



# Universal Service Initiative

Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)



# Introduction

- ❑ The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (the Authority) is an independent regulatory body established by the Telecommunications Act, Chap. 47:31 (the Act) of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago.
- ❑ One of the objects under Section 3(d) of the Act is to promote universal access to telecommunications services for all persons in Trinidad and Tobago, to the extent that is reasonably practicable to provide such access.
- ❑ In addition, Schedule 3 of the Telecommunications (Universal Service) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019 mandates the provision of approved assistive technologies to PwDs.



# The United Nations Convention



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasises the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in enabling PwDs to enjoy basic human rights and access ICTs on a basis equal to others. Article 9 of the Convention states:





*To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open to the public, both in urban and rural areas.”*  
- UN 2008

# The United Nations Convention

Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to this Convention.



# The Goal of the PwD Initiative



- ❑ This initiative supports the Universal Service Framework for Telecommunications Services for Trinidad and Tobago which seeks to promote digital inclusion in Trinidad and Tobago.
- ❑ The goal of this initiative is to provide subsidised mobile devices to the visually-impaired and hearing-impaired in Trinidad and Tobago. Mobile devices must contain assistive features such as messaging options, internet capability, vibrating alert, screen readers, adjustable font size, text to speech etc.
- ❑ The Authority will fund 90% of each mobile device up to TT\$540. Any excess costs will be funded by the PwD.

# The Objectives of the PwD Initiative



- 1 To ensure that PwDs have access to basic telecommunications mobile services.
- 2 To make ICTs more affordable to PwDs
- 3 To reduce the digital divide by promoting digital inclusion of PwDs.
- 4 To enhance the quality of life by enabling PwDs to participate more fully in society – at school, work and in civic life.
- 5 To enable independent living for PwDs.

# Key Stakeholders



The Authority has collaborated with a number of organisations who materially contributed to the effective implementation of this initiative. Such organisations included:

- ☐ Ministry of Public Administration
- ☐ Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
- ☐ PwD Organisations
- ☐ Mobile Telecommunications Providers





# Project Phases



The PwD initiative will be rolled out in two phases:

- ❑ Pilot Phase – provision of mobile handsets to 100 PwDs who are visually and/or hearing impaired and expected to run from November 2019 to January 2020.
- ❑ Full-implementation – provision of mobile handsets to 100% of PwDs who are visually and/or hearing impaired and expected to start in February 2020.



# Eligibility Criteria



To qualify for a subsidised mobile device, each applicant must meet the following criteria:

1

The applicant must be visually or hearing impaired.

2

The applicant must be in receipt of a disability grant issued by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

3

The applicant must be a resident of Trinidad and Tobago.

# Eligibility Criteria



To qualify for a subsidised mobile device, each applicant must meet the following criteria:

- 4 The applicant must be 18 years and over.
- 5 The applicant must provide the Authority with evidence of the disability (medical report or doctor's certificate).



# The Process



- ❑ The Authority has developed several standardised steps for each PwD to receive an assistive device.
- ❑ Such steps were developed to provide simplicity and clarity to each PwD interested in receiving an assistive device.
- ❑ The Authority will also implement its own internal control procedures to mitigate potential risks associated with the PwD initiative.



# The Steps



**Schedule an  
appointment**

01

**Submit  
application form  
and supporting  
documentation**

02

**Approval of  
application after  
verification  
checks**

03

**Issue  
authorisation  
letter**

04

**Submission of  
authorisation letter  
to preferred mobile  
provider at specific  
locations**

05



# Training



- ❑ In an effort to provide superior customer service offered by the Authority and mobile dealers nationwide when interacting with PwDs, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has facilitated free sign-language training through the University of the West Indies.
- ❑ The training targeted representatives from the Authority, as well as frontline staff at various cellular outlets throughout Trinidad and Tobago.



# Training

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## Such training will:

- ☐ Allow frontline staff to more effectively communicate with persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- ☐ Improve the level of service provided to persons who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- ☐ Help persons understand and appreciate the cultural and linguistic barriers the deaf or hearing impaired face when seeking to access care and support.



# Funding

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- ❑ The PwD initiative will be the first project to be implemented and funded through the Universal Service Fund (USF).
- ❑ As such, mobile providers will be reimbursed through the USF, upon the submission of relevant documentation.
- ❑ The USF will be subject to annual independent audit.





# Future Projects



- ☐ Schedule 3 of the Telecommunications (Universal Service) Regulations, 2015, facilitates the *“Special provision of approved assistive technology for persons with disabilities to support use of basic telecommunications services.”*
  
- ☐ Schedule 1 of the Regulations defines **basic telecommunications services** as:
  1. Voice telecommunications services (call origination and call determination)
  2. Access to emergency services
  3. Directory assistance
  4. Free itemised billing
  5. Internet service provision at throughputs (to be defined by the Authority from time to time)
  
- ☐ Such initiatives which meet the above criteria are eligible for funding through the USF.
  
- ☐ All concessionaires shall implement the mandatory universal service initiatives identified in Schedule 3.

*"A child is only  
as disabled as  
their  
environment  
and the beliefs  
of the people  
around them."*

**- Bala Pillai DPT, PCS**





**THANKS FOR LISTENING**  
WE'LL BE ANSWERING QUESTIONS NOW

