ca](http://www.TextWith911.ca) to register their cellphone with their wireless service provider and to learn more about how the system works.

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*E-Comm is the largest 9-1-1 call centre in British Columbia and handles approximately 1.35 million emergency calls per year for Metro Vancouver and 24 other regional districts and communities spanning from Vancouver Island to Alberta and from the U.S. border, to north of Prince George. E-Comm also provides call-taking and dispatch services to 35 police and fire departments and operates the largest multi-jurisdictional, tri-service emergency radio system in the province.*

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