

# Inclusive Health Care: Communication Tips for Workers

## What is Inclusive Communication?

Inclusive language and communication should be **easy to understand, respectful, assumption and judgement free**. It should reflect and respond to individual consumer's communication needs.

## Why is it necessary?

Inclusive language and communication can help consumers feel safer in health care settings. Inclusive communication respects consumers' identities and gives information in a way that helps consumers make decisions that are right for them. Consumers are more likely to access the care they need if they feel safe. When consumers understand their own health and health needs, they are more likely to follow instructions and advice, and take medication correctly.

## Inclusive language tips



**Avoid jargon** – Consumers can't genuinely consent to treatment described using words and phrases they don't understand. Only about 40% of Australian adults can understand health information in the way it is presented to them. It makes it hard for consumers to understand their own health care when information is not accessible. To help consumers understand, avoid medical jargon, abbreviations, acronyms, or complicated terms.



**Use Plain English** – Try to keep sentences short, use a conversational tone and an active voice. Consumers may not understand many medical terms, have low literacy levels, have a disability, speak a language other than English or just be struggling to understand new information while under stress. Keep this in mind when talking to consumers or creating written information.



**Keep it Gender Neutral** – 'Gendered language' is often used when it is not relevant. This type of language can incorrectly assume a consumer's identity or exclude those who are nonbinary, intersex or transgender. We can use more gender conscious language by swapping terms for a neutral alternative like partner/family member/parent/friend/ or using they/them pronouns. Using gendered terms like girlfriend/husband/daughter is assuming someone's gender without knowing.

## Inclusive Communication tips



**Different formats** – Everyone processes information in different ways, so verbal instructions or written information may not be accessible for all consumers. Consider using multiple formats to give information to consumers - such as reading aloud, models, pictures, diagrams, videos, or factsheets. Consumers may need a qualified interpreter or extra time to process information about their care.



**Teach back** – A great method to check if consumers are understanding you is [the Teach Back Technique](#). Teach Back is when you ask consumers to explain the information you have given them back to you in their own words. It helps to identify any misunderstandings or missed information.



**Representation** – Include pictures that represent the diversity of consumers when you communicate health information to community. Use images, examples and instructions that are culturally relevant so you can broaden the reach of information.



**Don't shy away from topics** – Be clear and factual, especially when referring to health conditions that are often stigmatised (sexual, mental, and reproductive health). You can be aware of the attitudes your audience may have, but you should avoid creating more judgements, assumptions, shame, or stereotypes about consumers and their conditions.



**Encourage research and feedback** – If consumers are struggling to understand their condition, they may need time and further resources to build their knowledge. There should be opportunities for consumers to actively understand their treatment by asking questions and raising concerns before they have to make decisions.

### A quick note - language is *always changing!*

Remember language changes – if in doubt – ask consumers! It's okay to make mistakes but be open to finding out the most appropriate language for next time. What is appropriate will change over time, so it is important to keep asking consumers and the communities they belong to what language they prefer. People may feel comfortable using certain words and phrases if they feel safe, but not all the time.

### Where to learn more?

[Canberra Health literacy – Community Services and Workers](#)

[Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health - Speaking with Clients who have a Low English Proficiency](#)

[Easy English Vs Plain English](#)

[People With Disabilities Australia Language Guide](#)

[We Heart Health Literacy – How to write for everyone \(Sort of\)](#)

**hcca.org.au**

02 6230 7800 | [adminofficer@hcca.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@hcca.org.au)

HCCA.ACT @HealthCanberra

