

Transcript: Online Seminar - Accessible communication with people with disability

KATE BOWMAKER:

Good afternoon and thank you for taking the time to join us today for the first of our online seminars on accessible communication and engagement. My name is Kate Bowmaker and I'm director of communications, at The Social Deck. To begin today's webinar, I'd like to extend my acknowledgement, acknowledgement of country for the lands on which we and our participants are present to meet on today. Where I am, it's in Queensland. This is the land of the Kabi Kabi people.

I pay my respects to Elders past, present and future. I also welcome and acknowledge First Nations people who are joining us for today's webinar.

We're using Microsoft teams today, as you can hear, to broadcast this webinar. There'll be some features you may not be familiar with if you're used to accessing broadcast files in IMO or other channels. But to make sure we can reach government staff, which is predominantly what this seminar is for, Teams has been selected as the most likely platform that people will be able to access from your workplaces. So bear with us while we sort of let everyone in and, you know, work with sort of the platform to be able to broadcast today's seminar. You'll likely have the best experience today if you keep your Teams in large gallery view, so that way, you'll be able to see the speaker who is speaking at that time. There'll be five people on camera and myself, our speakers and also Auslan interpreters. If you require an Auslan interpreter, you can right click on the interpreter screen and select PIN to make sure their video remains in your view. If you need or want to see live captioning during today's webinar, we have put the live captioning link into the Teams chat and it would have been included with your second reminder email that went out. It's also on our Humanitix page. If you lose connection at any stage, we suggest that you close the feed and reopen the link.

I want to thank you all for joining us today. I was a public servant for almost 15 years, and today at The Social Deck, we work extensively across government on communication and engagement projects with a strong focus on making sure information and engagement is accessible and inclusive. We work with different levels of government on some really complex, yet rewarding areas, from communication strategies to prevent domestic and family violence against people with disability, to improving education, access and participation for students with disability, among other things. And through this work, we've certainly learned a lot of lessons ourselves about what being inclusive and accessible really means, particularly when it comes to effective action and engagement. We're delivering today's webinar in partnership with the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The department knows the importance of making sure that information from governments at all levels is more accessible to people with disability, and is really leading the way in this area. So they brought this seminar to you. We're really excited to have more than six hundred people registered to join us today for this online seminar on accessible communication. There's clearly a strong commitment to improving communication and making sure it is more accessible for all. During today, I will set context, but we do have a

number of key speakers who will provide further details and examples about making communication more accessible. So I'd like to thank our speakers who have given up their time to share their expertise and tips with you today. So joining us is Aine Healy, Jody Barney and Jane Britt. So I will introduce them in a little bit more detail as we get to the time in which they will be speaking. So I'd also like to introduce that to Auslan interpreters, we have Julie from Auslan Services and Heather from Auslan Connections with us today as well. You'll see them appear throughout the session and you'll notice that they are linked in remotely from their own locations. I guess this is one example of that you could think about for making your communication events more accessible these days, particularly following events such as COVID. There are there are a lot more events that happen online, and having interpreters at your online event or information session is really important. And it can be done because we can be linking in Auslan interpreters from our locations from throughout the country to participate in these kinds of activities.

So in today's session, we will talk about why accessible communication is so important and the different things you can think about and do to help make sure your communication is accessible. There is a lot to cover today. We'll talk about strategies for making information accessible to people who have different types of disability. So this won't just be about webcam compliance and areas like this, that this will be a real range of information covering a lot of different ways in which you might communicate with different people, with different types of disability. We hope you'll come away from today's session with some practical tips, but also a belief in an understanding of the importance of taking that extra time to get your communication right, so that it's inclusive for people with disability. So we'll also have some time for questions at the end of the session, so those of you who can stay with us right until the end, there's that opportunity and we will pose some questions to our speakers. I encourage you to jot down any (AUDIO SOFTENS) thoughts and then to post questions that you might have as we go through the sessions into the chat function on Teams. So you can use the chat function by going to the sort of chat icon at the top of your Teams screen, we do have with so many people in attendance, we obviously won't get to all of the questions for our panel, but we do have some Social Deck team members who will be looking across these questions and selecting out a few and looking where there are some common questions that we can draw out for our speakers. So before I do hand over to our speakers today, I wanted to share a little bit more context about why accessible communication matters. Many of you joining us today will have important information about policies, programs or initiatives that you need to share with the community. When thinking about who the community is, we need to consider how diverse we are as a society. There are 4.4 million people in Australia with disability. So within this, there are many different types of disability and circumstances that impact people's abilities to receive communication. There's 3.6 million people who live with some form of hearing loss, and that includes around 30,000 deaf Auslan users with total hearing loss. There are around 660,000 people with intellectual disability, around 360,000 people are blind or have low vision. So when communicating about your policies for all Australians, if we don't consider the needs of people with disability, we cannot hope to fully achieve the outcome of our policies, for a large proportion of the Australian public. A very large portion of the community is missed when our communication is inaccessible. Somewhat small changes in the way you deliver your communication can really make a big difference. So throughout today's webinar, you will hear directly from our panel about what difference these changes can actually make from their point of view. But

this is also about the rights of people with disability. So accessible communication is not just about providing information about disability issues to people with disability. And that's why it's really important that we've got lots of attendees here today from across the public service, also some of the private sector and other organisations, because this is really about sharing all information that needs to be communicated to the public in ways that can be accessed by people with disability. People with disability have the right, to be able to access government and public information on the same basis as people without disability. And this is really made clear in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 21 of the UNCRPD, it's about freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information. So among other things, that says that the parties of the convention of which Australia is one, must ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others, and through all forms of communication of their choice. This includes by providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities, inaccessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, people with disability have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community. So no matter what level of government you are, the information we provide to the community helps people to live their everyday lives and make informed choices. This might be information about a new tax policy that impacts a person with disability who's running their own business, or new information about an education or health program that might impact a person with disability, or person with disabilities' child. Or it could be information at local level, like a local law happening in someone's own neighbourhood, or really importantly, information in situations that could prevent trauma, injury or loss of life. People with disability have the right to this information, so it's really up to Government and communication professionals to make sure it's delivered in those accessible formats with technologies that are appropriate. The Disability Royal Commission has found that receiving timely information does continue to be a major barrier for many people with disability, and it's an area that really needs improvement. This has especially been the case during emergencies, and Aine who's one of our speakers today is going to talk about that in a little bit more detail. The Disability Royal Commission also highlighted that, access to information about and during in COVID, for people with disability needs a very strong focus across all levels of government. Other reports have also identified significant gaps in the way information is being shared so that it meets the needs of people with disability. The Disability Rights Now 2019 Report stated that more than two thirds of people with disability find government information inaccessible or difficult to understand. So that's two thirds of people. When The Social Deck, when we did the consultations to inform the next National Disability Strategy in 2019, again, three quarters of respondents said it was very or somewhat difficult to find information about policies, programs or supports available to help them. And 60% said it was somewhat, very or somewhat difficult to find information about their rights.

However, many people did also say that access to information was improving, and especially with new technologies and changes in attitudes in the community and the media. So it's a real opportunity for us to change some of that at this stage. People acknowledge efforts by government to create more accessible content, such as using easy read formats, to share some information. However, there's still concern that there's not enough consistency across government and not enough done across areas like education, health and other sort of

mainstream policies and services. So this tells us that more can, and should be done to make our communication with people more accessible. So in this next session, we're going to talk about how governments and communication professionals can improve communication with people with disability. First, we're going to hear from Jane Britt. So I'll be bringing in one of the speakers. She'll be speaking about communicating well for people who are vision impaired. So Jane is the current national policy officer for Blind Citizens Australia, and is deaf-blind. She's a leader and a strong advocate for equity of access and inclusion for all people, especially for people with disability. Jane is experienced in stakeholder engagement, and with an aim to achieve positive outcomes for individuals with disability in each of her roles. She is also a public speaker, and journalist covering disability equity issues. So remember, you can use the chat function to ask questions as you're listening to Jane speak. But now I will hand over to Jane.

JANE BRITT:

Thank you very much, and good afternoon everyone. Firstly, I would like to begin by acknowledging and paying my respects to the Yuggera and Turrbal people, the traditional custodians of the land where I'm speaking from today, in Queensland, and the people of all places where we are gathered today. I'd like to pay my respects to Elders, past, present and emerging and acknowledge all First Nations people who are here today. Paying my respects to your Elders, past, present and emerging. I'm Jane Britt, the National Policy Officer of Blind Citizens Australia and an executive director of Queenslanders with Disability Network. Blind Citizens Australia, is the national representative organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired. Our mission is to inform, connect and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community. Why am I presenting today? So I'm presenting in two capacities. I'm deaf-blind myself and my area of work for BCA focuses on areas of national interest and policy, extending to accessible communication for people who are blind or vision impaired. So what are the issues facing us? The major issue facing people who are blind or vision impaired is gaining access to information in the first instance. This is a systemic issue facing people who are blind or vision impaired across all sectors and all areas of life. This includes, accessing information in education and employment spaces, health care and community participation. For example, this might be receiving information about health services, medical treatment or medical advice in PDF format, which is incompatible with screen readers like JAWS, which is the voice navigation software that we often use to have text read out, that is on a computer screen. We have particularly seen this exacerbated in the pandemic environment, with the need for rapid delivery of information to people. A lot of the content presented has been in a visual format without appropriate descriptions of visual imagery or audio description, if there is a video format. A major example of this in the early stages of the pandemic was the appropriate use of the mask to avoid viral contamination. What we saw in those early stages was, a lot of diagrams and a lot of visual imagery, as well as videos that were being uploaded to explain that process. For people who are blind or vision impaired, they didn't then understand how to appropriately put on and take off the mask to avoid viral contamination. In terms of digital access to information, a major barrier is screen reader compatibility with website content. Although, a website may make web content accessibility guidelines, with white tab which was referenced earlier, which stipulates conditions for compatibility of that information with screen readers like JAWS. Compliance with the guidelines does not necessarily ensure that it will be intuitive for screen to read and use. I'll come back to this later in terms of some of the solutions that I proposed for these issues. So why does this matter? Inaccessibility of

information matters because it creates inequity for people who are blind or vision impaired, and having access to clear, consistent and current information. As referenced earlier, Article 21 of the UNCRPD stipulates the requirements for access to information for people with disabilities. In the pandemic environment particularly, we have witnessed retrofitting of information to make accessibility a requirement for people with detrimental outcomes. These outcomes have been that, by the time people who are blind or vision impaired have gained access to the information they require, that information has already become outdated or superseded by new medical advice. It also compromises our ability to protect sensitive information from others. So how might that be? People who are blind or vision impaired may find themselves in a situation where they need someone else to read out the information, not only making the existing individual privy to potentially sensitive information about the person who's blind or visually impaired, but anyone else who is in the vicinity and can overhear that information being read out. Further if the person is using a screen reader to read the information aloud, the same issue can occur if they are unaware of who else is in the vicinity when they have activated the screen reader. This requires people that are around them assisting them to let them know about who else might be in the vicinity when they're getting assistance. But at its worst, inaccessible information may be life threatening for people who are blind or vision impaired. Again, pointing to the emergency response to both the recent Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, and inability to have contemporaneous information about the situation could be the difference between protecting against or placing oneself in harm's way. In the instance of the black summer bushfires, inaccessible information on an app showing where a fire was located, meant that the fire threatened loss of life and property for a BCA member who was unaware that the fire had reached a previous land where it had been, and that member that was then was unable to activate their emergency plan because it was too late. So, what are the solutions? What would the process look like for creating accessible communication? Terms of the process for developing the information and disseminating it, when information is not being released under stringent timing, it is critical that co-design principles are used. To develop a process for release of both emergency and non-emergency information. That is, people with disabilities must be present at the table throughout the process of initially creating, developing, and disseminating information to ensure the information communication is truly accessible. In parallel with that approach, it is important that user testing takes place. To ensure that the information that is about to be released is genuinely accessible prior to that launch. Finally, it also means that if information is being disseminated over time, it's about knowing the preferred format for information for people who are blind or vision impaired. So, for example, this might include large print, paper copies, braille, audio or electronic formats. Though also is about avoiding formats which are inaccessible. For example, we know that PDF is largely incompatible with screen readers. So, in summary, the solutions that I'm proposing are co-design, user testing and a person-centred approach to find that preferred format for information access. In finishing today, I would like to sincerely thank you for allowing me to present to you on this critical information of information access. I believe it is beginning of a dialogue whereby we can witness the translation of ideas into tangible processes for genuinely inclusive practice with information access. Thank you.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Thank you, Jane. And that was really useful information and I think just a reminder to everyone, if you've got some specific or general questions that you would like to ask of Jane for her to respond to later in the session, please do put them into the chat on Teams. So, I'd

now like to hand over to Jody Barney. So, Jody is a Birri-Gubba, Urangan deaf woman and a leading Aboriginal disability cultural trainer and consultant. She has been a deaf Indigenous communications consultant for over 13 years and has worked for over 30 years towards social equity and equality for Indigenous Australians with hearing loss and complex communications needs. She works across Australia as an integrated visual communication specialist using Indigenous sign languages of which she is fluent in 18. So, we're really lucky to have Jody here with us today. And I will hand over to Jody who will be speaking first in this session about communicating well for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. And then we'll be hearing again a little bit more from Jody later on. Thank you, Jody.

JODY BARNEY:

Great. Thank you. Thank you, Kate. And thank you everyone. If you can't see me, you can pin me and make me larger on your screen so that you can see me signing.

You will also hear the interpreter's voice, but obviously you can't see the interpreter. If you're looking for the voice the interpreter is off screen and she's interpreting what I'm signing to you today.

First of all, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land that I'm on and their Elders past, present and emerging. I'm here on Yorta Yorta country. And that is in Shepparton in Victoria.

I'd like to also acknowledge all the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who may be taking part in this webinar today.

I'm fortunate that I have access to interpreters and captioning today. And this is a good example of how I can be included in conversation.

The first part of my lived experience was quite difficult because my parents are both not deaf.

And what that means is that in my family, I had two brothers who were also deaf. They use their voice, they don't sign, but growing up in my family, my first sign language was not Auslan. I was able to acquire Aboriginal sign language, which was from the parts of Queensland that I was in over many years growing up. I was involved in many different Aboriginal communities and communication styles throughout my childhood. So, I'm very fortunate to have had that experience and develop those skills. I'm part of the stolen generation. And so I learned signed English at that time, which was very difficult for me. I also was involved with speech therapy and I was bilingual.

And I was taught to speak as well as being signed to and using English at school. Whereas at home I used cultural signing. So, there was quite a mix.

And I guess that's where I learnt about complex communication because of what I'd acquired and how people preferred certain ways of communicating. And I tend to switch to what people who are deaf and hard of hearing and what their preferences are for communication.

There are some deaf, native deaf Auslan users, which I'm not one of. But Auslan is probably my fifth sign language.

Part of my childhood was meeting people where they needed to be met.

It was not a lot of formal sign language users that I was exposed to in the media back in those days. Back in those days, there was the welfare officers that could perhaps sign, but they didn't actually interpret. When I went to school, some parents had children who were deaf going to the school or hearing children, coders who would go to the school. And that's how I acquired sign language, being exposed to quite a wide range of people who used sign language.

There's a lot of opportunities and options for communication, for deaf and hard of hearing children. But what we're seeing now is the progression of technology and that's hindering sign language and the position of sign language and how important it is for communication. Often people will look at technological advances such as hearing aids and different augmented devices for meetings. And so the demand now is lifting for sign language interpreters. So, we need to improve the access for interpreters so that we can make sure that access to that communication is there. Sometimes I haven't been able to get an interpreter for many months because they're not available. Fortunately I can use other technological supports such as captioning, text based communication because my literacy is at that level. And sometimes I'll use my voice to speak in English, but it's not my preferred language.

But I can't always have my preferred option. And for many deaf people, they don't have other preferred options either. So, we need to look at the systems and the way that the systems can support and fund the needs of their communication so that they can get the communication that is needed.

Another option is deaf interpreting because if you have one language, say myself, I might be working with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who doesn't know Auslan. Then we may bring in an Auslan interpreter, but that's going to only assist in one way with the translation process. We also need to think about having interpreters who are deaf, who can bridge both those sign languages. So, that access again is there for Indigenous people who use their own sign language. So, bringing in deaf interpreters is another way of helping bridge that communication gap. What we see in families is that 95% of parents to deaf children are not deaf and they don't know sign language and they're overwhelmed. And the reduction of students now going to deaf schools. We've seen an increasing mainstreaming

and what that means for cultural identity of deaf students, people who are culturally deaf, we consider a capital D deaf person. And what that means for those students is that their preferred language is sign language. But if they don't use sign language to communicate, we consider them deaf with a lowercase D and they may use both English, spoken English or sign. Different people have different preferences. So, using Auslan and deaf interpreters are very important also with deaf people who are also vision impaired or blind. So, there's tactile interpreters. And often those people are isolated. They're not able to get out and meet people in the mainstream. And we know from coronavirus last year, there's a number of deaf blind people who communicate through tactile sign language who were quite isolated. There are also other people that might be deaf that have an intellectual disability, or have autism. There's a number of other disabilities that deaf people may have. So, it might not only be communicated barriers to communication. But sometimes having professionals brought in to support them often in the government areas, they don't understand why two interpreters might be needed, if a deaf interpreter is also needed for a language gap.

Often government services will send emails or text messages, and that's not always appropriate. Sometimes it needs to be delivered in sign language and that would be the preference for some people.

Just talking about the importance of literacy skills for deaf and hard of hearing people. It's not always important to us having things written down because face-to-face communication is what's needed. Depending on the context, what needs to be unpacked, what emotions are involved in the discourse. Sometimes having that visual communication actually is extremely valuable to us.

For example, videos on coronavirus. The Victorian government have interpreters signing and talking about the information that's being relayed to the wider community about coronavirus on the media. But unfortunately, and often, when you're using technology, whether it be Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or what have you or LinkedIn, the filming cuts out the interpreter then hones in on the English speaker. And so the interpreter's not included. And deaf people miss out on that information, and this has happened over and over again, and it's very discriminatory. And it's just how the media does not value and include the interpreter. So, we need to ensure that government takes some sort of responsibility in developing a policy so that the media understand that communication needs to be accessible to all. And many government organisational services when they're uploading information to the internet or the website, it's just not accessible. There's no interpretation. It may be done at a later time, but it's not at the same time as everybody else. So, therefore people don't get information who are deaf in the sign language in a timely manner. So, it's very important that we see that translations or interpretations are done in the same time. So, that government procedures and policies have that embedded and that they're mandatory rather than taking such a lax approach towards it. I'm also conscious about how many people assume deaf people all understand Auslan. They don't. It's not only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander deaf people, but people who are perhaps migrants from other countries who are living in Australia and English is not their first language and neither is Auslan. They might not have access to spoken language interpreters either. So, then again,

that option of providing CALD community interpreter service, as well as other translation services that suit them. So, having deaf interpreters working in that space more broadly could be incorporated into governmental policy. So that those pieces of information can reach those people. And we need to understand what that means.

We shouldn't be ignoring what people are saying around the table. If they're deaf and hard of hearing from all walks of life, they should have the opportunity to be able to have their voice heard. Because certain interpreters will be right for certain types of deaf people. Different technologies will be right for other deaf people or hard of hearing people. So, it's quite a range and we need to ensure that access can be delivered depending on what people need.

We also want to see the same access provided to us that is provided to the wider community.

We had those human rights and those human rights should work for everybody, not just one segment.

I think it's important also, finally, just to talk about what does it mean for our deaf and hard of hearing community to be included and communicated with. If I want to log on to something like a webinar I can get perhaps captions, that's fine. I can have access, but if I wanted to go out to say a festival that was run by a council, I should be able to be included. And my communication needs should be met by making sure that interpreters are booked and provided.

I think it's important to ensure that those access needs need to be equitable across the country. Not only in urban areas.

We need to consider access to those who are in remote areas as well across the country. So, that's all from me.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Thank you.

JODY BARNEY:

Thank you to my interpreter too.

KATE BOWMAKER:

And thank you. Jody, that was really great. Thanks for sharing...those experiences and also giving some of that advice in terms of the importance of inclusion for all deaf and hard of hearing people. I'm now going to go to our sort of final speaker in this section. So, this is Aine Healy. So, Aine spends her time working on making the world a more inclusive place. She's the founder of Ideas Info Action, where she works on projects that make a positive impact. She's partnered with many not-for-profit disability-led organisations and researchers

to do this - bringing her skills in communications, campaigning, inclusive design and knowledge transfer to the table. She previously headed up advocacy and information for the New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability, where she loved being led by people with intellectual disability. Plus former CEO of the Attitude Foundation, she worked on shifting how disability is represented in the media. So, I'm going to hand over to Aine, who's going to talk a little bit about accessible communication with people with intellectual disability. Over to you, Aine.

AINE HEALY:

Thanks, Kate. And thanks also to Jane and Jody. There's a lot to be thinking about and getting on with. Firstly, I would like to pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation where I'm working from today. I am in Sydney. I think when I first started working in this space, I was, "Oh, my goodness, there's so many things, I have to do all of the things. It's way too much. I just can't possibly." There's this, there's this, that and the other. And I just was like, "Oh, goodness." Thankfully one of my colleagues, he was my boss at the time, he had an intellectual disability, said, "Oh, Aine, get over yourself." He said, "You don't have to be accessible overnight." He said, "But start taking steps and getting towards there." So, I think that has been very good. And I often think back to that as well, you know, what will it take? There's heaps of things that you can do. And I don't know what your sort of jobs are, generally, but at your stage. But I think everyone can do something. So, I'm always mindful of that. Maybe if you decide to put one piece of information into accessible formats or that you put it as a goal in your strategic plan, etc. There's incremental ways to do things. Obviously, with emergency information, which I'll talk a bit about later, stuff has to be done in there. But for the bigger picture stuff, I'd suggest planning and stuff from the beginning. I think my sort of big three things and thinking about communication for people with intellectual disability, but I think some of the principles will transfer over. Make stuff, just make stuff accessible in the first instance. So, write in Easy English in the first point in the first place, make the points clear, actionable, ready to understand in regards to what people need to do, what they can do, what they can't do, etc. Everyday language is great because it's what people use. So, don't use the fancy terms or other stuff, or what are people using on the street, use those terms. Plan to succeed. So, I would recommend having employing people with disability on your teams and employing people with intellectual disability on your teams. It's very odd for me not to be co-presenting or having a presenter with intellectual disability with me today. I'm currently not working on any projects with people, so I don't have some with me. But in any project that I do, I employ someone or a team of people or they're consulted and involved with the project from the beginning. That makes the biggest difference, I think, in how I have learned how to do good communication because sitting next to someone in the office all day and as part of everything that you do, you just get better because it's immersed. It means that your team is also building capacity. I guess, with regards to sort of messaging and overall communication and lots of you will be comms people, but my thing is make it easy for people to do the thing, whatever the thing is that you wanted to do, make it easy for them to get that piece of information, remove the superfluous stuff, the other things, what is it that you want them to do? Or how do they do it? And that's it. I love words. But lots of times I have to cut them out and minimise. And is... The main thing is x, y, z, where can you get extra info? And that's it. And I think I've gotten into the habit into writing like that. That then makes stuff easy to translate and put into other formats as well. Many years ago, I was translating some documents, someone in government had given us to review. And the person with intellectual disability supporting me was saying just,

Do they actually want us to read it? Like, do they actually want us to get the information?" And I was like, "Oh, yeah, they do." But the information was just so complex that wasn't possible for them to get that. So, I think by having people designed from the start of the process, you avoid making stuff up. Trend getting... Sorry, I'll say that again. If you have people involved from the beginning, co-designing the materials, you'll save a lot of time. So, it doesn't mean that you've written this big document, then you have to send it out to get reviewed and then send back feedback and then try and change it, etc. Planning from the start is better. I know that can take a bit of time, but I think it ended up saving time and resources in the end. I mean, at the end of the day, you want people to read your stuff. If you don't do that, they won't read or they won't get your messages. Again, I would employ people to have in your teams. And I think the good thing about government and large departments is perhaps you can have people working across a range stuff and you start to build up resources, etc. So, what I've learned about, and from people with intellectual disability and in planning stuff for them, who is your audience? Who are they? Where are they? Where do they live? You'll need to find this out for whatever specific materials you're making. And it may be information about something to do with intellectual disability, but it may be just everyday information too, perhaps something's changed with how you access your Medicare card. So, everyone will need that. I'm always mindful of where people will be when they get the information, will they be getting it on the phone? Who will be with them when they get it? Will they be tired? Will they be stressed? Etc. That all impacts how you take information in and how you can process it. And when you're stressed in a crisis, it's harder to take information. So again, it's easier to go back to messaging that can be repeated. That's clear. That's simple.

Or more than ten years ago now I'd say... Before we had the NDIS, I worked with a group of people with intellectual disability to map out all the points of things that we took us ages to go around the boardroom and all the different points of things. So, it was like, we want everyone to know about this. So, if you chatted to someone when you were at the supermarket, it should be easy for them to say you could speak to the NDIS or that. So, you need to be able to speak to the people on the phone when you read the information. There's posters out and about their stuff when you're at school, the things. So, I think we talk a lot about printed information and information online, but it's also all the other points of contacts, what happens when someone rings up on the phone? Do they have to press 10 buttons to get through to something? Or will they have a friendly warm welcome on the end of the phone, because they've rung up the person knows about the project, knows what they're ringing and has got the time to spend with them? Having time is another important factor with regards to giving people time to process the information, to decide what they may do next, and to come back and to be able to ask questions. They're making decisions or things on the fly or on the hop can be really, really hard. And we don't like to put people under pressure. And often people with intellectual disability will acquiesce and say, Yeah, I understand it. No one wants to say, Oh, I don't understand it," "I don't get it." So, I think we have to be super mindful of that. OK. I'm just looking at time. With regards to stuff being online and offline, things have changed a fair bit in the last while and lots of people have had that used COVID to get more tech-savvy. But some people with intellectual disability are super tech-savvy, and that's fine and get on and do stuff. Others have no access at all. So, having to take that into mind, I did a lot of work for IDEAS and for Counsel for Intellectual Disability. And we still sent out lots of information and get stuff into mailboxes, getting things

into people's hands, having face-to-face or being able to talk on the phone to stuff is still really, really important. There is no good having stuff online. People can't access it and they have no idea where to find it. And I know that you won't always have control over the big perhaps websites, but it's make sure you're sending the right link to people or having in your budget from day dot how it will be printed and how be distributed, and not putting the printing and distribution costs onto people 'cause lots of people won't have a printer or they won't have other stuff. The same thing too, with regards to downloading data and having access to stuff, people don't always have or can afford that.

I'm going to quickly talk about Easy English, which some of you will be familiar with. And that's a skilled way of putting together words and meaningful pictures so that the information is easy to understand. I'd recommend your team getting trained up in that and a few people. And then building a suite of resources that you can use. So, you could have templates ready to go for emergencies. You can also make generic documents and then they can be personalised to local areas. And that's a good thing for, say, emergencies or other stuff. So, it might be, everyone has the same sort of document, but at the bottom, it's like, and in New South Wales, you will do x, and the New South Wales people can put it to there. And I think that cuts out a lot of time. I know it's hard to get approval processes. And when you're working in quick lines of stuff, that can be tricky. But pre-doing some of the stuff in the case stuff is important.

And then you'll have more resources to spend on other areas and things, cause you're all not making similar resources. You've got a solid thing to go. With regards to Easy English, the main sort of things we talk about is clear pictures on the left, usually of the page, cause it orientates people to the idea, action words, step points, who, what, where, why, how. Questions can be good, things like, what do I do next? If this happens, do this. And it can be quite conversational. Cut out the jargon. Sometimes you have to explain a term. So, my colleague had said, you put a word list at the back and explain it, but largely cut out the jargon if you can, size 14 font, one idea per sentence.

One of my board members once said to me, "Oh, that document that you showed me, it was just so busy, busy. I just couldn't look at it. So, there was just all of these words coming up and coming, coming up at me. There was no white space." There was no, I guess, time for breathing or resting their eyes. And I think that's important too. Sometimes we want to sort of fill spaces and that doesn't work. I will drop some links into the chat and please ask any questions. I'll come back to them. Access Easy English is a great org that does training in this area and they make lots of documents and materials for people. The good thing about Easy English is it will work for a lot of the population. So, we know that 44% of the general population doesn't have functional sort of literacy and can't read a lot of everyday tasks. If you make this information, it's gonna reach lots of other people and benefit as well. So, I think that's... Sometimes people think I need to have all of these versions. Sometimes you don't, if you make something really good, lots of people can access it. A word of caution is that Easy English is just one way of communicating. There's also videos. We know lots of people watch TV, chat to their friends, use social media. So, same with anything, no eggs in

the one basket, all eggs in one basket is not good. The final thing... How am I going for time, Kate?

KATE BOWMAKER:

Yeah, I think if you finish your final thing and then we will be coming back for some questions and remarks as well.

AINE HEALY:

OK. So, I did live coverage of the bushfires and of COVID last year. And it was intense as it was for many of you as well, I imagine. If there was one thing, it would be send out plain text accessible documents at the same time as you send out everything else. I spent loads of time translating documents that were in PDF format or otherwise, and putting them just into a plain text versions. They were the most popular resources put on the IDEAS website at those at that time, because there was not stuff available. As Jody and Jane said, these things can be life and death. Get relationships with the peak bodies and the other organisations and networks do that ahead of time, build good relationships, they'll help you share stuff, allow some budgeting for that. If you're putting information out, give it to them. They're not going to use it in a bad way. They're going to get it out to people and more quickly. Delayed information is just awful. Having clear info in the first instance, keeps people safe. It shows you to value your audience. It reduces stress when people are already really stressed. It's really hard to find stuff when you're stressed and busy. And it saves you having to make, again, multiple versions of things, like some of the plain text versions can then be taken off and other people can do stuff with them. Put an embargo on them if you need them, but get them out there. And again, build up a bank of things that you can use at events. We know there's going to be more bushfires. We know there's probably going to be messaging. You're going to have to do around heat in summer, you know, this stuff around storm seasons. Again, have stuff ready to go, then you can just drop in the details. I suggest, again, working with a few colleagues and getting a group of you together to do stuff, you can share stuff, it's not as hard you get. But then you get to build your practice up. I've seen over the last ten years, so much more information. And it's just fantastic. So, there's obviously some champions within your departments and stuff already. So, I would just say, keep going and make it measurable and resource it. So, it can happen. That's it.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Thank you so much, Aine. That was really useful information and we've had a couple of questions come through in the chat. And just a reminder to people that you can post questions to our speakers in the chat function. We're going to talk a little bit about some of the other things to consider around particularly diversity of people with disability. And I think we won't cover that in detail. We are running behind time a little bit. But just to make the point that, again, people with disability come from many different backgrounds. Jody spoke a little bit about some of those considerations people in regional and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, people from CALD backgrounds. So, it's just really important, I think, to consider that as well, is that it's not just accessibility, but it's also making sure that the language and the actions that you're taking are sort of considering some of those intersectionalities as well. But what are we going to do is move to our last session today. And I guess wrap up with sort of some practical tips. And then as we mentioned, we've got sort of 15 minutes for some reflections and questions. So basically, we've got sort of ten practical tips that we would like to share based on some of the things

that we've heard today. And we might put a few of these into the chat as well. So, you've heard that it's really important to distil your messages and share them in ways that are accessible to all. So, we know that public policy information is often complex and it does take time to really distil those messages. But most of the time, if you're able to create key messages, even if that's what is your landing page of your website, is that the top information you need to share, distilling some of that information and then making sure that is available in different formats is very important. You will notice that and we've seen a lot of government departments are starting to translate information into Auslan videos definitely as well into that Easy English and Easy Read formats. And sometimes that requires really just distilling that message before do that, to make sure it's practical and able to be understood. The other thing is just using voices of people with disability to help people communicate and articulate a message. So, a little bit of feedback there, might just check everyone's on mute. So, that's really important. And our speakers have mentioned the importance of working with disability organisations and people with disability to help you both share your message out to people with disability, but also to be able to have people with disability help to shift to actually deliver that message and help you to articulate that message is very important as well. The use of video and imagery, which Aine has already spoken about, but very important when it comes to breaking down some of the language or literacy barriers. But also so that you can show that people with disability are part of the community are represented in that video and imagery. And it's really important to think about that. You know, for example, in developing a brand or a campaign creative as you know, you always want images that are representative of the community including people with disabilities. So, it's not about representing people with disability all in one way, all through a person in a wheelchair, for example, but really looking at the diversity of disability and making sure that's represented. Of course, one in five people have disability - so, there's a lot of different people out there who represent that as part of the community. We've touched on this, the importance of starting to develop information early so that you do have time for that translation to Auslan, translation to easy read so that you can book and film and publish those translations. It's really, really critical. And sometimes you are limited, we know by time. And as early as you can think about these things, the better.

We've talked about the importance as well of listening to people with lived experience and how best to communicate. That's really critical and is a piece that can be done through relationships you might have you know, when you can create with disability organisations or people with disability and really encouraging having people with disability in your team can obviously really, really help with that as well. Other practical things are considering things like having a checklist for your organisation. Every organisation is different. So, while there's some generic checklists out there, it can be a good idea to make one or adapters specific to your organisation so that the people who you're giving advice to or working with are really, you know, they can see that that checklist is for them and they can see the practical ways to use it. We'd also suggest really diversifying your channels. So, making sure that you're not always using just the same channel, so just putting an Auslan video on your website, isn't enough. It's really about thinking about the different channels that you can go through and identifying where there are channels that are trusted information. So, sometimes it's not your social media accounts that people with disability are necessarily following or trusting to sort of get their information, but it might be an organisation that they're connected with. So, really trying to push your messages out through some of those varied and trusted places. I've

combined a few of these. So, number nine is just to obviously use the tools that are available to test accessibility. So, many of you know, about and use the WCAG 2.0, web accessibility checklists. And that's great, and that's becoming a real norm within government. But there are also other accessibility checkers. So for example, things built into Microsoft products these days has a Microsoft Accessibility Checker function. There's other devices and ways that you can do some simple accessibility checks on a number of the products and tools that you are providing to people. And lastly, I guess consider the language and the terms used, and this is a really tricky area. Using the right language about disability can be really difficult to navigate, and it can actually scare people. And sometimes I think can prevent people in government in particular from actually communicating quite openly. So, using the right language is important, but probably to work out what that is, you know, it's going to some resources that are available. So, there is the Australian Government style guide on inclusive language. And I think Alix has been putting a few of these documents into the chat for you to be able to access easily. Persons with Disability Australia also has a handy language guide specific to disabilities. And again, I think we've put that in the chat function. So that's another, a couple of resources that you can use. And it's just the golden rule is to just sort of listen as much as possible and understand and follow the preference of the person that you're communicating with. OK. So, there's some additional tips. And I'm looking at time and we've got about 10 minutes to go. What I might do - so Aine is putting a few tips for you as well straight into the chat, which is great. I might just first go to Jane and just ask you, Jane, a question that we've had come in. And you can feel free to also use this time Jane for any final reflections that you might have. But Jane, what are your preferred formats when using a social media platform?

JANE BRITT:

Yeah, sure. So, I guess when using a social media platform, the first thing to think about is having alt text added. That is the function that's in the background, which describes an image it's accessible in terms of Facebook, in Instagram, I'm uncertain about Twitter settings, but I imagine there is something in the back then that allows you to go in and type a visual description that allows the person when the screenreader hits it, that will describe that image to the person. If it can't be adequately conveyed in that way, then it needs to be accompanied by text, that will give enough information for someone who is blind or vision impaired to understand it when they come across it. In terms of the audio aspect of it, I think it's always really important that closed captioning is available and that we're possible that Auslan can be also added. For me, I am more inclined to engage with something where I can turn on the captioning and follow that because I do have the residual vision to do so. But I think, it's important to know what the accessibility settings are for different platforms and to have those in use all the time. I guess for me, in terms of what I'd like to reflect on that is that, it's about having, you know, that thing that was raised before using multiple channels, not just the same channel for thing. It's about having different options that are available to people, whether that be different formats and different ways of communicating the same information. I think something that we've seen today is that there's a really diverse way of communication for different disabilities. And that there might be some that directly conflicting with each other, say visual imagery that someone who is blind can't see, but then that needs to be audio described so that they can understand it. But then say for the video content, if there is no closed captioning or Auslan, then you might have a difficulty for someone who is hard of hearing or deaf to be able to access that. So, I think it's always being mindful about

the best methods of communication with a broad range of your audience. So, I'd say my top takeaway really would be to have multiple channels, multiple formats.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Yep. And great. Thanks, Jane. And there's just a quick follow-up question around that, is there a standard or best practice that you'd say for writing alt text?

JANE BRITT:

Yeah, I would guess get across the essential information. You can certainly drop extraneous information, for example, like that the background is yellow, you're just getting what the diagram itself for example is showing. I think the best practice really just to give a very clear description of the essential takeaway that you would want someone - if you're coming across it and getting a very quick understanding of it, how can you best put that into words so that someone else can get that same quick understanding through a minimal amount of words? I think that's what it's about. What I tend to like to do is to divide it up into quadrants. So, if there's something quite complicated, describing it that way, which makes a bit more sense. But I think it goes back to user testing as well. If you are going to use that sort of accessibility tool, if you can have someone that run through it and say, does this work for you? What would need to be tweaked here? Is really important.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Great, thanks, Jane. Aine, there's a question around an organisation working with people who have lived experience of mental and or emotional distress. And the question is around with easy English, how you balance between conveying the information to the individual that you need to without coming across as sort of descending or patronising if you got some advice around that, Aine?

AINE HEALY:

Yeah, thanks. We all work with different range of people. There's always those considerations. And we know people are often at high levels of abuse and other sorts of types of things. So, we do need to be sensitive. And I think for people with intellectual disability too, people don't want to be patronised and they likely have been patronised and bullied in their life. Again, I think it comes back to Jane's, the sort of user testing of stuff, what language are people comfortable with using? Etc. Simplified language doesn't have to be language that is, I don't know, babyish or little like that. It just might be everyday words. It might just might be how it's put together, etc. When we test images for stuff as well, we have realistic things of people, not cartoon images 'cause people think we may be making fun off that as well. So again, it's sort of working with the people around, what language are you comfortable with? How would you like to be addressed? And I think then building up a quite a bank of words. So, whenever I'm working on a large project, we will work on all the words that we use and regularly sort of using them. Then I think maybe then you've got a suite of stuff that you can sort of use and be comfortable with and that people are comfortable with as well.

If you need more info on that, I can put another message in, and I'll find some specific stuff for you afterwards.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Alright. Thanks, Aine. There has been a question as well, that's come through around doing co-design, I'll just let you know that we do have another session on the 13th of July that's about accessible engagement. So, I might leave that one. Hopefully, you can join that session because we'll talk a little bit more about that process, although it is important as well for the communication side of things, cause co-designing products and information with people with disability is really important. I just gonna go to a question for Jody. Jody, I was wondering if you wanted to reflect on, are any mainstream media to focus on when communicating with all Australians? So, do you think in terms of reaching the vast range of people that there should be particular types of mainstream media or otherwise to get that message out quite broadly?

Just checking we have our interpreter. We aren't hearing the interpreter at the moment.

Sorry, we're just not hearing the interpreter. There we go. Yeah.

JODY BARNEY:

OK, sorry. Hi, everybody. I think Julie might be frozen at the moment, so there's a bit of a technical issue, so I'm not really quite sure. But now that question regarding mainstream media getting the information out there, I think it would be really wonderful if there was an opportunity to share responsibility, making sure that everything could be brought together or work together, that co-design process. And then that could actually be raised with the government and organisations and NGOs as well. And that would benefit everybody. Plus the individual like me, then with the lived experience, then we would be able to work in collaboration as well, finding the most appropriate method and process because of the different channels around Australia and differences and different limitations and the media within the communities as well and access, making sure that we have a standard approach, making sure that the media can get that information out there and is accessible to people with disabilities around Australia.

Also being very, very clear when you're working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with disabilities, if you do have an organisation, the disability action plan using that, and communicate with the reconciliation organisations for planning as well to make that you can actually have a match and bring it forward and making sure that it's culturally safe and culturally appropriate and a culturally appropriate approach to get that communication started. And then that would open the channels of communication and the dialogue as well to create sharing and being able to work together within the communities and create networks and connections to be out there within the community. So, we do have wonderful organisations that do the work. So, they should be funded more and also provide training to government organisations, service providers, people who have experience and knowledge to make that connection and learn how to do so, because we know that people have different processes and different ways of working and moving things around and different staff that actually do move around as well. So, it's really, really important to have open communication and open relationships and partnerships with disability organisations to make sure that you can provide that access that is standard and creates and seamless.

KATE BOWMAKER:

Thank you, Jody. It's a really nice area I feel to end on. I'm mindful of time where a couple of minutes over our sort of 3:15, so an hour and 15 minutes.

I mean, we'd love to stay and answer a lot more questions and provide a lot more information. As we said at the beginning, there is a lot to cover in this area. We're really happy to take some of the questions as well that you've been putting into the chat. And see if we can potentially send you some further information about some of those questions. Hopefully, have your details for the registration process. We do plan to sort of make a recording of this and make that available to people who have missed the session today as well. So, in wrapping up, I would like to thank the panel to thank our speakers Aine, Jane and Jody. As you can all imagine, very busy people who are doing a lot of work to improve exactly this, and really appreciate the time that you've been able to take with us today. Just a reminder again, about the second webinar on the 13th of July. So, that's about making sure your consultation and engagement is accessible. There probably be a little bit of crossover as well. So, an opportunity to hear a little bit more. That webinar will actually feature the former Disability Discrimination Commissioner and prominent speaker, Graeme Innes. So that will be - as well as some other speakers. So that will be a great opportunity to hear directly from him. We do encourage you to attend and share that with others. So, thank you all again for your time. We all know you're busy people, especially at the end of the financial year. And thank you again to the Department of Social Services who have put on this seminar for you all. I'm sure they'd love to hear any feedback. We will look to seek some feedback from you and certainly as well, any ideas or things that you'd like to hear more about, please feel free to get in touch. OK. Thank you again, everyone. We'll close the session here.

SPEAKER:

Thank you. Thank you, interpreters. Thank you.... (AUDIO ENDS)