

## Public health crises and the need for accessible information

Arielle Meltzer  
Research Fellow  
University of New South Wales  
Centre for Social Impact  
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

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 <sup>1</sup>. 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 <sup>2</sup>; are subject to service systems that can enhance their exposure to infection <sup>3</sup>; and often face entrenched system-driven inequalities, including being excluded from health prevention and response actions <sup>4</sup>.

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 <sup>5</sup>.

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**

1. United Nations. Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Geneva: United Nations; 2008. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html> (accessed June 2020)
2. World Health Organization. Disability and Health. Geneva: World Health Organisation; 2018. [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health) (accessed June 2020)
3. Carey G. The National Disability Insurance Scheme and COVID-19: a collision course. *Medical Journal of Australia*; 2020 [Preprint: 14 May 2020].
4. Office of the High Commissioner Human Rights. Statement on COVID-19 and the human rights of persons with disabilities. United Nations; 2020. [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25942&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25942&LangID=E) (accessed June 2020)
5. Meltzer, A. Information accessibility for people with disability during the COVID-19 crisis. Webinar for Disability Innovation Institute. University of New South Wales, Sydney Australia. <https://www.disabilityinnovation.unsw.edu.au/Informationaccessibilitycovid19> (accessed June 2020)