



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 by 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** Research update (p. 3)
- 03** Project Impact: Co-design in healthcare (p.4)
- 04** Project Impact: Building current and future Healthcare worker capacity (p. 5-6)

PROJECT UPDATE

The Communication for Safe Care project is going through an exciting period of transition, which includes:

- A project extension until 28th February 2025
- The welcoming of new project team members
- The farewelling of some team members who are moving into other roles within NSW Health

We are currently recruiting for two positions (applications close 2nd October 2023):

- Project Manager (Health Mgr Lvl 3) - Communication for Safe Care - Temp FT | I work for NSW
- Project Officer (Health Mgr Lvl 2) - Communication for Safe Care - Temp FT | I work for NSW4



Pictured: Katherine Shannon (Clinical Specialist, Western NSW)

Western NSW Health Research Network (WHRN) Conference 2023

The Communication for Safe Care Western NSW project team presented at the 2023 WHRN conference. WHRN is the peak body for health research conducted in Western NSW. It is collaboration between universities, Local Health Districts and other health services and networks.

Molly Banks (Project Officer) presented on 'Communication Accessible Healthcare: Co-designing communication access solutions in two regional services.'

Katherine Shannon (Clinical Specialist) presented on 'Reframing the narrative of allied health student placements - from burden to breakthrough'. Katherine was awarded the Best Oral Presentation award in the emerging researcher category. Congratulations, Katherine!

Conference Presentations and Awards:

- **South Western Sydney Health Beyond Research Showcase** (August 2023) - the team presented at three sessions throughout the week. Rebecca Karmas (Project Officer) was awarded 'Best Allied Health Presentation' at the Campbelltown and Camden Hospital session.
- **National Allied Health Conference** (August 2023)- Communication for Safe Care Electronic (ePoster)
- Fiona Murphy (Project Manager) received a South Western Sydney '**Allied Health Hero**' award

Filming with the Council for Intellectual Disability!

We have been working closely with the Council for Intellectual Disability's (CID) Health Team. Recently our Project Officer, Rebecca, had the opportunity to be involved in filming! The CID team are creating training modules for Health Care workers, which will be available on the NSW Health 'My Health Learning' platform. The training modules will focus on topics such as: supported decision, consent and behaviour supports.



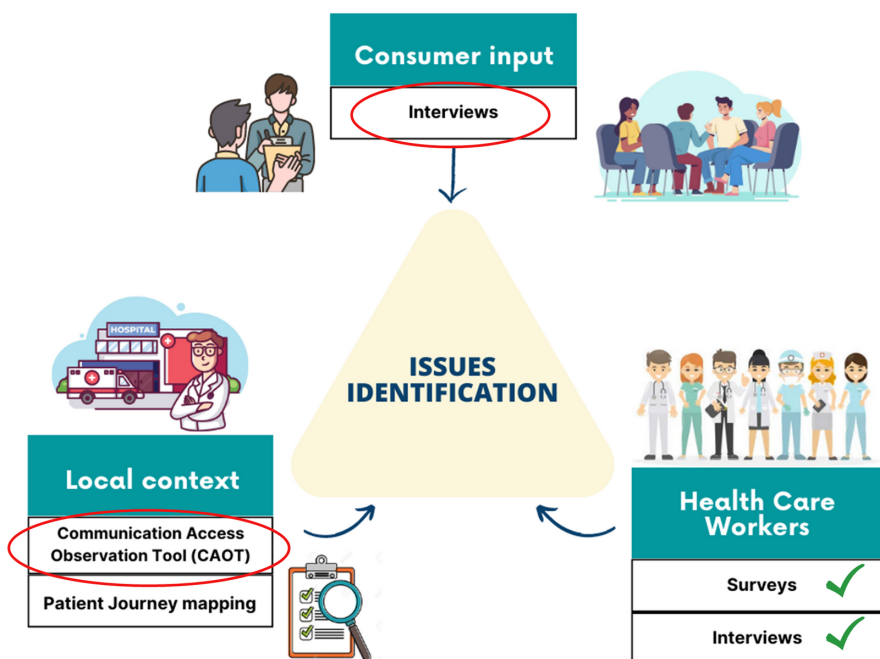
Pictured: Rebecca Karmas (South Western Sydney project officer)

RESEARCH UPDATE

In our last newsletter (Issue 3), we outlined the data collection process for the 'gather' phase of co-design. This process is helping us understand the communication accessibility of our 4 Target Sites. We are discovering lots of strengths and strategies, as well as opportunities to enhance access.

We have completed interviews and surveys with healthcare workers in our 4 target sites. We are currently interviewing people with communication disability about their experiences accessing healthcare services. We are also interviewing carers and support workers of people with communication disabilities.

We are continuing to test and refine the Communication Access Observation Tool (CAOT). The CAOT identifies strengths and gaps in communication accessibility without disrupting patient care or delaying patient flow. It can be used by anyone - students, doctors, administrative staff, nurses, dentists, managers. Communication is everyone's business.



If you have a communication disability or support someone with a communication disability, and would like to learn about how you can get involved in the project, please email us: swslhd-communicationforsafecare@health.nsw.gov.au

RESOURCES

Oral Health for adults with disability - Guide for Carers

The Communication for Safe Care project is passionate about Oral Health Care!

NSW Health have developed a range of videos about oral hygiene that are targeted at carers of people with disability. The videos cover topics such as brushing, sugar reduction and preparing for a dental visit.

The full range of videos can be viewed here: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/prevention/Pages/advice-for-people-with-disability.aspx>



PROJECT IMPACT: CO-DESIGN IN HEALTHCARE

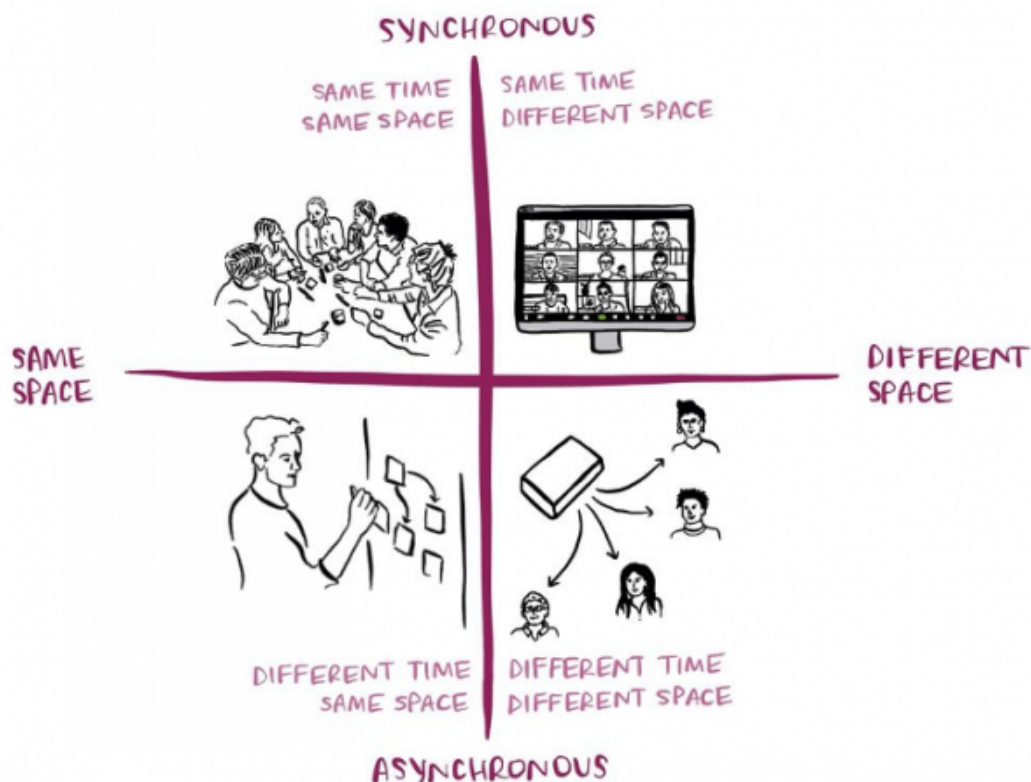
Undertaking co-design in busy healthcare environments can be challenging! Co-design requires trusting and equal relationships between all stakeholders, including healthcare staff, patients and executive sponsors. This way of working focuses on engaging stakeholders before the agenda is set. The aim is for patients and healthcare staff to work together to define the problems and design solutions.

Co-design is an exciting process. However, there can be significant barriers when utilising it in healthcare settings. Healthcare workers may have limited availability to participate in meetings or workshops due to high workloads, KPIs, low staffing levels and limited options to backfill shifts. Consumers of healthcare services also have busy schedules, often attending multiple medical appointments throughout the week.

We have been collaborating with other co-design projects to better understand these barriers, as well as share ideas. It is clear that flexibility is the key when co-designing in healthcare, this means utilising a combination of synchronous and asynchronous co-design activities (see diagram below). Offering a range of options to participate may result in higher engagement from stakeholders. We are investigating if it is an accessible model for people with communication disability.

If you are interested in learning more about co-design in healthcare, check out these projects and resources:

- [SPEAK Project](#) (Alfred health, Victoria) - "The SPEAK project is committed to using a co-design approach in achieving its objectives. People who work in healthcare are experts in healthcare delivery. People with disability are experts in their own lives and needs. A big part of co-design is saying both are equally important".
- [Lab4Living \(UK\)](#) - This work is an exploration into how to engage participants meaningfully through remote co-design during the COVID-19 pandemic.



PROJECT IMPACT: BUILDING CURRENT AND FUTURE HEALTH CARE WORKER CAPACITY

We are Vanessa and Victoria, fourth year speech pathology students from the University of Sydney. We had the wonderful opportunity to take part in the Communication for Safe Care project in Western NSW. It has been a fascinating experience that has given us insights into individual patient experiences and has reinforced the importance of communication access for all.

This placement has provided us with a deeper understanding of the importance of accessibility for patients, but more importantly, the need for us as health professionals to facilitate accessibility. More often physical disabilities are addressed in society, whereas communication disabilities are invisible and can therefore go unnoticed. It is crucial that we recognise the barriers around us that are preventing people from getting information and services as well as expressing their needs. Seeing these barriers will therefore push us to provide solutions and options that increase communication access, that is, access for everyone no matter how they communicate i.e., verbally, or nonverbally.



Pictured: Speech Pathology Students Vanessa and Victoria with Oral Health Therapy students

As part of this project, we had the privilege of developing and running a workshop for the final-year oral health therapy students from the University of Newcastle at the Orange Hospital. This was focused on further developing their capacity to effectively communicate with different populations of patients. The initial conversation with them helped to determine strategies that they currently use with patients. We developed an engaging, purpose-built workshop that targeted strategies to minimise communication breakdowns that the students reportedly experienced. Throughout the workshop, we collaborated with the oral health therapy students to define the problem of communication access and generate solutions suitable for their everyday practice. This experience has taught us about the effectiveness of co-design, which embraces a reciprocal and equitable relationship with stakeholders to ensure person-centred care.



Pictured: Speech Pathology Students Vanessa and Victoria

Take-home Message:

Vanessa: "This experience has opened my eyes to the diverse role of speech pathologists. It was quite interesting to see how the role of speech pathologists goes beyond individual client and small group interactions. This project has shown me how speech pathologists can collaborate with so many other health professionals to fulfil our passion of access and inclusivity for all, regardless of their communication needs."

Victoria: "Communication is crucial across all settings, including but not limited to the healthcare environment. My understanding of speech pathology and our role in facilitating communication has deepened throughout this project. It has particularly emphasised to me the sheer significance of small changes to communication style and how it can have such a positive major impact on a patient's health outcomes and experience."

PROJECT IMPACT: BUILDING CURRENT AND FUTURE HEALTH CARE WORKER CAPACITY

Hi, we are Olivia and Stephanie, fourth year student Speech Pathologists from the University of Sydney. As part of our final placement, we had the pleasure of working on the Communication for Safe Care Project as a part of the South Western Sydney Local Health District team.

Throughout this project, the team has been developing various resources in preparation for future co-design workshops and meetings. As the project's main purpose is looking at developing solutions to enhance communication accessibility in healthcare, it became clear that we, as a project team, needed to consider and prioritise communication access to our own workshops and meetings. The task of creating an 'Access Check' was then handed over to us, as the team wanted to develop a tool to help structure discussions with all the people that will be interacting with the project.

Something that we have noticed, particularly as we have visited and observed interactions in the Emergency Department and Oral Health Service, is that health care workers often waited for the individual to tell them what supports they require. However, in creating the 'Access Check', we are attempting to provide an example for people to understand that it is okay to ask what people need, as long as it is done in a respectful and person-centred way.

To create the 'Access Check', we were inspired by existing resources from the Specialised Intellectual Disability Health Team (SIDHT) and the Ministry of Health. In particular, the Communication Needs assessment tool for virtual appointments and the 'All of Us: Essentials Checklist'. During the planning process, we wanted to make sure that all key issues were covered and that it wasn't simply a checklist for facilitators to just tick off. We also needed to consider how the check itself would be conducted as well as reasonable adjustments that needed to be made on the day.



Pictured: Stephanie and Olivia meeting with former student Kirushna

We later had the opportunity to complete an access check on a member of the advisory network, Kirushna, who was also a previous speech pathology student of this placement (see Newsletter, Issue 1). Kirushna gave us lots of helpful feedback into ways we could better accommodate and approach people who presented with communication difficulties. This activity has taught us so much about the importance of being accessible to enhance engagement and overall participation in all settings.

Looking forward, the information gathered from the 'Access Check' could be used to develop consumer profiles, where each individual interacting with the project could have a summary of their preferred supports and key personal information to ensure they are able to have the most interactive and valuable experience with the project.

CONTACT US:

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