

Accessible Information Standard (AIS)

In the current situation information about the safety precautions around Covid-19 requires constant circulation and reminders. Health care services need to ensure that the information they provide to those who may have a disability, impairment or sensory loss is in accessible formats and in response to their specific needs and requirements.

1. The Legal Context

The Equality Act places a legal duty on all service providers to take steps or make “reasonable adjustments” in order to avoid putting a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage when compared to a person who is not disabled. The Equality Act 2010 (section 212) states that, ““substantial” means more than minor or trivial.” The Act is explicit in including the provision of information in “an accessible format” as a ‘reasonable step’ to be taken.

In addition, the Care Act 2014 details specific duties for local authorities with regards to the provision of advice and information, this includes the requirement that, “Information and advice provided under this section must be accessible to, and proportionate to the needs of, those for whom it is being provided.” The NHS Constitution also states that, “You have the right to be involved in planning and making decisions about your health and care with your care provider or providers, including your end of life care, and to be given information and support to enable you to do this. Where appropriate, this right includes your family and carers.”

2. Aim of the Standard

The Accessible Information Standard aims to make sure that people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss get information that they can access and understand, and any communication support that they need from health and care services. The Standard says that patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss should:-

- Be able to contact, and be contacted by, services in accessible ways, for example via email or text message.
- Receive information and correspondence in formats they can read and understand, for example in audio, braille, easy read or large print.
- Be supported by a communication professional at appointments if this is needed to support conversation, for example a British Sign Language interpreter.
- Get support from health and care staff and organisations to communicate, for example to lip-read or use a hearing aid.

The Standard tells organisations how they should make sure that patients and service users, and their carers and parents, can access and understand the information they are given. This includes making sure that people get information in accessible formats.

The Standard also tells organisations how they should make sure that people get support from a communication professional if they need it, and about changing working practices to support effective communication.

It is of particular relevance to individuals who are blind, deaf, deafblind and / or who have a learning disability, although it should support anyone with information or communication needs relating to a disability, impairment or sensory loss, for example people who have aphasia, autism or a mental health condition which affects their ability to communicate.

3. Who should be implementing the AIS?

The list of organisations which must have regard to information standards is set out within the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

3.1 Providers of Health and Social Care

The Accessible Information Standard applies to – and therefore must be implemented and adhered to by all providers of NHS and publicly-funded adult social care. This includes (but is not limited to) the following organisations:

- All providers of NHS care or treatment;
- All providers of publicly-funded adult social care;
- Adult social care or services bodies (in their role as service providers);
- Independent contractors providing NHS services including primary medical services (GP practices), dental services, optometric services and pharmacy services;
- NHS Foundation Trusts and NHS Trusts;
- Providers of NHS and / or adult social care from the voluntary and community or private sectors;
- Providers of public health services, including advice and information.

3.2 Commissioners

Although exempt from implementing the Standard themselves, organisations that commission NHS care and/or adult social care, for example Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), must also support provider organisations in the implementation of the Standard. Commissioners are required to ensure that their actions, especially through contracting and performance-management arrangements enable and support provider organisations from which they commission services to implement and comply with the requirements of the Standard. This includes ensuring that contracts / frameworks enable and support provider organisations to be responsive to the needs of individuals with information and communication support needs. The CCG will continually review contracts / frameworks and make any adjustments necessary to allow for, and indeed support, providers to comply with the Accessible Information Standard. We will also ensure AIS forms part of our monitoring and assessment of provider services.

4. Key steps to implementation

There are five basic steps which make up the Accessible Information Standard that health care organisations need to implement:

1. **Ask:** identify / find out if an individual has any communication / information needs relating to a disability or sensory loss and if so what they are.
2. **Record:** record those needs in a clear, unambiguous and standardised way in electronic and / or paper based record / administrative systems / documents.
3. **Alert / flag / highlight:** ensure that recorded needs are 'highly visible' whenever the individual's record is accessed, and prompt for action.

4. **Share:** include information about individuals' information / communication needs as part of existing data sharing processes (and following existing information governance frameworks).
5. **Act:** take steps to ensure that individuals receive information which they can access and understand, and receive communication support if they need it.

More information

Further information of the methods, processes and practices that can be used to support implementation of the above can be found in the NHS England – Accessible Information: Implementation Guidance v1.1



implementation-guidance.pdf

NHS England website www.england.nhs.uk/accessibleinfo