Communication for Safe Care

What is the Communication for Safe Care Project?

Our project aims to enhance healthcare access for people with communication disabilities. We will achieve this goal by making healthcare services more communication accessible, whether they are metropolitan, regional, remote or telehealth.

Why is this project necessary?

Research consistently shows that people with a communication disability report that their access to community and health services has been impacted. Communication failures (verbal or written) can result in errors, misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment and poor care outcomes. Creating communication accessible healthcare environments will:

- increase consumer and carer engagement
- provide consumers with greater choice and control over their own health care
- support the delivery of safe, timely and high quality patient care
- improve staff capacity and satisfaction

What is a communication disability?

It is estimated that 1.2 million Australians have a communication disability. This includes impairments occurring any point along the communication pathway: giving, receiving, processing or understanding information (verbal or nonverbal).

A communication disability can range from mild to profound. It may also be temporary and associated with a short term clinical situation. It includes consumers who have:

- Intellectual disability
- Neurological injury/degeneration
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Communication disorders, such as developmental language disorder or speech sound disorder
- Psychosocial disability

What is communication accessibility?

"Communication access is when everyone can get their message across. Good communication occurs when people are respectful and responsive to individuals with communication difficulties, and when strategies and resources are used to support successful communication."[1]

We are aiming to improve communication exchanges between consumers and health care services. We will be looking at this holistically from environmental design to day-to-day interactions between healthcare workers and consumers.

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[1] Solarsh B, Johnson H. Developing Communication Access Standards to Maximize Community Inclusion for People With Communication Support Needs. Topics in Language Disorders. 2017;37(1):52-66.

Who is involved in the Communication for Safe Care project?

Funded through a National Disability Insurance Agency Mainstream Capacity Building Grant, Communication for Safe Care is a collaboration between:

- South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD)
- Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD)
- University of Sydney

How will achieve our goal?

In order to create sustainable and meaningful change, we will be working closely with:

- Health Care Workers (HCWs)
- Health Care service providers (executive management, operational management, administration and support staff)
- consumers with lived experience
- carers
- Allied Health students (to develop the skills of the future workforce)
- subject matter experts
- industry partners

This iterative process of collaboration and co-design, will allows us to translate current evidence and best practice to create communication accessible healthcare environments.

Would you like more information?

Please contact the Communication for Safe Care Project team:

SWSLHD-CommunicationForSafeCare@health.nsw.gov.au