

## **Best Care for People with Communication Disabilities: Communication Accessible Emergency Health**

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### **Short Abstract**

Best Care for People with Communication Disabilities aims to enhance communication between health professionals and patients during medical emergencies and ensure that the patient journey is communication accessible.

One in five Australians has a disability but only 24% of adults with disability experience very good health, compared with 65% of adults without disability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). People with disability need to engage more often with mainstream health services than those without disability with 26% visiting a hospital emergency department and 22% being hospitalised in every year. Poor communication leads to poor health outcomes for people with communication disabilities. Everyone should be able to make their own healthcare decisions and understand the information that is presented to them about their healthcare.

Scope have worked with their valued partners (000 Victoria; Ambulance Victoria; LaTrobe Regional Health; St Vincent's Hospital; Two Way Street and South Australia Ambulance Service) to develop training and communication resources to enhance communication access across the patient journey in emergency health. A co-design approach to the development of resources and training has been implemented and people with disabilities have played a major role.

This project, funded by the Department of Social Services through an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant, commenced in 2020 and has endured the unique challenges presented by the global pandemic. This presentation will outline the stages of the project; showcase the communication tools and training developed; and bring the personal stories of people with a disability and paramedics to life.

### **Long Abstract**

Best Care for People with Communication Disabilities aims to enhance communication between health professionals and patients during medical emergencies and ensure that the patient journey is communication accessible.

One in five Australians has a disability but only 24% of adults with disability experience very good health, compared with 65% of adults without disability (Australian Institute of Health

and Welfare, 2019). People with disability need to engage more often with mainstream health services than those without disability with 26% visiting a hospital emergency department and 22% being hospitalised in every year. Poor communication leads to poor health outcomes for people with communication disabilities. Everyone should be able to make their own healthcare decisions and understand the information that is presented to them about their healthcare.

Scope and its health system partners (000 Victoria; Ambulance Victoria; LaTrobe Regional Health; St Vincent's Hospital; Two Way Street and South Australia Ambulance Service) developed training and communication resources for workers in emergency health services across the patient journey, from initial contact (dialing 000) through first response and treatment by Ambulance officers, and handover to hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) staff.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) estimated approximately 1.2 million Australians have a communication disability that limits their ability to express themselves and/or understand what others are saying. Communication has been named as the core issue for people with disability accessing hospital health care (Bradbury-Jones, Rattray, Jones, & Macgillivray, 2013). The need to increase knowledge and confidence of emergency health care workers in communicating with people with communication disability is acknowledged in the literature (Baylor, Burns, McDonough, Mach, & Yorkston, 2019; Burns, Baylor, Dudgeon, Starks, & Yorkston, 2015; Sowney & Barr 2006). Although there is some research to support the provision of communication tools and training in communication skills to health care staff (Baylor et al, 2019; Eadie, Carylton, Stephens, & Wilson, 2013; Heifetz & Lunsky, 2018), there is little to no research focusing on providing supports to meet a broad spectrum of communication disabilities. Currently there has been no research conducted with pre-hospital emergency service staff on the outcomes of providing communication access training and tools. This research, conducted through the University of Melbourne, aims to address this gap.

The training developed aims to build the capacity of paramedics and emergency department staff to communicate effectively and confidently with people who have a range of specific communication needs. The tailored resources, including communication boards and key word sign resources aim to facilitate communication between patients with disability and mainstream health workers through all stages of medical emergencies. In line with best practice communication access standards, information has also been developed for people with disability in plain language and Easy English, explaining when and how to call an ambulance and what to expect when it arrives. Educating people with disability about the ambulance service will help reduce fear of the unknown and associated stress, and further support successful communication between health professionals and patients with communication disability.

This project, funded by the Department of Social Services through an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant, commenced in 2020 and has endured the unique challenges presented by the global pandemic. This presentation will outline the stages of the project; discuss the formal evaluation and analysis of results; showcase the communication tools and training developed; and bring the personal stories of people with a disability and paramedics to life.