

## Public health crises and the need for accessible information

TO THE EDITOR: The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted the need for accessible information for people with disability during public health crises. Accessible information — including Easy Read, Auslan, large print, Braille and audiovisual 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 that people with disability commonly have underlying health conditions that may make them vulnerable to public health risks,<sup>2</sup> are subject to service systems that may enhance their exposure to infection,<sup>3</sup> and often face entrenched system-driven inequalities, such as being excluded from health prevention and response actions.<sup>4</sup>

In Australia, accessible information is provided by governments, 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 subtopics 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 information through agencies they trust, as well as news media and governments. Where applicable, hard copies should be available, not only online.

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