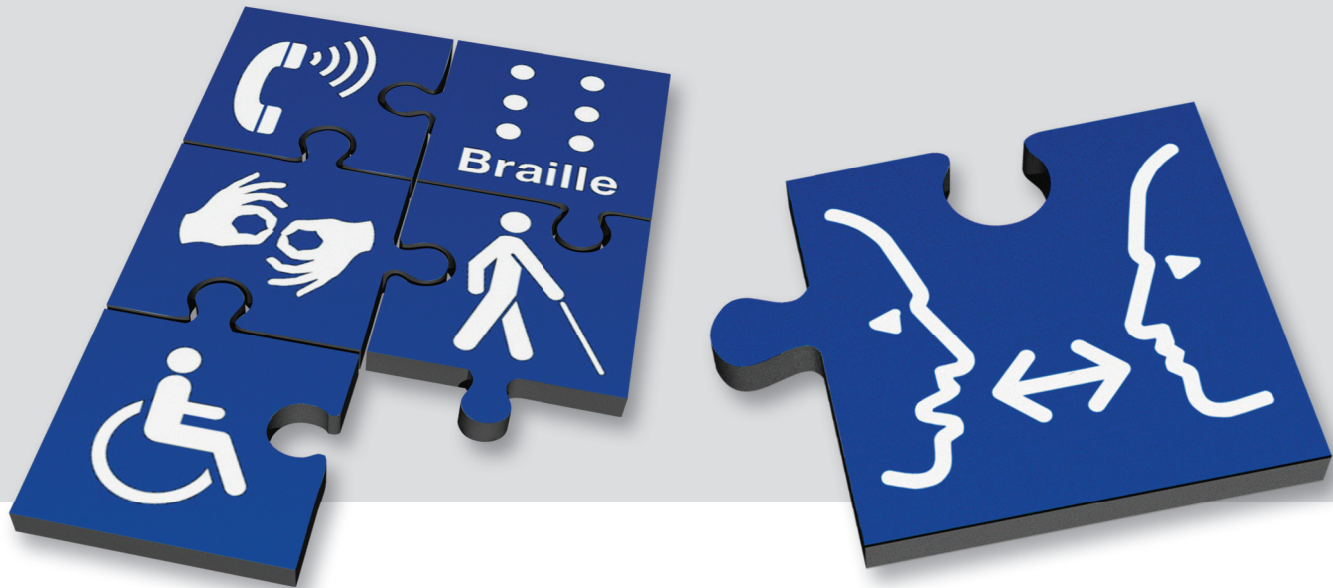


ACCESSIBILITY INCLUDES COMMUNICATION



Communication Disabilities Access Canada

This booklet is about ways to make your business or organization accessible to people who have communication disabilities. It is part of Communication Access Now (CAN), a national strategy to raise awareness of the accessibility requirements of people who have communication disabilities. CAN is funded through a contribution from the Office of Disability Issues, Employment and Social Development Canada. Some sections of this booklet have been taken from past CDAC publications.

For information about Communication Access Now (CAN)

www.communication-access-org



Communication Disabilities Access Canada (CDAC) is a national, non-profit organization, that promotes accessibility, inclusion and human rights for people who have speech and language disabilities.

For information about CDAC

www.cdacanada.com

CDAC © 2014

Table of contents

Communication is the Key	1
Communication Disabilities	4
Communicating in Different Ways	7
Communication Barriers	9
Communication Access Symbol	12
Recognizing a Person who may have a Communication Disability	15
Communicating with a Person who has a Communication Disability	17
If the person uses a letter or picture board	19
If the person uses a communication device	20
If the person's speech is difficult to understand	21
If the person has difficulty understanding speech	21
If the person uses a communication assistant	23
If the person is deaf or has a hearing loss	24
If the person is deaf and blind	25

Special Situations	26
Signage	26
Front desk	26
Communication tools	27
Appointments	27
Telephone	27
Reading materials	28
Signatures	28
Note taking	28
Completing forms	29
Meetings, public events and presentations	29
Privacy	29
Healthcare Settings	30
Police, legal and justice services	32
CDAC Resources	34

Communication is the Key

Being able to communicate is something many of us take for granted. Speaking and understanding, reading and writing are skills that most of us use every day. We communicate to express our feelings, thoughts and opinions, to ask questions, to get things we need and to give information to others. We communicate with lots of people and for many different reasons. For example, we might ask for things we want in a store; discuss our medical concerns with a doctor; order a meal in a restaurant; interact with a bank teller about our finances or call a taxi company to book a ride. Communication is fundamental to getting all goods and services in our community whether that is through face-to-face interactions, writing, internet or communicating over the telephone.

Without effective communication we cannot access businesses and organizations

In Canada, there are 440,000 people who have communication disabilities, not caused by hearing loss. They may have cerebral palsy, cognitive disability, traumatic brain injury, aphasia, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis or other conditions. Like everyone, they have the right to access your services. They cannot be discriminated against, denied or given inferior services because they have a disability. Their rights to equal access to goods and services are protected by:

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
- Provincial and territorial human rights codes and accessibility laws

The basis of all good communication includes a respectful attitude and being a good listener. These skills are more important than ever for people who have communication disabilities, because their disability requires you to do some things differently so that you can effectively interact with them.

In addition to being a good communicator, you can do a number of practical things to ensure that people with communication disabilities can use your services.



Jess Weber is an Ambassador on the Communication Access Now project and has taught classes at Centennial College in the Developmental Service Worker Program. Jess communicates by typing her messages into her communication device.

Communication Disabilities

There are **four** main areas that may or may not be affected when a person has a communication disability. Depending on the type of disability, one or more areas might be affected. The areas include a person's ability to:

- Speak
- Understand what others are saying
- Read
- Write

Some of the main types of communication disabilities affect the following:

Hearing: For people who are deaf or have a hearing loss it can be difficult or impossible to hear what a person is saying and sometimes their own speech may not be easily understood.

Movement: People who have disabilities such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis may have difficulty moving their muscles to speak, using gestures, turning pages in a book and writing.

Cognition: People who have intellectual disabilities from birth or acquire dementia or Alzheimer's disease later in life may have problems remembering, learning, understanding, or problem-solving that can make communication challenging.

Language: People who have aphasia after a stroke or accident may have difficulty understanding others, speaking, reading and writing. The experience of aphasia is similar to being in a foreign country where you know what you want but you have problems understanding others or expressing yourself.

In addition to having communication challenges, many people have multiple disabilities. People who are deafblind have limited hearing and vision. They are unable to use these senses to receive communication. People who have cerebral palsy, may be unable to speak, walk or physically manipulate objects. People who have autism may experience challenges learning and using language, as well as interacting with other people.

Regardless of the cause of the disability, all people who have communication disabilities are individuals and communicate in their own ways.

They can also communicate more effectively when they are given appropriate supports.

Rebecca Beayni welcomes visitors at the Royal Ontario Museum. She communicates using her communication device, and her assistant helps others to interpret her body language and personal signs.



6.

Communicating in Different Ways

People communicate in different ways because of the type of disability they have as well as their personality, preferences, needs, skills and circumstances. Most individuals use many ways of communicating.

Example: Jean uses some speech, gestures or body language with people who know her well and a communication device over the telephone and when communicating with people who don't know her in the community.

Some ways people communicate:

- Speech (speech may be unclear)
- Body language and facial expressions
- Gestures (e.g. wave to signal goodbye)
- Pointing or looking at objects and people
- Sign Languages (e.g. American Sign Language, Langue des signes Québécoise, Signed Exact English, and Adapted Sign Language)

7.

- Writing, typing or drawing
- Spelling on a letter board
- Pointing to pictures, symbols and/or written words on a communication display, which is custom-made for an individual
- Using a communication device, which is usually obtained through an augmentative and alternative communication clinic

The best way to find out how a person communicates is to ask them.



Paul Marshall is a web master, mentor and disability advocate. He communicates by spelling out messages on his letter board.

8.

Communication Barriers

People with communication disabilities, can experience major barriers when accessing goods and services in their communities. They tell us that the people they are communicating with, cause many of the problems.

- “I was trying to ask if they had a piece of hardware I wanted. I tried to spell it out on my letter board. They thought I was begging and asked me to leave the store.”
- “The emergency response person just ignored me and asked the person beside me to give consent to my treatment.”
- “I wasn’t accepted into college because of my speech disability.”
- “Many people think that because I can’t speak, I can’t think or make my own decisions.”
- “My speech is unclear because I have cerebral palsy. When I use the phone, people often think I am drunk and hang up on me. Financial and government services tell me they won’t accept someone interpreting my speech over the phone.”

9.

- “Due to my physical and communication disability, I couldn’t use the hospital call bell to get the nurse when I wanted attention.”
- “I tried to tell the police about how I was abused. They told me I would not be a credible witness because I could not speak.”
- “I didn’t have food when I was in the hospital. The staff dropped off the tray at the end of my bed and left. I couldn’t tell them I needed someone to help me eat because they locked up my communication device.”
- “I was ordering a sandwich using my communication device and they threatened to call the police if I didn’t leave the restaurant.”
- “I was contacted by phone to set up a job interview. As soon as they realized I used a communication device, they told me they would get back to me and I never heard from them again.”

Go to www.communication-access.org to see barriers in your sector



Jody Schloss, a master’s student at York University, types her messages when discussing finances with her bank manager.

Access Symbols

Symbols tell people about disabilities and access to services.



The wheelchair symbol tells people about ramps to get into buildings.



The Braille symbol tells people who have visual impairments that they can get documents in Braille.

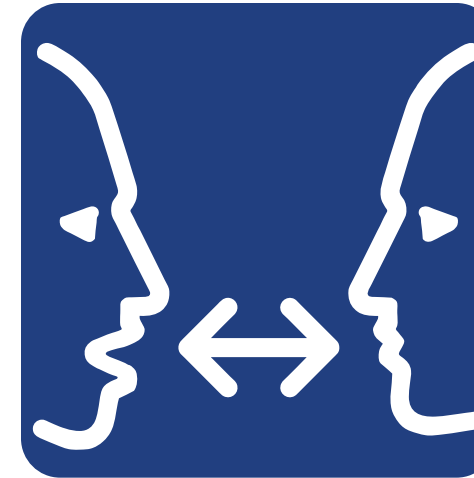


The sign language symbol tells people who are Deaf that sign language interpreting is available.

12.

The Communication Access Symbol

The communication access symbol tells people about accessibility for people who have communication disabilities.



It shows that communication:

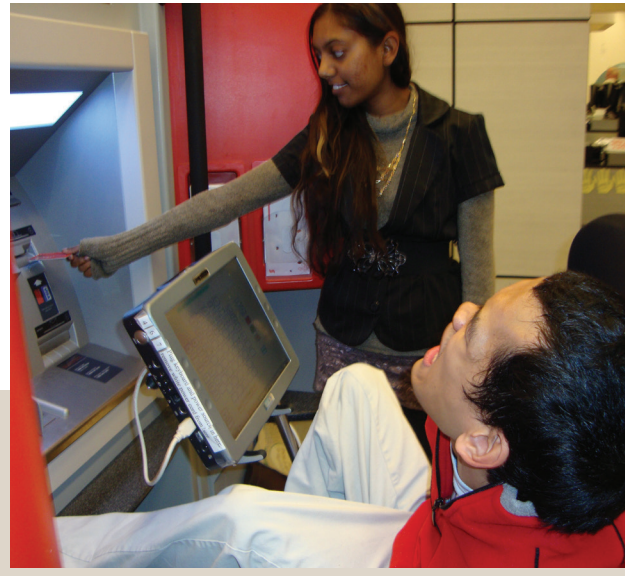
- Involves two people
- Is about interaction
- Is about giving as well as receiving information
- Is about listening and watching

13.

Communication access means that people can:

- Understand what you are saying
- Have you understand their messages
- Use the communication methods that work best for them such as speech, gestures, writing, pointing to objects or pictures, spelling words, typing on a communication device or human assistance
- Receive and understand your written information
- Sign your documents and complete forms in ways that are accessible to them

Tien Hoang is a disability advocate. He communicates using speech and his communication device which he operates with his foot.



14.

Recognizing a Person who may have a Communication Disability

You can't identify a person with a communication disability by just looking at them unless they have a communication board or device with them.

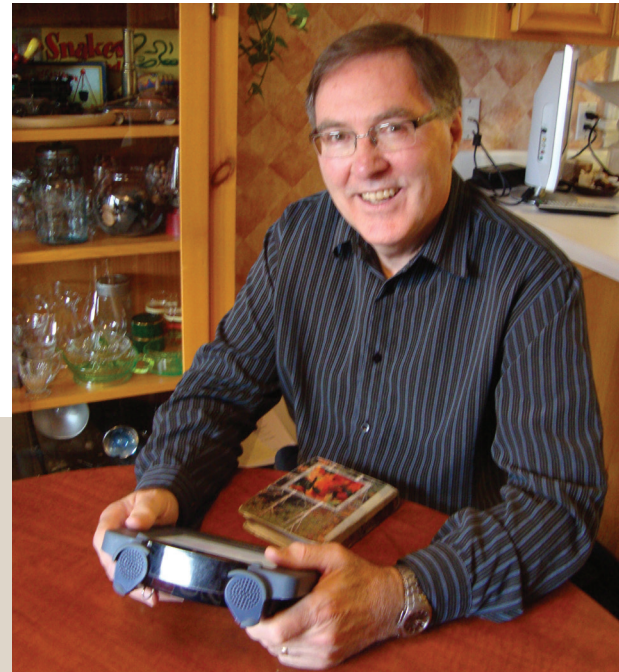
A person may have a communication disability if they:

- Speak in a way that is hard for you to understand
- Communicate messages in ways other than speech
- Have difficulty finding the words they want to say
- Show you a card or tell you they have a communication disability
- Appear not to have heard you

15.

- Look confused, shrug or gesture that they don't understand
- Defer to someone to answer for them
- Answer in ways that suggest they may not have heard or understood what you said
- Tell you that they do not understand what you are saying
- Use a communication board or device

Bill Scott has aphasia as a result of a stroke. He sometimes has difficulty processing what is being said and wants people to show him what they are talking about. He communicates using his communication device as well as body language.



16.

Communicating with a Person who has a Communication Disability

When you meet a person who may have a communication disability:

- Say "Hello." Don't ignore the person.
- Talk directly to the person, not just the individual who might be with them.
- Speak naturally and clearly, using your normal tone, volume and rate.
- Ask what you can do to make communication go smoothly. Many people have prepared instructions and can tell you what to do when communicating with them.
- Do not underestimate the person's abilities.
- Be patient. Do not rush the conversation.

17.

- Wait for the person to finish their message.
Do not guess unless the person gives you permission to do so.
- If it isn't obvious how the person communicates, ask them to show you how they communicate "Yes" and "No". Use "Yes" and "No" questions to find out how the person wants to communicate with you.

Krystine Donato is a research assistant and project coordinator at Brock University. She speaks and when not understood, she types her message on her communication device.



18.

If the person uses a letter or picture board

If it isn't obvious how the person communicates

- Say, "Please show me how you say "yes.""
- Say, "Please show me how you say "no.""
- Say, "Please show me how you communicate." The person will either demonstrate or show you their communication instructions. These instructions are usually on the person's communication board or their wheelchair tray.
- If the person points to items on a board, say the letter, word or picture out loud as they point to them.
- If the person uses a way other than pointing such as an eye gaze to select items on his/her communication board, they might want someone to assist you communicating with them.
- It often helps to write down the items that the person selects so that you can keep track of the message.

19.

- If the items that the person selects do not make immediate sense, try putting the words together into a sentence.

Example: The person selects the following items on her board: “Bus - Home - Time.” Using these words to guide you, you could suggest, “Do you want to know what time your bus is coming to take you home?” Person responds “no.” Suggest another meaning, such as “Are you telling me it’s time to go home on the bus?” The person responds, “yes”.

If the person uses a communication device

- Stand or sit in front of the person. Do not look over their shoulder or ask how they use the device.
- Wait for the person to construct their message.
- If you don’t understand the speech, tell the person and they will either repeat it or indicate that you can read the screen.

If the person’s speech is difficult to understand

- Watch how the person says the words.
- Move to a quiet area with no distractions.
- Take the time to get used to the person’s speech. It gets easier the more you listen and the person may need to repeat what they are saying a few times before you understand.
- Tell the person if you don’t understand what they are saying. They will either say it another way, show you what they are talking about, spell it out verbally, write it down, use a communication device or point to letters, words or pictures on their communication board.

If the person has difficulty understanding speech

People can have challenges understanding spoken language for many reasons and they require different types of supports.

Example: A person with a hearing loss may want a speaker to write down what they are saying or use a sign language interpreter; a person with aphasia may require the speaker to write down key words or show a picture of what is being talked about; a person with an intellectual disability may require the speaker to use short, simple sentences.

- Make sure the person can see you when you are speaking.
- Ask what you can do. If the person cannot hear what you are saying, they may indicate that you speak louder (do not shout) or that you write down what you are saying. In some situations, they may want to use a sign language interpreter.

People who can hear, but who have difficulty understanding what you are saying may want you to:

- Use clear, straightforward language when speaking.
- Avoid unnecessary words, jargon, technical terms and long, ambiguous sentences.
- Pause between your sentences to allow the person more time to process what you are saying.

- If there is a communication assistant present, this person may rephrase what you are saying or use other strategies to support the individual in understanding what you are saying.

If necessary show the person what you are talking about by:

- Using gestures
- Pointing at objects, people or pictures
- Writing the key words that you are saying
- Drawing a picture or diagram

If the person uses a communication assistant

A communication assistant is someone who interprets a person's impaired speech or assists a person who uses a communication display or device.

- Ensure that the person who accompanies an individual has been authorized to assist them with communication. Once you have confirmed the role, accept the person's messages as conveyed to you by the assistant.
- Speak directly to the individual, not to the assistant.

- Observe the person directing the assistant so that you know they are communicating and approving their messages. An assistant may support the person to understand questions and to communicate their answers and opinions. If you are unsure who is communicating, always the person, “Is that what you wanted to say?”

Dr. Kaufmann has aphasia after a stroke. In important situations such as a meeting with a lawyer, he uses a communication intermediary to assist him with communication.



If the person is deaf or has a hearing loss

- Make sure the person is looking at you before you start talking and that he/she can see your mouth.

- Find out what the person wants to use when communicating with you. S/he may want to use his/her own amplifier or communication device or may request that you write down what you are saying.
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace. Do not shout.
- If what you have said is not understood, say it in another way rather than repeat it.
- Upon request, arrange to have a sign language interpreter (i.e. a person who translates spoken language into sign language) or a captioner (i.e. a person who writes or types what is being said.) Contact The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) for these services.

If the person is deaf and blind

- A person who is deafblind, may require an intervenor. An intervenor provides visual and auditory information to the person using their preferred sign language. Contact The Canadian Deafblind Association Ontario Chapter for these services.

Special Situations

Depending on your business or service, you may want to consider communication access in some of the following situations.

Check out our website for more information, training modules and videos.

Signage

Use signs that are easily recognized by people and put them in areas that are well lit and can be seen by people who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

Front desk

Display the communication access symbol with the caption, “Let us know if you have any communication needs when using our service.” You can download the desktop symbol from our website. If possible, have a low desk section for people who use wheelchairs. This will make it easy for you to see them as well as their communication board or device.

Communication tools

Most people will have their own communication displays and devices and will use these to communicate with you. However, it is useful to have a black marker, pencils and a note pad on your desk so that people can either tell you to write down what you are saying or for them to write down what they are communicating to you.

Appointments

Because it takes longer for people with speech and language disabilities to communicate, they may require more time for an appointment.

Telephone

Find out how the person wants to communicate with you on the telephone. They might want to use their speech, a device or a communication assistant. Depending on the nature of your services, you may need policies and procedures in place to ensure that the individual with a communication disability has authorized an assistant to speak on their behalf or to interpret their messages to you. Alternatively, the person might want to use e-mail or text instead of the telephone. If you have a receptionist, ensure s/he knows how the person will communicate over the telephone.

Reading materials

Ensure that your text information is in formats that the person can access and understand. Some individuals may want information in plain language; large font; electronic formats; Braille or the assistance of someone who can help with reading and understanding documents.

Signatures

Not being able to physically hold a pen does not mean that a person cannot approve or sign a document. People who cannot write and who understand the meaning of a document may use an alternative way to sign documents such as an X, a stamp, a thumb-print, or assistance from an approved person. Depending on the situation, you may want to negotiate a formal arrangement for signatures with the individual.

Note taking

People with physical and / or communication disabilities may have difficulty writing. Depending on the nature of your service, they may require a person to transcribe or take notes or they may want to audio record a meeting or session.

Completing forms

Make your forms easy to read and understand. Some people will want to fill them out on their home computer and will need to be able to type into the open cells, and save the document if they require frequent breaks. Alternatively, some people will want a person to assist them to complete forms.

Meetings, public events and presentations

It is helpful to give people the agenda ahead of time so that they can prepare their points and program them into their communication device. Find out if they require a communication assistant at the meeting or event.

Privacy

Be mindful of the individual's right to privacy. While the person may rely on a support person to assist in daily activities, they may not want to share aspects of their personal life with that person. It is the person's responsibility to negotiate privacy agreements with their communication assistant. However, in some situations your organization may require a communication assistant to sign an agreement to protect yours or other people's privacy (e.g. group counseling).

Healthcare settings

People who have communication disabilities can face many barriers when communicating in healthcare situations such as a doctor's office, emergency services, clinic, intensive care unit, acute care and rehabilitation hospital, home health service and hospice. Some of these barriers can have serious consequences that may result in misdiagnosis, increased patient pain, medication errors, extended periods of hospitalization, and even death.

Healthcare organizations need policies and procedures to ensure that patients can communicate effectively when using their services. This includes training staff in how to communicate with people who have speech and language disabilities as well as having communication boards available that people can use in emergency situations.

Visit our website for more information.

30.



John Draper, runs his own business educating people about accessibility and inclusion. He uses his letter board to spell out what he wants to say to a nurse at his local hospital.

31.

Police, Legal and Justice Services

People with communication disabilities have the same rights as everyone else to access police, legal and justice services. They may need to make a disclosure to police; give testimony in court; express opinions at legal meetings; give informed consent or participate at capacity evaluations. Without appropriate accessibility accommodations and supports, they can experience significant barriers that can have serious consequences.

Communication Intermediaries are qualified speech-language pathologists with additional training from CDAC to work in police, legal and justice situations. They can assist people with communication disabilities by supporting them to understand questions and to communicate their messages.

The CDAC national roster of intermediaries is available online.

Visit our website for more information.



Colin Phillips is a PhD. Candidate at Ryerson University. He uses a communication intermediary when communicating in critical situations such as police, legal, justice and healthcare settings.

CDAC Resources

Visit our website for more information.

www.communication-access.org

You can get:

- Information about the Communication Access Now Project
- Free e-learning modules on how to make your services communication accessible
- The communication access symbol which you can download and use
- Videos to share with your colleagues
- A list of communication barriers for your sector
- Suggestions for eliminating barriers in your organization
- A checklist to rate your organization's communication accessibility

Contact us for more information

Email: cdac@bell.net

Follow us on



www.cdacanada.com

