

What is the NHS Accessible Information Standard?

NHS England's Accessible Information Standard is in place so that everyone can receive their health information in a format they can read. From the 1st August 2016 some organisations must follow the Accessible Information Standard by law.

NHS England have created the Accessible Information Standard which the NHS and adult social care services are legally obliged to meet.

Organisations that provide NHS or adult social care must do 5 things:

1. **Ask** people if they have any information or communication needs, and find out how to meet their needs
2. **Record** those needs in a set way
3. **Highlight** a person's file, so it is clear that they have information or communication needs, and clearly explain how those needs should be met
4. **Share** information about a person's needs with other NHS and adult social care providers, when they have consent or permission to do so
5. **Act:** Make sure that people get information in an accessible way and communication support if they need it

Who does it apply to?

The standard applies to service providers across the NHS, Adult Social Care and publicly funded Adults Social Care providers.

Whilst there are clear benefits to local people of other organisations adopting the standard there is currently no legal requirement for this. However, you may consider it good practice and will in any case need to provide your services in a way that is compliant with other disability, discrimination and equalities legislation.

How can information be provided?

This includes making sure that people get information in different formats if they need it, such as:

- Large print
- Braille
- Easy read
- Via email
- Offering support from a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, deafblind manual interpreter
- Offering the support of an advocate.

Why is accessible information important?

Accessible information is about empowering people. People need information to make decisions about their health and care services. If an individual does not get information in a way that they can process, they are unlikely to be involved in the services they are accessing.

The nature and complexity of some medical information makes accessibility an issue for everyone. However there are some groups that are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of accessible information and good communication. Removing these barriers by providing accessible information, tailored to specific needs, is a key enabler for people to access health services. By doing this providers will be **supporting reductions in health inequalities.**

The Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with learning disabilities found that men with learning difficulties die on average 13 years sooner than other men; women with learning difficulties die on average 20 years sooner than other women. **Barriers to people with learning difficulties accessing health services** include problems with understanding and communicating health needs and failure to make 'reasonable adjustments' to services so that they can be used easily and effectively by people with learning disabilities.

Getting **good access to information** has emerged as a common theme for health, social care and amongst local community and voluntary organisations. This topic has the potential to become a shared cause that can bring together disparate groups to work with and advocate the views of local people. Working collaboratively on this issue could be particularly effective at amplifying voices that are seldom heard.

What should people with a disability or sensory loss should do if a provider is not meeting the standard?

Providers have a legal duty to comply with the in full by 31st July 2016.

If patients, service users and carers find that NHS provider organisations are not complying with the Standard by failing to meet their accessible information / communication support needs, they should follow the NHS Complaints Procedure.

If the issue concerns a provider of adult social care services, each local authority is responsible for arrangements for dealing with complaints, so people should contact their local authority for a copy of its complaints procedure. Under the statutory complaints system, you should complain to your local authority in writing or verbally to the complaints manager within 12 months. The local authority should acknowledge it has received your complaint within three working days. It will inform you of how long your complaint is likely to take to investigate. The local authority must respond fully within six months, unless a different time period has been discussed and agreed with you.

What has been done to promote the standard?

NHS England published an Implementation Plan and a Communication Plan in July 2015 to support implementation and awareness-raising about the Standard. Activity has included issuing press releases and publishing articles in a range of bulletins, including NHS England's NHS News, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Bulletin and the Foundation Trust newsletter as well as regular social media coverage.

There has also been communications to CCGs, NHS Patient and Public Involvement and Communications leads, Directors of Adult Social Services, Commissioning Support Units and members of clinical reference groups.

For patients, voluntary and community sector organisations including Action on Hearing Loss, CHANGE, the RNIB, Sense and SignHealth have raised awareness with their members and networks both nationally and locally.

More Information

More information on the Accessible Information Standard can be found on the NHS England website

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Healthwatch Slough is adopting the Accessible Information Standard in the services we provide to people.