

# Communication in healthcare settings

Dr Rachael Rietdijk

Acknowledgement to Dr Elise Elbourn and the Communication for Safe  
Care team for slide content



# Why do we need to improve communication in healthcare?



An estimated 1.2 million  
Australians present with  
communication difficulties.

ABS (2015)



Communication breakdown  
can result in errors,  
misdiagnosis, incorrect  
treatment and poor care  
outcomes.

Bartlett et al (2008)



Health care workers report  
poor knowledge and  
confidence in interacting with  
people with communication  
disability in health care  
settings.

Cameron et al (2018)

# Communication for Safe Care Project: Enhancing healthcare access for people with communication support needs

**Making healthcare services more communication accessible:  
where everyone can get their message across**

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<https://abi-communication-lab.sydney.edu.au/communication-for-safe-care-about/>

## What is communication access?

**Communication access** means that everyone can get their message across and be understood.

**Everyone can participate** regardless of:

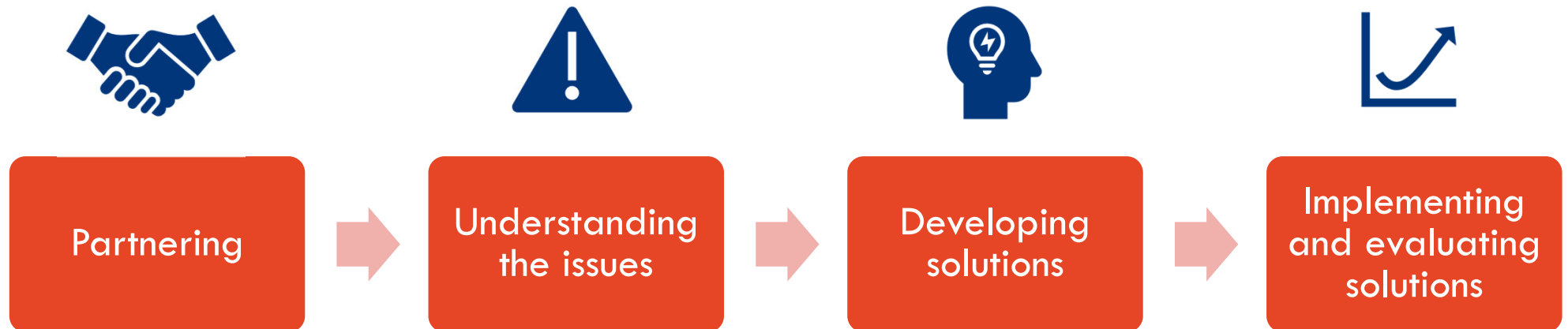
- Preferred language
- Mode of communication
- Communication support needs

This can also be called **inclusive communication**.

Speech Pathology Australia (2024). Communication Access and Inclusion Terminology Report.



## A framework for identifying and addressing communication access barriers





Understanding  
the issues

## Methods to understand the issues

Consumer  
Interviews



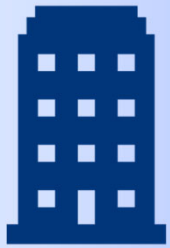
Healthcare Worker  
Interviews



Communication Access  
Observation Tool



# Understanding the issues: Communication Access Observation Tool (CAOT)



## Environment

Wayfinding  
Physical Environment  
Sensory environment  
Communication access supports



## Interactions

Identifying communication supports  
Providing information  
Checking understanding  
Facilitating the interaction  
Supporting communication



## Resources

Information resource review



☰
✓ Summary of Tool
<b>Form 1: Environment</b>
Form 1: Summary
Form 2: Interactions
Form 2: Summary
✓ Form 3: Resources
✓ Form 3: Summary
✓ Overall Rating Scores

# Wayfinding

**Tick any enablers that are present:**

Please use the comment box below for any additional observations.

	Yes	No	Not applicable
Service entrance sign	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wayfinding support (e.g., technology, maps, or staff)	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Sensory Environment

In your opinion, please rate the overall accessibility of the **sensory environment** on the scale.

☰
✓ Summary of Tool
Form 1: Environment
Form 1: Summary
<b>Form 2: Interactions</b>
Form 2: Summary
✓ Form 3: Resources
✓ Form 3: Summary
✓ Overall Rating Scores

## Identifying communication supports

Did that healthcare worker identify any communication support needs?

Yes

No

## Communication Access Supports

Tick any enablers that are present.

Please use the comment box below for any additional observations.

	Yes	No	Not applicable
Braille	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pen and paper easily accessible to consumer/staff	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication cards	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



- ✓ Summary of Tool
  - Form 1: Environment
  - Form 1: Summary
  - Form 2: Interactions
  - Form 2: Summary
- ✓ **Form 3: Resources**
- ✓ Form 3: Summary
- ✓ Overall Rating Scores

**Tick all that were used in the resource to enable communication:**

Please use the comment box below for any additional observations.

Purpose of the resource is captured in the title

Relevant information chunked together using headings

Uses short, simple sentences that are written in Plain English (e.g. no jargon, medical terms defined)

Avoid acronyms (if unavoidable the resource should provide a definition)






Dot points

Information is available in different languages (if yes, list languages in the comment box)

# Consumer voice

Ask a wide range of consumers about their thoughts on the resource:

**Do you feel comfortable understanding the information in this resource?**

				
Very uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very comfortable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Understanding  
the issues

**Let's use the Communication Access Observation Tool  
to understand issues in a health service**

## Imagine you receive this parking information before attending a clinic...

### Important parking information:

Please read the parking information carefully. **The clinic takes no responsibility for visitors who do not follow these instructions and receive a fine.**

- The parking entrance is located on the left-hand side of the building, as you face the building.
- You must not park in any other parking bay. **If your parking bay is occupied at your allocated time please call Reception on 1212-3434 and do not park in any other bay.**
- Please note that if you arrive early for your appointment, you will need to wait for the allocated bay to become available at the start of your parking booking period.
- You must move your car at the end of your parking booking period, as there may be another booking directly after yours.
- Vehicles parked outside of their allocated booking period may be fined.

Please note all visitor parking vouchers are virtual permits which are linked to the vehicle registration number provided with your booking request. If you arrive with a vehicle with a different registration number for any reason please notify Clinic Reception as soon as possible after you arrive otherwise you may be fined. The clinic is not liable for any fines issued due to incorrect registration numbers.

Please press the Intercom button located on the door at the rear of the carpark and advise Clinic reception of your arrival. The access door into the building will be unlocked for you and you will be able to walk directly down the corridor and turn to the right at the end to access the lifts.

Please be aware there are currently construction works happening around the car park entrance, which is causing reduced access when entering the car park. Please take extreme care on approach to the building, make sure you watch for pedestrians and oncoming traffic.

### Important parking information:

Please read the parking information carefully. **The clinic takes no responsibility for visitors who do not follow these instructions and receive a fine.**






- The parking entrance is located on the left-hand side of the building, as you face the building.
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Please be aware there are currently construction works happening around the car park which may result in reduced access when entering the car park. Please take extreme care on approach and watch for pedestrians and oncoming traffic.

**Do you feel comfortable understanding the information in this resource?**

 Very uncomfortable <input type="radio"/>	 Uncomfortable <input type="radio"/>	 Neutral <input type="radio"/>	 Comfortable <input type="radio"/>	 Very comfortable <input type="radio"/>
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**Tick all that were used in the resource to enable communication:**

Please use the comment box below for any additional observations.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Purpose of the resource is captured in the title
<input type="checkbox"/> Relevant information chunked together using headings
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses short, simple sentences that are written in Plain English (e.g. no jargon, medical terms defined)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Avoid acronyms (if unavoidable the resource should provide a definition)
<input type="checkbox"/> Dot points

# What improvements could be made?

## Important parking information:

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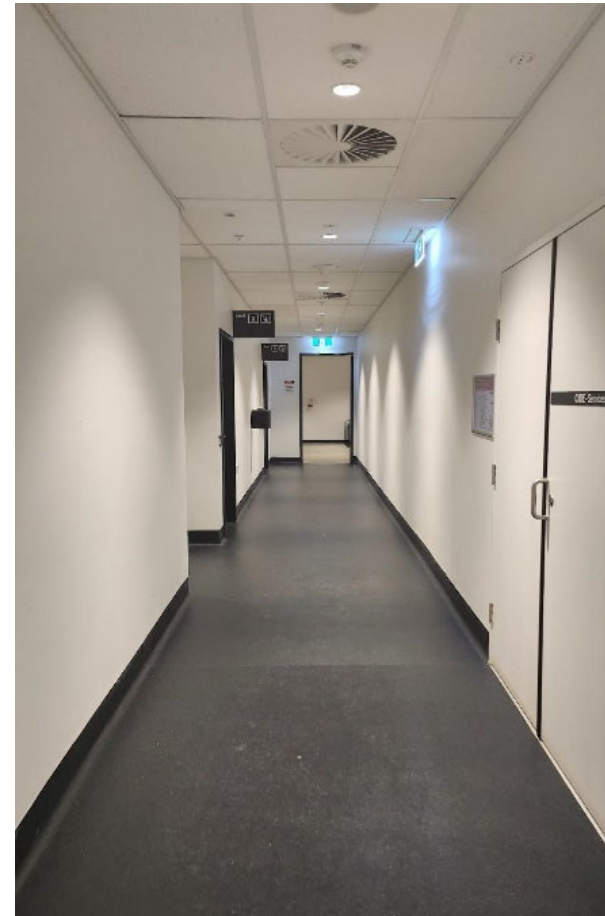
Use subheadings to “chunk” information

Change to short, simple sentences

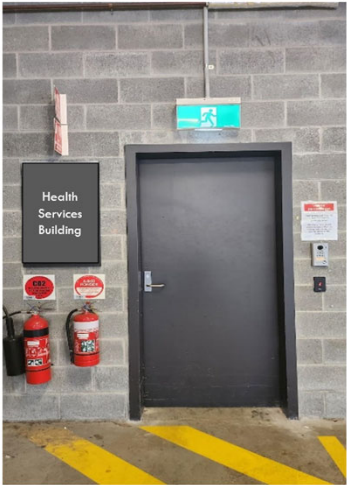
Use dot points

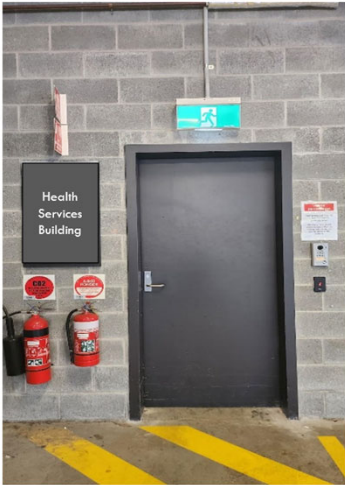


**Now imagine you have parked and are navigating to the clinic**



## Now imagine you have parked and are navigating to the clinic





Do you feel comfortable communicating in this space?

Very uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Neutral	Comfortable	Very comfortable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Wayfinding

Tick any enablers that are present:

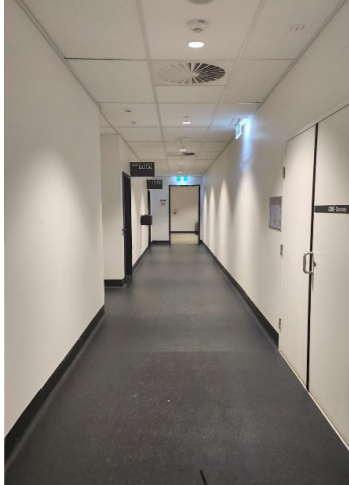
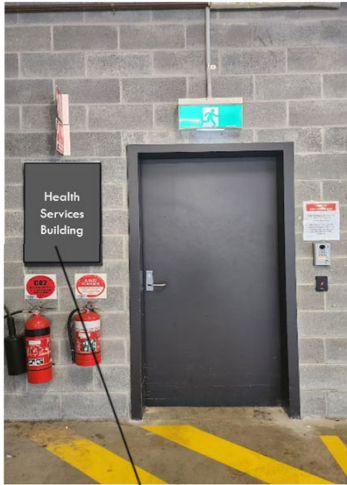
Please use the comment box below for any additional observations.

	Yes	No	Not applicable
Service entrance sign	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wayfinding support (e.g., technology, maps, or staff)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Are the signs:

	Yes	No	Not applicable
Clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easy to read	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include visual prompts (e.g. arrows)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Large font	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clear and bold colours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sufficient number of signs located throughout the facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## What improvements could be made?



Make it clearer that this is the entrance.  
Add visual prompt

Add another wayfinding sign at this point



Understanding  
the issues

## What were the issues identified in the Communication for Safe Care project?

Consumer  
Interviews



Healthcare Worker  
Interviews



Communication Access  
Observation Tool





Understanding  
the issues

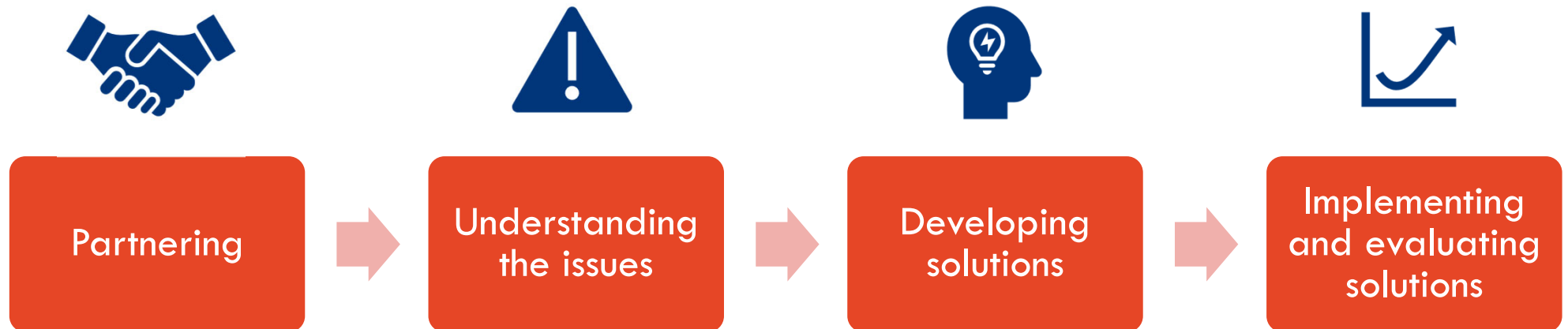
Consumer  
Interviews

Healthcare Worker  
Interviews

Communication Access  
Observation Tool

<b>Identifying support needs</b>	<b>Awareness and attitudes</b>	<b>Time pressures</b>
<b>Knowledge or training of staff</b>	<b>Accessible resources</b>	<b>Interpreter services</b>
<b>Physical environment</b>	<b>Exchange of information</b>	<b>Support people</b>

## A framework for identifying and addressing communication access barriers





## Understanding the issues

**Identifying support needs**

**Knowledge or training of staff**

**Physical environment**



## Developing solutions

**Establish new screening process at referral**

**Run mandatory staff training session**

**Add additional wayfinding signs with visual prompts**



## Implementing and evaluating solutions

**Screening of communication support needs completed for 81-100% appointments**

**Staff report high confidence communicating with people with communication support needs**

**Patients and/or carers report being very comfortable with finding their way to the clinic**





## Implementing and evaluating solutions

**Screening of communication support needs completed for 81-100% appointments**

**Staff report high confidence communicating with people with communication support needs**

**Patients and/or carers report being very comfortable with finding their way to the clinic**

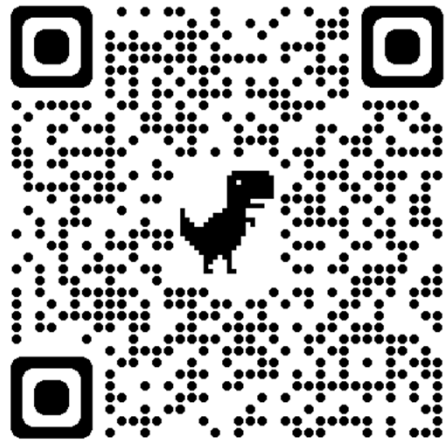
## Goal attainment scaling

Turner-Stokes (2009)



	Screening of communication needs completed for:
+2 (Much more than expected)	81-100% appointments
+1 (More than expected)	61-80% appointments
0 (Expected)	41-60% appointments
-1 (Less than expected)	21-40% appointments
-2 (Baseline)	0-20% appointments

# Keep in touch!



<https://abi-communication-lab.sydney.edu.au/communication-for-safe-care/>

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015). Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Australians Living with Communication Disability.

Bartlett, G., Blais, R., Tamblyn, R., Clermont, R. J., & MacGibbon, B. (2008). Impact of patient communication problems on the risk of preventable adverse events in acute care settings. *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 178(12), 1555–1562. <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.070690>

Cameron, A., McPhail, S., Hudson, K., Fleming, J., Lethlean, J., Tan, N., & Finch, E. (2018). The confidence and knowledge of health practitioners when interacting with people with aphasia in a hospital setting. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 40, 1288 - 1293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2017.1294626>

Speech Pathology Australia (2024). Communication Access and Inclusion Terminology Report. <https://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/Public/Public/About-Us/News-media-campaigns/Articles/2024/Communication-Access-and-Inclusion-Terminology-Report.aspx?>

Turner-Stokes, L. (2009). Goal attainment scaling (GAS) in rehabilitation: a practical guide. *Clinical Rehabilitation*, 23(4), 362-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269215508101742>