What does it mean for information to be accessible to people with intellectual disability?

Dr Ariella Meltzer

Presentation for the Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability Conference 2025

Acknowledgement of Country

I respectfully acknowledge the Gadigal people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are based today.

I pay my deep respect to Gadigal elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

About me

Dr Ariella Meltzer

Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Social Impact UNSW.

Disability research – accessible information, employment and families.

For the research I am speaking about today, I worked with Ayah Wehbe and Emma Barnes.

What will I talk about today?

Our research about what it means for information to be accessible for people with disability.

- How we did the research.
- The 5 questions we think people should ask about what makes information accessible.
- Ideas about what makes information accessible for people with intellectual disability.

What was our research about?

Our research was about:

- The experiences of accessible information provider organisations.
- What they think it means for information to be accessible.
- What it was like making accessible information during the pandemic, bushfires and floods.

How did we do our research?

1. Workshop with 4 staff from a very experienced provider across many accessible formats.
2. Analysing their workshop to make starter points about what it means for information to be accessible.
3. Checking and expanding on those starter points with interviews with 16 other accessible information provider organisations.

Who took part in our research?

17 organisations overall:

- 12 made or supported at least some Easy Read or Easy English information.
- Each organisation had a leader or other senior person take part.

5 questions to ask about what makes information accessible

1. Who is the information for?

Audience

- Information needs to be for a chosen audience.
- Needs to clearly match their requirements.
- Important not to make generalisations about how others might use the information.

1. Who is the information for?

For people with intellectual disability

- Be clear when Easy Read and Easy English is primarily made for people with intellectual disability or also for others.
- The preferences of people with intellectual disability may be different to others, e.g. use of photos vs. AAC symbols vs. graphics.

2. How is the information made?

Production

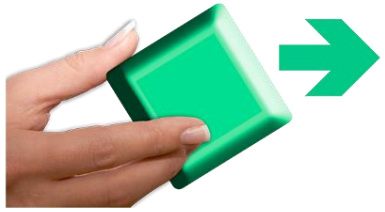
- Technical features of the information are high quality.
- Made with co-design and user testing with people with disability.

2. How is the information made?

For people with intellectual disability

- Easy Read and Easy English documents need to be written and crafted well.
  - No formal guidelines, so there is a lot of variation based on specific user groups.
- Co-design with people with intellectual disability is critical.

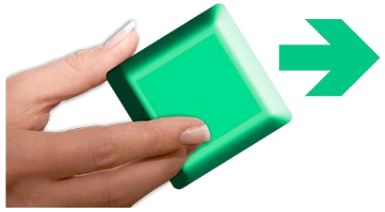
3. How is the information found?



Dissemination

- Information is easy to find and get to people who need it.
- Dissemination is seen as part of accessibility itself.
- Information is in hard copy (where relevant).

3. How is the information found?



For people with intellectual disability

- Easy Read or Easy English information that is buried in a website is not useful to anyone – need a strategy for getting it out to people.
- Hard copies are particularly important for people with intellectual disability.

4. How is the information used?

Use

- Information is realistic and practical.
- Made with knowledge of how it will be used:
  - Independently or with a supporter.
  - For news and facts, or for new ideas, vocabulary and discussion.

4. How is the information used?

For people with intellectual disability

- People vary in whether they want to use information independently or with a supporter.
  - When there is a supporter, documents can define ‘hard words’ and extend vocabulary. This can be very useful.
  - But not everyone has or wants a supporter.

5. When is the information trusted?

Trust

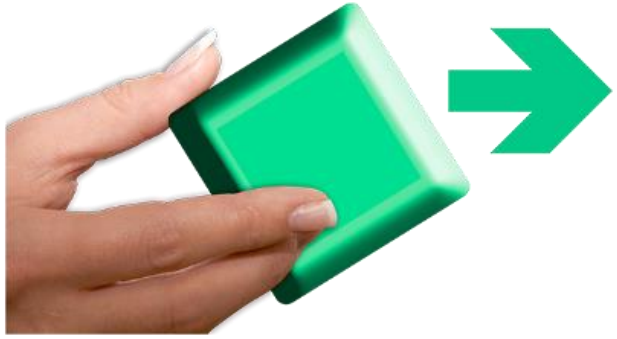
- Up to date, verified and accurate.
- Gives people what they really want and need to know.
- Delivered with a ‘human touch’.

5. When is the information trusted?

For people with intellectual disability

- Easy Read and Easy English information is commonly made once and then never updated – this is a big problem.
- Delivery with a ‘human touch’ is especially important for people with intellectual disability living in institutional settings.

What should we work on?



Do a better job of getting Easy Read and Easy English information to people who use it.

Do a better job of keeping the information updated – it is not a one-time job!

Contact me

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