Australian Government

Department of Health

Communications Strategy for People with Disability

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

MAY 2020 – LIVING DOCUMENT

Contents

Purpose

This Communications Strategy outlines the national approach and activities to inform people with disability, their families and carers about the latest health advice for novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This is complementary to the overarching national communications approach to COVID-19.

The development of the Communications Strategy is a key action outlined in the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19): Management and Operational Plan for COVID-19 for People with Disability (the Plan). The Plan was developed to provide a targeted approach for people with disability, their families, carers and support workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 2 April 2020, an Advisory Committee was formed to oversee the development and implementation of the Plan. The AHPPC endorsed the Advisory Committee and reports to the Australian Government Chief Medical Officer. Members of the Advisory Committee are experts from a range of backgrounds including:

- people with lived experience
- Disabled People's Organisations
- the disability service sector
- the research sector
- the health care sector including medical practitioners, allied health professionals and nurses,
- Australian Government officials, and state and territory government officials.

On 11 April 2020, the AHPPC endorsed the Plan and agreed that updates will be presented as required. On 16 April 2020, National Cabinet agreed to the release of the Plan and for implementation to commence.

Context

Some people with disability are more likely to be vulnerable to the effects associated with COVID-19. This may include impacts that continue after the pandemic period. The Communications Strategy, similar to the Plan, will be flexible. It can be scaled to the level of outbreak risk and the needs of different cohorts and settings. The Communications Strategy will be reviewed regularly and updated to adapt to the pandemic situation in Australia.

The management of a COVID-19 outbreak requires governments, the health and disability sectors, and the community to work together. The need for clear, accurate and accessible communication for people with disability is key to prevent and manage the spread of COVID-19. The Plan includes a number of actions to reflect this.

The Department of Health (the department) will work with the Advisory Committee to tailor communications to people with disability and to address any gaps in communications for people with disability.

Building on broader COVID-19 communications (whole of population)

Communication from the National Incident Room commenced in January 2020 and has expanded rapidly to address the outbreak, border controls, and the flow on impacts to Australians and sectors such as health care, education, tourism and travel.

A number of communication-based activities have been established during this time including:

- development of the Coronavirus Health Information Hotline which operates 24 hours a day
- a dedicated webpage on health.gov.au that is updated frequently
- implementation of the COVIDSafe App in order to speed up contact with people exposed to COVID-19
- development of targeted resources for the community
- regular interaction with the media to provide timely information on the national health response.

The Communications Strategy will build on the elements that have already been established. It will identify areas where information specific to people with disability needs to be developed and disseminated. It will also consider a variety of accessible formats.

Communication approach for people with disability

During COVID-19, people with disability need a comprehensive, adaptable communications approach. This needs to be implemented across all stages of the outbreak.

It is critical that timely, factual, consistent and accessible information is available to the media, the general public, and to stakeholders.

This will ensure they have up-to-date health information and will reduce misinformation.

Principles to inform the communications response

The following principles outlined in the Plan will guide the implementation of this Communications Strategy:

- EQUITY: The **human rights** of people with disability are upheld through an equitable, accessible and tailored health care response.
- PREVENTION: **Preventing** people with disability **becoming infected** is the primary focus.
- INFORMED: People with disability, their families, carers and support workers **understand what to do** during the pandemic and how to access support.
- TARGETED: Clear, **targeted information** and advice is communicated in a diverse **range of accessible formats** and **via different channels**.
- SUPPORT NETWORKS: Supporters of people with disability (families, carers, support workers and others providing formal and informal supports) are **central to the safety of people with disability**, during the pandemic, and are a key target group for this plan.
- PARTNERSHIPS: There is a need for an **integrated partnership between the health sector and disability sectors** to appropriately respond to the diverse needs of people with disability, their families, carers and support workers.
- CULTURAL CONSIDERATION: **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** with disability need special focus in this plan and associated plans, with underlying **disadvantage, cultural considerations, remoteness** and other issues posing challenges for **equitable access** to health care and other supports.
- WELLBEING: protect the mental health and wellbeing of people with disability and their families by involving them in decision making and **minimising disruption to their daily lives**. Where

appropriate, providing appropriate care in non-hospital settings as much as possible and facilitating the **essential support** that people with disability need.

Communication protocols and coordination

Coordinated communications with state and territory jurisdictions and other government agencies is critical. This will ensure consistent messaging is communicated to the target audience of people with disability, their families, carers and support workers. Regular meetings with all counterparts to plan and coordinate communication efforts are being held to adapt and respond to issues as they arise.

The Department will work closely with a number of key stakeholders including:
- the state and territory health departments
- relevant Australian Government departments and agencies such as the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)
- Disabled Peoples Organisations
- the disability service sector
- the health care sector including medical, nursing and allied health
- select parts of the private sector involved directly in emergency health management for people with disability.

Target audiences

This Communications Strategy is designed to reach a broad range of disability stakeholders involved in and affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The strategy's primary focus is people with disability but further communication activities will also target:
- the families of people with disability
- carers and support workers
- health care professionals including medical practitioners, nurses and allied health professionals
- the health care sector – especially acute, community and primary health care settings
- the disability service sector.

The health-specific communication activities will also focus on where people with disability live and work, including:
- residential care facilities
- congregate disability accommodation services or group homes
- home
- residential aged care facilities
- places of employment
- prison and detention centres including juvenile justice
- schools
- hospitals, including rehab centres and mental health facilities
- community.

Communication approaches and channels

A comprehensive range of communication approaches and channels to ensure target audiences are kept informed on the latest information on COVID-19.

Communications will be tailored to meet the needs of people with disability. Information will be provided in a range of accessible formats. This includes the following considerations:

- using plain English
- using Easy Read
- captioning videos, including the provision of video transcripts where possible
- using appropriate font style and size
- providing online information in alternative formats such as hard-copy printed materials
- providing audio loops
- using Auslan sign interpreters including the production of Auslan videos
- providing information in multiple first languages
- cultural appropriateness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- cultural appropriateness for CALD (i.e. the provision of information in different first languages)
- designing accessible websites.

Website

The department's website (www.health.gov.au) is the primary place for Australian Government information on the COVID-19 outbreak. The department publishes a daily health alert on its home page which includes:

- information on the virus's epidemiology
- health messages
- media alerts
- media releases
- transcripts of media interviews.

The department has developed a dedicated webpage at https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-disability to provide advice for people with disability. Importantly, this webpage links to other relevant government departments including the DSS and NDIA. This enables access to other content for people with disability and more specific information related to support and the NDIS.

The department has also published a collection of easy read resources on COVID-19 at https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-easy-read-resources.

The department's website is also complemented by links to several other external websites, including the:

- Department of Home Affairs (63 languages)
- World Health Organization
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Smart traveller website
- Study in Australia.

Coronavirus Australia and COVIDSafe App

The department has developed two apps so people can:

- stay informed of the latest advice
- be informed quickly if they may have come into contact with someone with COVID-19.

The coronavirus apps can be downloaded from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

The Coronavirus Australia app contains disability-specific information under the heading 'People with Disability and Support Workers'. This section of the app also links to the DSS website for further information.

Accessibility issues were considered during development of the COVIDSafe App. This particularly focused on people:

- with vision impairments
- hearing difficulties
- from CALD communities.

The app:

- uses Plain English to make the content as easy as possible to understand
- was tested against colour contrast standards
- considered optimum text size
- uses alt text for images
- used screen readers to check voice-prompted interactions for visually impaired people.

Public enquiries

The National Coronavirus Health Information Line (1800 020 080) is currently operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Operators have access to scripts for frequently asked questions, which are updated regularly. Operators triage callers who have symptoms to a registered nurse for initial assessment and advice. Callers requiring translation or interpreting services are able to call 131 450.

DSS has established a Disability Information Helpline to provide information and referrals for people with disability who need help because of COVID-19. The Helpline can also assist families, carers, support workers and services. The Disability Information Helpline is free, private and fact-checked.

The Helpline can be contacted:

- by Phone (free call): 1800 643 787
- by calling the National Relay Service on 133 677 for people who are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment.

The Helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm (AEST) and Saturday and Sunday 9am to 7pm (AEST). It is not available on national public holidays.

Tailoring by stages during the COVID-19 pandemic period

Communications is tailored for different action areas of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to continuously review all developed communications and adapt the approach as we progress through the following action areas.

1: Preparedness actions	Information should be provided as early as possible to reduce the risk of infection in people with disability and facilitate community preparedness.
2: Targeted actions	Information should be provided as early as possible to optimise health and support responses to help recovery and minimise further transmission.
3: Stand down and evaluation actions	Enhance stand down measures through timely public communication, sharing information between responders, sharing data and learnings and undertaking consultation.

Table 1 covers activities which mainly focus on action areas 1 and 2. These activities will be adapted as required to respond to the needs of people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Action area 3 communications will be added as needed.

Table 1: Communications Strategy Activities (Commonwealth)

Target audience	Topics to consider	Communication approach/materials	Method for dissemination
People with disability, their family members, carers and other supporters	• Where do I go for information? • Will I be treated equally during this period? • How serious is this? • Am I at risk? How can I protect myself and my family? • What does physical distancing mean? • How does this affect my daily activity? • Will this affect the disability support care I receive? • Will my other health care needs be affected? • What does it mean to quarantine or self-isolate? • What should I do if I develop symptoms and how do I access COVID-19 related care? • When should I or people supporting me use PPE? How can I access PPE? • How can I look after the mental health of myself or those around me? • How can I plan ahead, so I know what to do if I have symptoms? • How do I ensure if I have to go to hospital my needs are understood? • What happens when you get tested? • Is it safe for my child to return back to school? • Where can I get more information? • What is the government doing to respond? • What is the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Committee discussing? • How do I support the mental health needs of myself or the people I care for during COVID-19?	**Guidance/factsheets/tools** • Disability specific webpage on health.gov.au • Disability Information Helpline • AHRC Guidelines on the rights of people with disability in health and disability care during COVID-19 • What is COVID-19? • What do you need to know? • Physical distancing • PPE access and use • Staying at home • Where to go for assistance/information • Accessing non-COVID-19 related health care • Mental health and wellbeing support • Prescription of psychotropic medications • Preparedness Plan and Passport • Testing guidance • Infection control training • Risk based guidance for returning to school • General FAQ's • Management and Operational Plan in various accessibility forms – easy read/Auslan • Regular Advisory Committee communiques • Mental health	Publish on: • DoH website • DSS website • NDIA website • NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission • Coronavirus Australia App • Boosting the Local Care Workforce website Promote through: • DoH WhatsApp channel • Social media i.e. DoH Facebook and Twitter accounts • Advisory Committee • Disability sector organisations • PHNs • Ministerial and CMO media releases and press conferences • State and territory governments • Coronavirus Australia App • Provider alerts via the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission • DSS' Regional Coordinators Hardcopy dissemination through including to regional areas: • PHNs • DSS/NDIA channels
Health care workers in acute and primary health care settings	• How should I engage with and support people with disability, their families, carers and supporters? • What additional resources might I need to make available to people with disability? • Where can I get immediate advice on providing care to a person with disability? • How can I provide care (whether COVID-19 related or not) that prevents unnecessary visits to clinics or EDs? • When should I use PPE? How do I ensure the person feels comfortable when I wear PPE? • How do I support the mental health needs of the people I care for during COVID-19?	**Guidance/factsheets/tools** • Guidance/comms regarding number of supporters a person with disability can have in the hospital setting • AHRC Guidelines on the rights of people with disability in health and disability care during COVID-19 • Fact sheets for healthcare workers regarding the presentation of people with disability and their carers • How to provide in-home support and telehealth • Preparedness Plan and Passport • Prescription of psychotropic medications • PPE access and use • Explaining PPE to people with disability	

Target audience	Topics to consider	Communication approach/materials	Method for dissemination
		• Mental health **Advisory service** • COVID-19 Health Professionals National Disability Advisory Service	
Disability support sector and workforce (including residential settings)	• Where do I go for information? • What infection control procedures should I follow? • How and when should I use PPE? How do I ensure the person feels comfortable when I wear PPE? • How can I access PPE? • What procedure should be followed if there is an outbreak in a shared accommodation setting? • What measures are in place to assist me in maintaining my workforce? • How do physical distancing laws affect the support I provide? • Who should I contact if I, or the person I am caring for, develop COVID-19 symptoms? • How do I continue to care for someone who has tested positive for COVID-19? • What COVID-19 care options are available for people who I am supporting? • What is the government doing to respond? • What is the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Committee discussing? • How do I support the mental health needs of the people I care for during COVID-19?	**Guidance/factsheets/tools** • Disability specific webpage on health.gov.au • Disability Information Helpline • PPE access and use • Explaining PPE to people with disability • Infection control training • Behaviour support strategies and minimisation of restrictive practices • In-home care guidance (operational) • Screening of for staff and visitors to residential care facilities • Tailor national guidelines to disability support settings (i.e. CDNA) • NDIS Quality & Safety Commission - outbreak preparedness, prevention and management guidance • Management and Operational Plan for PWD • Regular Advisory Committee communiques • Mental health	Publish on: • DoH website • DSS website • NDIA website • NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission • Coronavirus Australia App • Boosting the Local Care Workforce website Promote through: • DoH WhatsApp channel • Social media i.e. DoH Facebook and Twitter accounts • Advisory Committee • Disability sector organisations • PHNs • Ministerial and CMO media releases and press conferences • State and territory governments • Coronavirus Australia App • Provider alerts via the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission • DSS' Regional Coordinators Hardcopy dissemination through including to regional areas: • PHNs • DSS/NDIA channels
Other front line workers i.e. law enforcement etc.	• What should I be aware of when providing care and support to people with disability, their families, carers and support workers?	**Guidance/factsheets/tools** • The needs and requirements of people with disability during the pandemic • Physical isolation and distancing for people with disability • AHRC Guidelines on the rights of people with disability in health and disability care during COVID-19	
Other residential care including correctional facilities	• What do we do if there is an outbreak? • What should I be aware of when dealing with people with disability during this period?	**Guidance/factsheets** • CDNA Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Correctional and Detention Facilities in Australia • The needs and requirements of people with disability during the pandemic • AHRC Guidelines on the rights of people with disability in health and disability care during COVID-19	