



Enhancing healthcare  
access for people with  
communication  
disabilities



COLLABORATIVE  
PARTNERSHIPS



LOCAL SOLUTIONS



SAFE, QUALITY  
CARE

# Communication for Safe Care Project News

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

We would like to recognise those with lived experience of communication disabilities. We acknowledge that we can only provide quality care through valuing, respecting and drawing upon the experiences and expert knowledge of consumers, their families, carers and friends, staff and the local community. We acknowledge their contribution and guidance in our attempts to create more inclusive health care settings.

## THIS EDITION

- 01 Project update (p. 2)
- 02 Meet the research team (p. 3 - 4)
- 03 Project Impact: Understanding local context and healthcare environments (p. 5)
- 04 Project Impact: Deliver safe & quality Healthcare (p. 6 - 7)

## PROJECT UPDATE

Over the past few months, the Communication for Safe Care project team have been busily gathering data! We have been conducting staff surveys and interviews at each of our Target Sites - SWSLHD Oral Health Services, SWSLHD Campbelltown Emergency Department, WNSWLHD Oral Health Services and WNSWLHD Perioperative Services.

We've been gathering rich insights from doctors, nurses, dentists, dental assistants and administrative staff about their experiences providing healthcare services to people with communication disabilities. Read on to find out more about our data collection process, as well as our next steps in co-designing communication access solutions!

### NSW Ministry of Health, Elevating the Human Experience

The Communication for Safe Care project featured in the June edition of the Elevating the Human Experience Newsletter. The team created a 'Learning Byte' video about communication access. Please click on the link below to view the short video, which provides

tips about effective communication:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlcD1hC6hTE>

### Speech Pathology Australia (SPA) Conference

In May, Karri Kneebone (Clinical Specialist) presented a Spark Talk at the Speech Pathology Australia (SPA) National Conference in Hobart. The presentation was 'Communication rights and communication access in health care environments'.

## Elevating the Human Experience Showcase

Fiona Murphy (Project Manager) had the opportunity to present at the Ministry of Health Human Experience Showcase on 27th May 2023. The showcase highlighted projects that focus on 'transforming patient and staff experiences across NSW Health'. You can watch the recorded presentation by scanning the below QR Code or clicking the link: <https://vimeo.com/823981577/a59fb4066f>

Communication for Safe Care: co-designing communication accessible healthcare settings

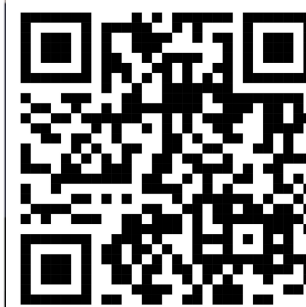
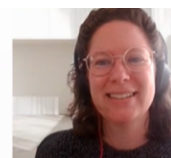


**Fiona Murphy**  
Project Manager, Communication for Safe Care



NSW Health

34



\*Note: the presentation starts at 48.00-minute mark

## MEET THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY TEAM



**Professor Sue McAllister** – Project Advisor, Honorary of The University of Sydney, Sydney School of Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Health

**Professor Sarah Dennis** – Research Lead, Professor Allied Health, Sydney School of Health Sciences

**Dr. Iqbal Hasan** – Project Research and Evaluation Officer

## Communication Research



**Professor Leanne Togher** – Professor Communication Disorders after TBI & Senior NHMRC Research Fellow

**Dr. Elise Elbourn** – Lecturer (Neurogenic Language Disorders and Language), Sydney School of Health Sciences

**Dr. Liss Bruner** – Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Speech Pathology, Sydney School of Health Sciences

**Dr. Rachael Reitdijk** – Lecturer, Speech Pathology, Sydney School of Health Sciences

## MEET THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY TEAM

### Work Culture and Change Management Research



**A/Professor Anya Johnson** – Deputy Head of Discipline, Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney Business School

**Dr. Ju Li Ng** – Deputy Director for Master HRM & IR, Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney Business School

### Future Workforce Development Research



**A/Professor Gillian Nisbet** – Director of Partnerships and Placements, Sydney School of Health Sciences

**Dr. Robyn Johnson** – Work Integrated Learning, University of Sydney

**Dr. Elizabeth Bourne** – Program Director of Masters of Speech Pathology & Work Integrated Learning Placement Innovation Lead, University of Sydney

## PROJECT IMPACT: UNDERSTANDING LOCAL CONTEXT AND HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS

The Communication for Safe Care project aims to improve communication access in healthcare environments via the co-design process. **Co-design** is an approach where solutions are designed **with** rather than **for** people with lived experience of the issue. Co-design typically occurs in a **staged approach**, using different methods to understand the experiences of people receiving and delivering services.

The project is currently in the 'gather' phase of co-design. This involves gathering information about the experiences of patients or consumers accessing healthcare services, as well as the experiences of healthcare workers delivering the services. We have partnered with 4 target sites to conduct staff surveys and interviews. We have interviewed doctors, nurses, dentists, dental assistants and administrative staff about their experiences providing healthcare services to people with communication disabilities. We are excited to start interviewing consumers and patients over the next couple of months.

The researchers from the University of Sydney are analysing this data so that we are able to report on what the key issues or barriers at each target sites. The top priority issues will be presented at solution workshops, where staff and consumers will work together to come up with solutions that are locally appropriate for the service.

If you are a person with lived experience of a communication disability and would like to learn about the project, please contact us: [swslhd-communicationforsafecare@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:swslhd-communicationforsafecare@health.nsw.gov.au)

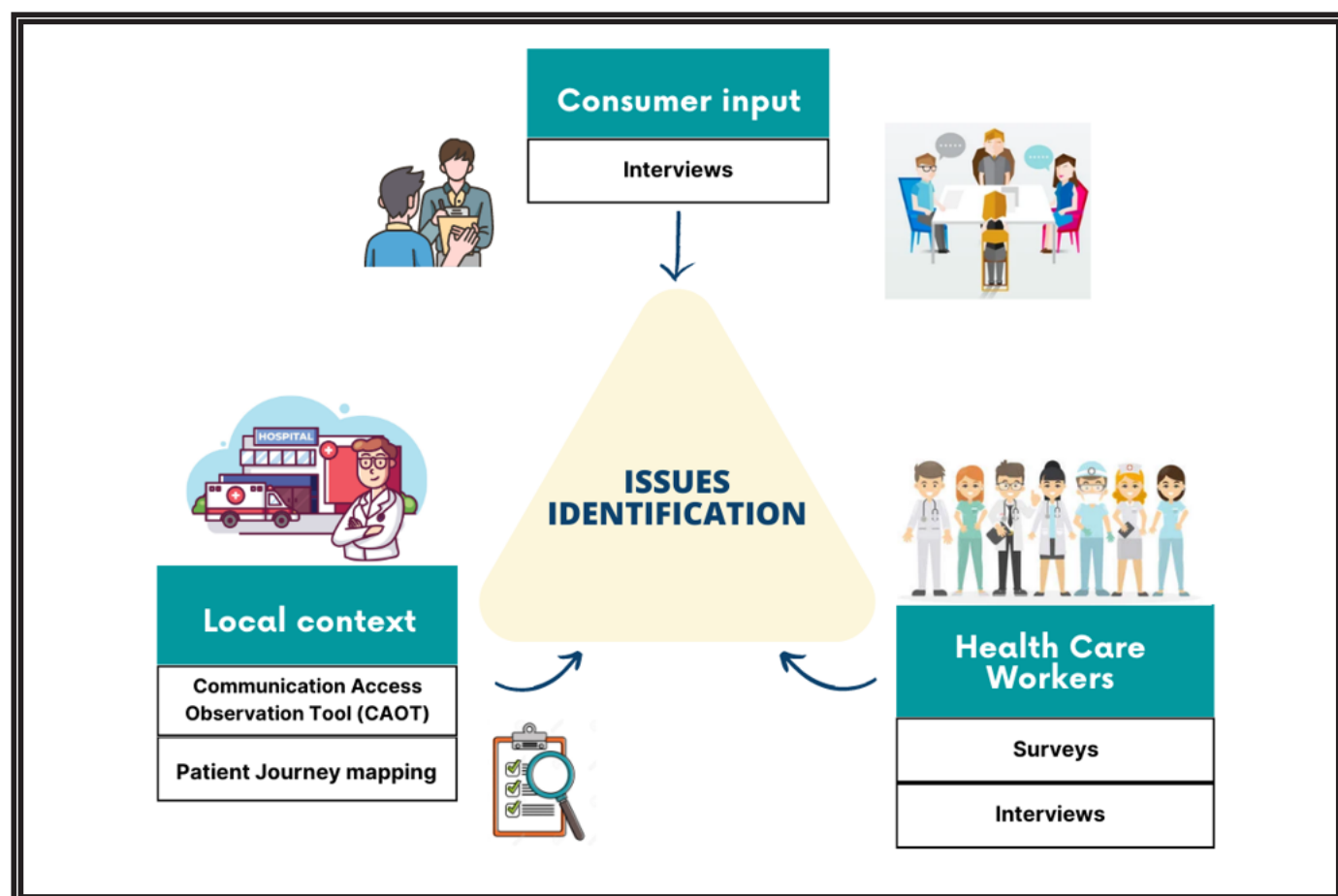


Image: Strategies for gathering data



## PROJECT IMPACT: DELIVER SAFE & QUALITY HEALTHCARE

We are Tiffany and Ella, fourth year student speech pathologists from the University of Sydney. We have had the privilege of being a part of the Communication for Safe Care project within the Western NSW LHD. This has been such an **eye-opening experience into the world of healthcare as well as the importance of communication access in all aspects of life.**

During our time on the project, we had the exciting opportunity to pioneer explorations at the Dubbo and Orange Hospital Perioperative sites. Within these visits we were able to follow patients through their journey from admission to the hospital to the operating theatre and observe interactions with different healthcare workers along the way. This gave us great insight into people's lived experiences of what supports them to understand and receive safe and quality care.

One outstanding observation of communication access in practice was when an admissions nurse adjusted her communication to engage with an older lady with hearing loss and Parkinson's disease. The nurse demonstrated this by moving closer to the patient, making eye contact when speaking, slowing down her speech, and speaking in simple, short sentences. **This allowed the patient to understand and be involved in the decision-making of her healthcare journey.**



Dubbo Periop site visit (L- R): Molly Banks, Tiffany Ngai, Ella Taylor and Katherine Shannon

### Take-Home Message

“Good communication begins with connection. Connection looks like building rapport, and we have seen the difference this makes for patient experiences. When health care workers take the time to get to know patients, empathise with how they feel, and respond to their concerns, a sense of trust is established between the patient and healthcare worker. **This elevates how patients see their care and their overall safety.**”

“**Communication is a two-way street! It is about both parties getting their message across to one another, and understanding the message they receive.** This means that it is important that all patients are provided information in an easy-to-understand way and supported to respond to this information. In most healthcare settings, this two-way street has many roadblocks which the project will continue to learn about and work towards finding effective, co-designed solutions.”

## PROJECT IMPACT: DELIVER SAFE & QUALITY HEALTHCARE

We are Da Eun and Alexis, fourth-year speech pathologists from The University of Sydney. As part of our university placement, we had the opportunity to work with the 'Communication for Safe Care' project as members of the Southwestern Sydney Local Health District team.

Though we have so much to share about our experience, we would like to focus on our visit to the Campbelltown Hospital Dental Centre, where we had the pleasure of meeting and observing the work of Dr Zanab, a special needs dentist. Special needs dentists are dentists specialising in the treatment of individuals with additional needs such as intellectual disability, complex comorbidities or conditions such as phobias. Zanab's role as a special needs dentist is a new addition to the Campbelltown Hospital Dental Centre, representing an emerging area of dentistry in Australia, with only 26 practitioners nation-wide.



Campbelltown Hospital Dental Centre visit (L-R): Alexis, Zanab (Special Needs Dentist) and Da Eun

During our site visit, we had the opportunity to observe communication interactions between Zanab and her patients. Something that made Zanab stand out was her ability to achieve **person-centred care, particularly by demonstrating accessible communication**. In addition to adjusting her spoken language, Zanab implemented a range of communication supports in her practice. For example, Zanab supported her patient and their carer's understanding of the next stages of service with a **customised care plan, comprising of a visual timetable of post-treatment care routines and a list of medications and oral health products to purchase accompanied by images**. This care plan was printed and given to her patients at the end of their appointment, to ensure that their aftercare instructions were clear and could be communicated to all of the patient's support networks. We observed how Zanab's care plan along with her other communication strategies promoted communication access and meant that her patients understood their treatment and were able to achieve great outcomes!

### Take-Home Message

Our observation of Zanab working with patients with communication disabilities was an immensely meaningful opportunity for us as Speech Pathology students. We recognised the importance of clear, person-centred communication approaches in the oral health setting. We have gained an appreciation of the important role that specialised dentists play in supporting patients with complex and additional needs. Accessible communication is a key component in being able to make a patient feel safe, and comfortable in the dental chair!

## CONTACT US:

For more information email us: [SWSLHD-CommunicationForSafeCare@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:SWSLHD-CommunicationForSafeCare@health.nsw.gov.au)