



Communication Rights and Communication Access

Information for Local and State Government Departments

Communication is a fundamental human right.

All people – all children and all adults - have the right to:

- share their own ideas and opinions
- and access information in a way that they can understand.

These rights are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948).

These rights to communication are made even more clear in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1998) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006).

Australia is a signatory to each of these international human rights treaties.

To find out more about Communication as a fundamental human right, watch this short video from the Communication Hub (2023) <https://vimeo.com/697315595>. The Communication Hub is an excellent source of information created by Speech Pathology Australia in collaboration with AGOSCI Inc.

Communication access involves everyone.

Communication access is explained very well in this animation from Speech Pathology Australia (2023) <https://vimeo.com/795081628>

Communication access happens when all people – all children and all adults – have the supports in place that they need to:

- understand what is said
- have their messages understood by others
- use the methods of communication that they use most easily and that they choose to use
- get the time and opportunity to communicate what they want to share
- get written information in ways they can understand
- get documents and forms in ways that they can understand, fill in and sign
- use an organizations website and social media pages
- connect with an organization via telephone or other more accessible ways

Local and State Government departments must think about the actions that can be taken to support and increase communication access for everyone. This is especially important for people who cannot not rely on speech to be understood and to understand others.

Children and adults who have difficulty communicating have the right to have the supports they need to:

- Understand what you and other people are saying to them
- Have written information given to them in ways they can understand
- Get their messages across to other people
- Use the ways of communicating that work best for them
- Use the ways of communicating that they feel most comfortable using and importantly, that they choose to use. This may be speech; gestures; body language; Auslan; writing; pointing to pictures, photos, symbols, words or letters; activating words through touch, eye gaze or with switch controlled scanning on a communication device such as an iPad or personal computer; and /or having someone who knows them well support their communication

When engaging with Local and State Government departments, agencies or services, people who have difficulty communicating have the right to the supports they need to be able to:

- Read and understand all written information from a Government department
- Read, understand, complete and sign Government department forms
- Read and understand Government department websites and social media
- Understand and be understood well at meetings, public events and consultations
- Take notes that will help them to revisit and review information
- Contact Local or State Government departments using telephone or email and via any other alternatives to telephone and email that they need

In emergency situations, or critical situations, people who cannot rely on speech to understand or to be understood by others have a right to:

- The communication supports they need, embedded in policies and procedures, to ensure they can give informed consent in medical, legal and other critical situations
- Choose someone they trust to support them in negotiations and decision-making processes
- A communication partner to help them understand and be understood when communicating with police or in other legal or justice settings.

The examples above have been inspired by the advice and lived experience perspectives of our Communication Advisory Team at DDWA and by from Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC, 2021) <https://www.cdacanada.com/resources/accessible-businesses-and-services/about/communication-access-rights/>