

Making mental health information accessible for people with intellectual disability – A Toolkit

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This Toolkit provides guidance on how to make information accessible for people with intellectual disability and other cognitive disorders, and how to support individuals to use and understand easy read information.

It can be used in conjunction with the *Easy read information on public mental health services in New South Wales* resources, and other easy read information.

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Introduction

Health Services have a responsibility to support people with intellectual disability to find, use, and understand the health information they need, when they need it. Having written information like the *Easy read information on public mental health services in New South Wales* is essential, but good resources are just the start. Making information accessible for people with intellectual disability involves more than easy read resources alone.

Supporting people with intellectual disability to find and use easy read is often the task of front-line workers, like nurses, front desk staff, or medical staff. Thus, ensuring staff are confident to find and use easy read resources is essential. Using easy read requires support and commitment from both individual staff, and your agency or organisation.

The person-centred practices fundamental to NSW Mental Health Services incorporate tailored services, including tailored communication, to meet individual need. The strategies in this Toolkit are designed to meet the communication needs of people with intellectual disability, but also have potential to benefit many people who use your service.

This Toolkit has 5 information sheets to support your agency to make information accessible and to use easy read well. The information sheets focus on individual and agency strategies as well as a summary of how to make easy read documents.

Information sheets

- [Making information more accessible: Making easy read](#)
- [Making information more accessible: Using easy read](#)
- [Making information more accessible: Conversations and appointments](#)
- [Making information more accessible: Procedures](#)
- [Making information more accessible: Resources and links](#)

Making information more accessible: Making easy read

Some general guidelines for writing easy read documents are below. More information can be found at [Scope](#). The [Council for Intellectual Disability \(CID\)](#) offer easy read training and support in the development and testing of easy read resources.

Design

- Place images to the left of writing.
- Left align text.
- Align main headings to the left of the page.
- Use a wide margin.
- Use a sans serif font such as Arial.
- Size 16 font for body text, 18 or larger for headings.
- Use page numbers (same size font as body text).
- 1.5 or double spacing between lines.
- Start each sentence on a new line.
- Include sufficient white space.
- Try to keep all text about one concept on the same page.
- Start a new page for a new topic.
- Include 3-5 images per page.
- Keep the design and layout the same on each page.

Language

- Include only one idea per sentence.
- Use short sentences (maximum approximately 20 words).
- Use bullet points to list multiple concepts rather than writing them in a sentence.
- Use clear, commonly understood language.
- Use active sentences rather than passive.
- Refer to the reader as 'you'.
- Use 'I' or 'we' for the person/organisation writing the document.
- Use nouns/proper nouns rather than pronouns (e.g. your 'doctor' or their name, rather than 'they').
- Keep terminology consistent throughout the document.
- Avoid acronyms (write out in full in the first instance if used, except if more commonly used e.g. NSW versus New South Wales).
- Avoid jargon or slang.
- Do not write in upper case (except capitalising words).
- Do not use contractions e.g. use cannot rather than can't.
- When writing numbers, use numerals e.g. 1 rather than one.
- Do not underline words or use italics.
- Bold important words or those that you define.
- Bold phone numbers and web addresses.
- Use minimal punctuation e.g. avoid brackets and colons.

Testing

It is important to design the resources with people who will be the target audience (co-design). Include people with intellectual disability, their families and support persons, and mental health professionals in testing what you have developed.

Additional resources

Easy read guides

- **Scope Accessible Information and Easy English**

Introductory information

<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/blog/communication-access/diving-easy-english/>

Style guide and factsheets on Easy English and accessible information.

<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Clear-Written-Communications.-The-Easy-English-Style-Guide.-Text-only-for-website.docx>

- **Clear Written Communications: The Easy English Style Guide**

This booklet provides a range of guidelines to support the presentation of 'easy-to-read' information in accessible reports, brochures, and flyers.

<https://www.centralwestgippslandpcp.com/assets/files/pre-2019/projects/health-literacy/guide/17.pdf>

Expert advice on easy read

Easy read experts can write your easy read, provide advice when you write easy read or teach you how to make easy read.

- **Council for Intellectual Disability**

<https://cid.org.au/event/learn-easy-read/>

- **Scope Australia**

<https://www.scopeaust.org.au/>

Making information more accessible: Using easy read

Easy read is designed to facilitate communication. It can be used by some people independently, but many people use it with support. Support is most often from a family member, friend, paid carer, or mental health staff reading and talking about the document.

Tips for using easy read

- There are different ways to use easy read information. Sometimes the person with intellectual disability will read the information directly, while at other times it may be useful as a resource to give supporters ideas about how to phrase discussions in ways that are easy to understand.
- Find somewhere without distractions.
- Allow plenty of time.
- Check if there is someone who usually supports the person with communication.
- Be flexible— only read through the sections that are needed and take a break if you need to.
- Information does not need to be provided in the order it is presented.
- Explain any terms that are unfamiliar to the person.
- The pictures can be useful when you are working with people who are not confident with reading or find it hard to remember where the conversation is up to.
- Use easy read as a conversation prompt or to facilitate questions.
- Use the words from easy read documents to help explain difficult ideas.
- It is often necessary and beneficial to go over the information at another time to reinforce understanding.
- Provide people with a copy of the easy read information to take home so they can review it with support persons to help remind them of the information.

Additional resources

Easy read information about mental health for people with intellectual disability

- **Council for Intellectual Disability easy read resources**

Information guides about what mental health is, and tips for good mental health.

<https://cid.org.au/resource/mental-health-guide/>

<https://cid.org.au/resource/tips-help-mental-health/>

- **3DN Positive Cardiometabolic resources**

Links to easy read information about medication.

<https://3dn.unsw.edu.au/content/psychotropic-medication>

Resources about health for people with intellectual disability

- **Council for Intellectual Disability easy read resources**

Easy read information about health-related topics such as visiting the doctor, medication and going to appointments.

<https://cid.org.au/resource-category/health/>

- **NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation health resources**

Pictorial information about health topics such as appointments, procedures and staying in hospital.

<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability/hospitalisation/say-less-show-more>

Making information more accessible: Conversations and appointments

People with intellectual disability often learn about mental health treatments and services in conversations with health workers. This could be at a medical appointment, or at a front desk or admissions counter. These conversations may be formal or informal, brief, or lengthy. Effective communication is most likely when staff have time to listen respectfully and tailor information to meet individual needs.

Below are some tips for making appointments and conversations more accessible.

To think about before you meet

- What information do you need to gather from the person or their family or support persons when you meet?
- What information is the person likely to need from you about the health service/agency?
- What does the person need to know right now?
- How does the person usually communicate? Do they have a communication system or plan that they usually use at home?
- Do they usually have someone who supports them at medical appointments? Can they be present too?
- Will you need additional resources to support the person at the appointment, or before or after?
- Are there simplified forms, easy read information, or other resources available to use?
- Can you allow extra time if needed?
- If appropriate, make contact and let the person and their support person(s) know what to expect when they arrive (e.g. usual waiting time or directions).
- Choose an appropriate location to meet (e.g. quiet, accessible, somewhere familiar to the person if possible).

At the meeting

- Talk to the person with intellectual disability directly.
- Check if the person has any preferences about who is there or how they communicate (this could change from when you checked with them before the appointment).
- Include family or support persons in the conversation if appropriate.
- Give the person, then their support persons, opportunities to ask questions.
- Check that the person has understood what you have said before moving on to discuss new information.
- Have a break if needed.
- Use a range of communication strategies as is appropriate to the person e.g. written information, verbal, video, or pictures.
- See the [Using easy read](#) information sheet for tips about using easy read.

After the meeting

- Provide opportunities to the individual and their support persons to follow up for questions.
- Provide information to take away from the appointment in an accessible format.
- When needed, offer information more than once to aid understanding.
- Check if the person requires further support to implement recommendations or outcomes from your meeting.

Opportunities for communication between agency staff and people with intellectual disability are often impacted by agency rules or procedures, such as appointment length or admission systems. The [Procedures](#) information sheet provides more information about making your service processes more accessible so that staff can be supported to make communication accessible.

Additional resources

- **NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation- Intellectual Disability Resources**

Resources to enhance the capacity of primary and secondary health services to provide health care to people with intellectual disability.

<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability>

Intellectual Disability Toolkit to support the health care of people with intellectual disability in NSW.

<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability/toolkit/intellectual-disability-toolkit>

- **Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities in Healthcare Settings Factsheet**

This factsheet by the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria (CDDHV) is a useful summary of information and tips for working with people with intellectual disability.

<https://www.cddh.monashhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-working-with-people-with-intellectual-disabilities.pdf>

- **Introduction to Intellectual Disability – Intellectual Disability Rights Service**

An introductory guide on what intellectual disability is, how to recognise it, appropriate language, disability etiquette, communication tips, and disability standards and discrimination.

http://www.idrs.org.au/pdf/IDRS_%20Introduction_intellectual%20disability_17Feb09.pdf

Making information more accessible: Procedures

It is important that mental health services have procedures that enable people with intellectual disability to navigate their service, and support staff to find appropriate communication resources and use them. A busy mental health service is a difficult environment for effective communication. Agency procedures can make it hard for people with intellectual disability to find the mental health information they need.

People with intellectual disability have a right to health information that they can understand and this right needs to underpin all agency practice. Procedures differ across mental health services, but here are some things to consider at your service as you use the easy read resources.

Resources

- Plan to have various accessible resources, including the *Easy read information on public mental health services in New South Wales*, readily available for staff to use as needed.
- Store easy read information where staff can find it easily when needed e.g. store the easy read version alongside the standard version rather than a separate location.
- Implement training for staff about how to find and use easy read resources.

Admission and discharge procedures

- Provide clear steps for staff, people with intellectual disability and their support persons to follow.
- Ensure the forms you provide clearly explain who needs to fill them in and what they are for.
- Provide opportunities for the person with intellectual disability to look at admission and discharge information with support from mental health service staff and/or a family member or support person.
- Allow extra time and multiple consultations if needed.
- Revisit information about admission or discharge procedures to answer questions when they arise.

Appointments

- Provide flexible appointment locations, times, and formats.
- Provide the option of a 'pre-visit' or brief orientation for people who are anxious about attending your service.
- Include supporters such as family, friends, or paid support staff when possible and appropriate.
- Provide clear steps for staff, people with intellectual disability and their support persons to follow. e.g. clear instructions about where to wait, who to call if they have questions.
- Provide opportunities for staff to build relationships with people with intellectual disability e.g. book the same worker for appointments or treatment

- The [Using easy read](#) resource has more details about how easy read information can be used.

Staff training

- Provide regular staff training about intellectual disability.
- Ensure staff have time to learn how to use easy read.
- Provide ongoing mentoring for staff, for example, having a designated person to ask if staff require support adapting communication.

Physical Environment

- Ensure there is clear signage at your service of key areas.
- Provide maps and directions available prior to arrival.
- Ensure front desk staff are aware of the easy read mental health resources.

Policy

- Procedures need to be supported by policy that explicitly articulates that all people have a right to health information that they can understand.

Additional resources

Training for staff about working with people with intellectual disability

- **Intellectual Disability Mental Health e-Learning**

3DN, UNSW Sydney's online training for mental health professionals, disability professionals and carers to improve mental health outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

<http://www.idhealtheducation.edu.au/>

- **The Intellectual Disability Mental Health Core Competency Framework: A Manual for Mental Health Professionals and accompanying Practical Toolkit**

The Framework Manual describes the key skills and core attributes required by mental health professionals working with people with intellectual disability. The accompanying Toolkit provides practical information to assist in the development of the core attributes. It provides more information on communication strategies and how to make assessment and management procedures accessible.

<https://3dn.unsw.edu.au/IDMH-CORE-COMPETENCY-FRAMEWORK>

Information about how to make your service more accessible

- **Accessible Mental Health Services for People with an Intellectual Disability: A Guide for Providers**

The Guide provides an overview of why accessible services are important, and practical strategies for inclusive and accessible services.

<https://3dn.unsw.edu.au/the-guide>

- **NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation- Intellectual Disability Resources**

NSW Health has developed various resources to support agencies to include people with intellectual disability.

<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability>

This is a comprehensive resource. It has online resources to use, including a checklist to help you make your service more accessible for people with intellectual disability.

<https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/intellectual-disability/id-essentials/resources/the-essentials>

Making information more accessible: Resources and links

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