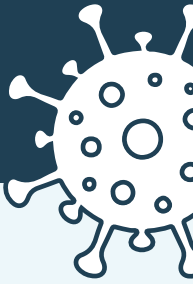




Communication Aid for Health Care Providers



Generally, it is important to...

- **Speak directly with patients** who may have disabilities (i.e., not to the individual who may be accompanying the patient or an ASL interpreter).
- **Not create assumptions** about the accommodations that patients may or may not need. First, offer any accommodations or assistance the health care facility/provider may provide. If the patient expresses any interest in the offer(s), ask for instructions and provide detailed explanation of what to expect for the duration of the visit. If the patient declines any assistance at any point, honor their decision.
- **Acknowledge that patients with disabilities are competent to handle their own care.** If the patient communicates that they may require assistance during their care, then proceed with offering any relevant services.
- **Schedule adequate time** for the appointment.
- **Use “person-first” language** when referring to patients with disabilities (i.e., person who is blind, person who uses wheelchair, person with hearing loss) unless the patient asks to be referred to in another manner.
- **Ask for clarifications** if you are unable to understand the patient.
- **Use simple language** through all communication with patients.



Communicating with Patients with Developmental Disabilities or Cognitive Impairments

- Delegate one staff personnel to communicate in fixed interactions with the patient.
- Maintain relaxed body language, as communication may decline under stress. Patients with communication challenges may be additionally sensitive to the emotions of others in their physical environment.
- Inquire whether the patient has any preferred communication and do the best to meet their communication needs.
- Repeat any important information and provide the information in multiple formats whenever possible (i.e., providing instructions verbally and in writing).



Communicating with Patients who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Materials should be available in multiple formats. Have written materials available, as well as a live American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or real-time live captioning.
- Speak directly with the patient with appropriate distance to allow for lip reading. If a face mask or face covering must be worn, have available transparent face masks to allow for effective lip reading.
- Do not rely on family members, friends, or other companions for interpretation.
- Always address the patient directly. Be aware of body language (e.g., eye contact).
- Speak with a steady pace and volume and eliminate any auditory distractions or background noise.
- Approach the individual from the front, so they can see you.



Communicating with Patients who are Blind or Low Vision

- Announce your entrance and exit.
- Verbally identify yourself or any other staff upon entering the room.
- In the beginning of the patient's visit, describe the physical environment (e.g., doors, steps, ramps, bathroom location, etc.).
- Do not touch a service animal without the consent from the patient. The service animal should be allowed in all areas that the patient is.
- Communicate with the patient where to place their belongings and do not move these items until the patient is notified and the consent is granted.
- Have available accessible health information in an auditory, tactile, or electronic format of the patient's preference (e.g., iPad, Braille, large print). However, do not rely on these methods of communication, as patients may bring their own communication aids. Accessible health information should be already embedded into the health communication (e.g., document accessibility).



Patients who use Wheelchairs or Other Mobility Aids

- Have extra wheelchairs available for use.
- The health care facility must have open paths to leave space for individuals who use wheelchairs or other mobility assistive devices.
- Prepare staff to provide assistance to the patient by clearing the path of travel or helping patients transfer to other wheelchairs or mobility assistive devices.
- Do not touch or move the wheelchair without first receiving permission from the patient.
- Not all individuals with mobility limitations use wheelchairs or aids – avoid making assumptions about a person's mobility based on whether they use assistive equipment.



Ensuring Accessible Vaccine Administration

- For guidance on providing an accessible vaccination distribution, please review [Guidelines & Best Practices for Accessibility at Michigan Vaccination Sites](#)

References

- [Access to Medical Care](#)
- [Communicating with Patients with Disabilities in the COVID-19 Response](#)
- [Guidelines & Best Practices for Accessibility at Michigan Vaccination Sites](#)
- [Improving Access to Care for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Physician Experiences Providing Primary Care to People with Disabilities](#)
- [Tips for Treating Patients with Physical and Sensory Disabilities](#)

