

# Accessible Information Standard

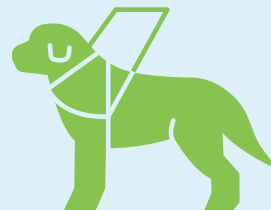
## What is the Accessible Information Standard (AIS)?

Since 1 August 2016, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard. The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss. \*NHS England

The NHS Accessible Information Standard makes clear how NHS and social care services in England must provide accessible information to patients with communication needs. By following the Standard, services will also meet some of their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

## What can you do at a GP Practice to help towards following the Accessible Information Standard?

- You must record the patient's preferred communication needs and reasonable adjustments. This may include large print, email, alternative text formats and Easy Read. When the patient is being reviewed, ask them about their communication requirements as this may change over time.
- When making any patient referral, please share the patient's communication needs.
- Identify support needs with the patient and arrange a Deafblind communicator guide, sighted guide or interpreter as necessary. In all cases, the GP practice should pay for this service. For additional information, click [this link](#).
- For people with sensory loss, ask the patient if they require a double appointment to support their communication needs.
- Patients with assistance dogs have [full access rights](#) under the Equality Act 2010 and this should be recorded on their records.



## Guidance on how to treat patients with sensory loss

- Ask the patient when they enter the reception "Is there anything I can do to help you?" Ask if they need assistance to get to a specific area, including the consulting room, and record this on their records. Be aware that some sensory impaired people may not be able to respond to audio and/or visual waiting room announcements.
- All clinicians need to ensure they have understood their patient and that their patient has understood them. You need to narrate what you are doing so that no physical interaction is a surprise or unwanted.
- Break down the information on what the next steps will be after the appointment into smaller sections. For example, if there is medication to be prescribed or if the patient will be referred onwards.
- Face patients and make sure that you have their attention. Ensure only one person is talking at a time and allow time for effective communication. Inform the patient if you move around the room or if you or someone else arrives or leaves.
- Do not overexaggerate speech; this can distort lip patterns and make it more difficult for people to lipread.



### Accessible Environment

- People with sensory impairments may not be able to use automated sign in tablets.
- Please be aware that Perspex screens are a communication barrier. Use clear speech and ensure you are facing the patient, and the receptionist may need to come out to communicate directly.
- Reception desks should be easy to locate and close to the entrance. Remember as some reception desks are quite high, a cane or dog may not be immediately obvious.
- Consider that queue belt barriers may not be accessible for people living with sensory impairments and are disorientating to negotiate for guide dog handlers and white cane users.
- Lighting may be an issue, consider asking the patient if adjustments need to be made.
- Try to ensure that furniture in the waiting room and lavatories have contrasting colours to make locating objects and hazards easier to detect.
- Include visual signs if you have a hearing loop. Ensure that your staff are knowledgeable on how to use it and that the loop is facing the correct way.
- Try to minimise the sources of extraneous noise that can make it difficult or disorientating for people with sensory impairments.

### How can you test if your GP is AIS compliant?

- Look at how you are meeting patient's accessibility needs and conduct an audit of your systems. Log any accessibility complaints made and have an improvement plan on what you can do to ensure the cause of the complaint does not happen again.
- Consider testing the accessibility of the GP practice with an access audit supported by a sensory organisation.
- Do you have someone who is responsible for AIS within the practice? Find someone who can be a main point of contact for patients and who can be an AIS Champion. For example, audit clerks or practice managers.
- Ask for volunteers with lived experience of sensory impairments to visit the GP practice and to share feedback of their experience, highlight what is working well and potential areas of improvement. Volunteers can also review and test if the Patient Participation Group meetings and your GP website is accessible for people living with sensory impairments. Healthwatch Essex would be able to support this activity.

### Links for further information:

- <https://healthwatchessex.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/guidance-for-commissioners-interpreting-and-translation-services-in-primary-care.pdf>
- <https://www.assistancedogs.org.uk/the-law/>

Contact Renée Robey, Engagement Officer at Healthwatch Essex, for further information and support - [renee.robey@healthwatchessex.org.uk](mailto:renee.robey@healthwatchessex.org.uk)