



# Improving accessible information

**healthwatch**  
North Yorkshire

# Accessible information

## Your feedback is making a change

### What is accessible information?

**Accessible information is information that can be read, received, and understood by the intended audience.**

The Accessible Information Standard is a law to make sure people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are given information they can easily read or understand.

The Accessible Information Standard applies to all NHS and adult social care organisations, including GP practices and NHS Trusts.

### Information is not as accessible as it should be

**Many people are not getting information from GPs, hospitals, dentists, care providers and others in formats that meet their needs.**

In 2022 Healthwatch North Yorkshire listened to people's experiences and highlighted the daily challenges for those with communication needs. We want them to get the accessible healthcare information they are entitled to.

**We found that two thirds of our respondents had never been asked if they needed information in a different format.**

**59% had to rely on someone else to read information to them if it was sent in the wrong format. People said they were frustrated with the situation and felt their independence had been taken away.**

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## A summary of the issues

**Ongoing issues:** Despite legal requirements, many people with disabilities still struggle to receive accessible information from health and care organisations, affecting their independence.

**Preferred format requests:** Many people are not consistently asked about their preferred format for information, and even when requested, organisations often fail to follow through.

**Impact on independence:** When information isn't accessible, it forces people to rely on others, compromising their privacy and autonomy, and often leading to missed appointments.

**Emotional consequences:** People feel frustrated, angry, and invisible when their communication needs aren't met, making them feel excluded and not listened to.

**Inconsistent practices:** Some organisations show good practice by providing accessible formats, but there is inconsistency across health and social care services in fulfilling this obligation.

**Communication is key:** Asking people what they need, recording this, and sharing the information across departments is vital for accessible care.

**Learning from experiences:** Involving people with experience can help organisations find practical solutions to diverse communication needs.

**Good practice sharing:** Health and social care organisations should share both progress and challenges to improve how accessible information is delivered, ensuring better service across departments.



## Listening and acting

### The NHS and social care commissioners and providers are making improvements

**Your feedback and our recommendations to healthcare providers has led to improved accessibility of information and, crucially, more people getting the support and information they need.**

Based on the feedback received, we identified nine key principles for improving how people receive support and information. From these, we recommended actions to drive necessary changes. Below is a summary of steps taken by various health and care organisations since the release of our report in June 2022.



## “Ask what helps and do something about it.”

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Offer an 'Ask, Listen, Do' feedback form for patients and carers with additional needs, plus easy-to-read versions for everyone, including children and young people.

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Ensure people with disabilities or sensory impairments get information in a format they can understand and hold workshops every six weeks to discuss accessible information.

They have also invested in AccessAble; a world leader in the provision of accessibility information, to provide their patients with vital details on [how to access services easily](#).

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Ask people about their communication needs, display posters to raise awareness, and remind them in appointment letters to share any requirements. They also work with local community groups to hear from people, get feedback and solutions to communication issues.



**“Make accessible information an organisational priority from the top down and ensure everyone knows why it is important. Have understanding, committed staff championing this at all levels.”**

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Have guidelines to help staff create accessible information such as easy read, large print, and other languages, shared on their intranet.

**The NHS across Humber and North Yorkshire:** Use Silktide to check website accessibility 24/7, with a 95% accessibility score on the “Let’s Get Better” site. They are improving other websites across the health system to ensure they meet the accessible needs of the public and continue to provide ongoing training on accessibility to NHS staff.

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Have undertaken a project to provide better guidance and training on accessible information for their staff.

Their website and intranet have information on the Accessible Information Standard, along with a video.

192 staff champions ensure training and information are shared, with Accessible Information Standard training included.

**North Yorkshire Council:** Have trained 23 staff in easy read and are creating an Accessibility Guide for their system.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Follow policies for accessible information and are developing a new interpretation policy. Feedback is shared quarterly.

They also offer training in sign language, deaf awareness, autism and attention deficit hyperactive disorder, learning disabilities, dementia, and health literacy for better accessibility.

**“Ensure that you ask people about their preferred format. Record this and use that information to provide information in a person’s preferred format. There is no point in having a flag on a record which is ignored.”**

**York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Use Synertec to automatically create outpatient letters in formats like large print and easy read based on people’s needs.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Have an ‘ask, listen, do’ feedback form that flags communication needs in patient records.

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Train their staff to record communication preferences and have an Accessible Information Standard flag in their patient records to alert staff to people’s different needs. Additionally, their leaflets explain how to get accessible formats, and their websites use ReachDeck for accessibility and translation.

**North Yorkshire Council:** Have improved how people’s communication needs are flagged and shared with healthcare professionals to ensure that different people’s communication needs are met.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Record their patients communication needs and ensure these are considered when handling complaints and enquiries.



**“Share people's information needs within organisations, so that information is recorded once and used to provide the correct format throughout the entire organisation.”**

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Have added an alert to the clinical systems, visible to all staff, indicating communication needs within a patient's health record.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Have communication flags within their patient record systems, helping staff to identify and address people's communication needs.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Routinely check the communication needs and requirements of their patients and act on these, such as the provision of easy read literature or printed materials.





## “Involve people with an accessibility need to find answers.”

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Have forums and groups for involving and consulting with patients and carers. Opportunities for involvement and communication is made available in different formats.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Have a reader group that checks materials for accessibility and provide guidance for creating information in formats like easy read, braille, and audio. Surveys and feedback forms are offered in print, digital, and easy-read versions.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Receive feedback from different community groups and involve people with experience in their decision making around new services, public information, service redesigns etc. Information is provided in formats like braille and large print, available through the website, leaflets, and QR codes. They also use hospital passports and support tools for communication needs.



**“Provide choice. Don’t assume that everyone with a particular issue needs information in the same format or that everything is accessible. Digital is not the solution for everyone.”**

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Provide information in formats to meet individual communication needs. Staff can use the Accessible Information Standard guide and follow brand guidelines for support.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Offer guidance to staff for creating information in different formats like easy read, braille, and audio. Surveys and feedback forms are available in both print and digital formats, with easy-read versions. They respond to concerns and complaints through letters, emails, phone calls, or face-to-face meetings.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Provide information in formats like braille, other languages, and larger fonts as needed. Information is accessible via their Trust website, paper and digital leaflets with QR codes, and from staff. They use hospital passports and support tools to meet people’s communication needs.



**“Each organisation should have one contact who works across that organisation to find solutions to accessible information needs quickly and effectively.”**

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Have a team of key staff members who make sure communication and information is clear for people. They check email inboxes for questions from hospital users, listening opportunities, and staff needing advice on making information accessible.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Their patient experience manager and equality lead work together to make sure information is accessible and meets the Accessible Information Standard.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Their patient experience team help with making information clear and accessible, including translation services. The public relations team makes sure the website is easy to use.



**“Seek and share good practice. Providing information in accessible formats isn’t always easy, but lots of organisations are trying. Share progress and challenges so that things are constantly improving.”**

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Share good practice across the Trust and different organisations and regularly update their accessible information guidelines. Their work and progress made on providing accessible information resources are included in their annual reports.

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Work with other health organisations and share good practice across the Trust to support improvements in their provision of accessible information.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Gathers feedback through surveys and community activities, collaborates with other hospitals, and attends meetings to support deaf people. They review policies every three years to ensure compliance.



**“Review what you’re doing to make sure it is working and learn from what is and isn’t going well.”**

**Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust:** Have recently reviewed their communication policy to support the compliance with the Accessible Information Standard.

**Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust:** Has reviewed and refreshed their accessible information guideline. It was approved by the Trust in April 2024. The Trust monitors accessible information provision for assurance that staff are recording communication needs through their patient and carer experience (including complaints and feedback) annual report.

**South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:** Their patient feedback is monitored through complaints, enquiries, surveys, a friends and family test, activities and opportunities to get involved.

Additionally, clinical audits are undertaken to ensure compliance and to identify areas for improvement with their accessible information and communication policy. The Trust’s policies for accessible information and communication, patient information, and reasonable adjustments are reviewed every three years.





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