Public health crises and the need for accessible information

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The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need for accessible information for people with disability during public health crises. Accessible information – such as Easy Read, Auslan, large-print, Braille, and audio-visual formats – is a human right. Such information is critical for people with disability to understand public health crises and know how to remain safe and access support. These needs are important, particularly given people with disability commonly have underlying health conditions that can make them vulnerable to public health risks; are subject to service systems that can enhance their exposure to infection; and often face entrenched system-driven inequalities, including being excluded from health prevention and response actions.

In Australia, accessible information is provided by government, specialist information access agencies, disability advocacy groups and service providers. As these groups have provided information about COVID-19, lessons have emerged for informing better practice during future crises.

To be appropriate for a public health crisis, accessible information must be:

- Accurate and of high quality
  The information needs to be correct and sufficiently accessible. This requires collaboration between medical professionals and information specialists.

- Timely
  Delays in producing accessible information are common, but dangerous.

- Kept up-to-date
  Producing accessible information that is never revised is inappropriate when the details of a crisis are constantly changing.

- Provided in sufficient detail and breadth
  Just as the rest of the population needs to know about many different aspects of a crisis, so do people with disability. Resources with a range of sub-topics are required.

- Produced with people with disability
  Including people with disability in producing the information will ensure it is useful to and accepted by them.
• Disseminated appropriately

People with disability need to be able to access accessible information through agencies they trust, as well as news media and government. Where applicable, hard copies should be available, not only online.
References


