

Advancing Accessible Communication for People with Intellectual Disabilities: Final Research Report

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Introduction

Why was this report done?

The *Accessible Canada Act (ACA)* came into effect in 2019. The goal of the Act is to have Canada be free of barriers by 2040. The Act created another organization. It is called Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC). It was made to create national accessibility standards.

This project is funded by ASC. This project will identify best practices. It will provide recommendations. These will help when accessibility standards are being made. The project will explore ways to make information more accessible for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. There is not much research or guidelines about this in our country.

The funding from ASC allowed us to do this project. It allowed us to collect information from Canada and around the world. It let us make and test different approaches. It led us to writing this report. It helped us make the recommendations based on what we learned.

Why is this report needed?

Information is a main part of our everyday lives. We need information to help us make decisions. For example, information about the weather helps us make some of our daily decisions. It can affect what we decide to wear. It can help us decide what we can do that day.

Information can also help us make other important decisions in our lives. It can help us manage our money. It can help us keep up our health. It can help us decide who to vote for and so much more.

Everyone needs access to information. We all need to be able to get information that we can understand. There can be negative effects when people can't access information. It can lead to people being left out. It can lead to people being treated unequally. It can lead to people making decisions without the information they need. A lack of access to information can affect many areas of life.

“We all need complete access to relevant information to be able to complete a task, or a form, or digest important helpful information that affects our lives.”

-Family Member

The words ‘accessible communication’ can mean a lot of things. It is most often thought about for people with sensory disabilities. For example, braille is used for people who cannot see. Sign languages are used for people who cannot hear.

But it is not often thought about for people with intellectual disabilities. It is assumed that this group will have someone to help them. So information is not made accessible for them.

There may be some people with intellectual disabilities who have help. But there are others who do not. Either way, the information should be accessible to them. It should be communicated in a way that people can understand on their own.

“People with disabilities in general, are an afterthought when it comes to anything related to emergency response or policies. Policies are usually made for the dominant majority first and then kind of jury-rigged a little bit at the end or adapted at the end for people from underrepresented communities in general. And that comes from not having people with intellectual disabilities at decision-making levels”

-Key Informant

It is important that people with disabilities have the freedom to make their own decisions. This is recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Access to information is a big part of making decisions. People with intellectual disabilities need access to information. They need it in formats they can easily use and understand.

Guidelines and rules are needed. This will require information to be provided in accessible formats. This will help people with intellectual disabilities take part in society. It will help everyone to be able to use and understand information.

“Everything that the government is offering to anyone in this country should be accessible to everyone in this country. The minute you have an exception, then you're not being inclusive anymore.”

- Family Member

What We Did

These are the 3 main parts or phases of the project.

1. The Discovery phase
2. The Testing phase
3. The Validation phase

These phases are described below. There is information on the activities we did and what we learned.

Discovery Phase

The first part was called the Discovery phase. The goal was to collect information to answer these questions.

- How does the federal government communicate information to people with intellectual disabilities and their families?
- What is already known about accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities?

The Discovery phase had six different parts.

- A Literature Review
- A Jurisdictional Scan
- Key Informant Interviews
- Focus Groups
- National Survey
- Community Consultations in Nunavut

Each of these parts is described below.

Literature Review

A literature review is a summary of other information. It looks at what other people have written. It looks at other research. It looks at what self-advocates have said. It looks and what professionals have said. It looks at what policy makers have said. It looks at different journals, articles, books and reports.

Our focus was on accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities. We wanted to find out what is already known. We searched journals. We searched other databases. Our review covers the important things that have been written on this topic.

Jurisdictional Scan

A jurisdiction is an area or a place. A jurisdictional scan is a summary of what different places are doing about an issue or topic. It looks at government policies and laws. It looks at guidelines that groups use to address an issue.

Our focus was on what is being done to make information accessible for people with intellectual disabilities. We looked at different places. We looked at what is being done in Canada. We looked at what is being done in other parts of the world. We looked for any guidelines, standards, policies or laws about this topic.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews are a way to collect information by speaking to people. It is usually done one person at a time. A key informant is a person who has experience or expertise on a topic.

We looked for people to interview. We looked for experts who had written articles about accessible communication. We looked in our networks. We looked at our partners. We looked at self-advocates and family members.

We wanted to know what each person had to share about their experiences. We wanted to find out what they knew.

We spoke to 15 people for our key information interviews. They were in the following groups.

- There were 7 researchers. They had studied accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities.
- There were 3 government officials. They are involved in communications.
- There were 5 people from community organizations. They worked with people with intellectual disabilities. Or they were experts in plain language.

“I think co-creation is a really big one where you're inviting people from this community to be part of your communication process. And not just as an afterthought...User testing is essential. I don't think anything can be put out there without user testing.”

-Key Informant

Each group was asked the same questions. But we also asked unique questions. These may have come up during the interview.

After the interviews, we reviewed our notes. We looked for common ideas that people spoke about. We looked for similar areas of information or themes.

Focus Groups

A focus group is another way to collect information. It is usually done by speaking to a small group of people. The group can share their ideas with each other.

We wanted to speak with adults with intellectual disability or self-advocates. We also wanted to speak to family members. We wanted to understand what makes communication more accessible for this group.

We found people for the focus groups through the networks of our project partners. Self-advocates and family members were also co-hosts of the focus groups. They helped the research team to conduct the focus groups. The questions we asked were developed with our project partners.

We hosted 9 focus groups. There were 59 self-advocates and family members that took part. They came from all across Canada.

We wanted to find the answers to these questions.

- Where do people find information?
- What makes it hard to find and understand information?
- What makes it easier to find and understand information?

The focus groups were recorded. They were typed in to text. We reviewed the text. We organized the information. We looked for common ideas that people spoke about. We looked for similar areas of information or themes.

National Survey

A survey is a way of collecting information. A survey asks people a set of written questions that they can respond to.

We made an online survey. It was in English, French and Inuktitut. It was about people's experiences with government information. The survey was only meant for some people. These are the rules we had for taking part in the survey.

- The person had to be 18 years or older.
- The person had to be an adult with an intellectual disability.
- Or the person had to be a family member of an adult with an intellectual disability.
- Or the person had to be a paid support staff.

People could do the survey online, on paper or over the phone. They could do it on their own or with help. This could be from a support person or from the research team.

These are the numbers on our survey.

- 438 people did part of the survey
- 349 people submitted the survey
- 202 were people with intellectual disabilities
- 97 were family members
- 50 were paid staff

We reviewed the surveys. We organized the information. We looked for common answers that people gave to the questions.

Community Consultations in Nunavut

A community consultation is another way to collect information. It is a way to get feedback and suggestions on a research project.

We put together a short document. It was about the barriers to communication that we had heard so far. It came from the focus groups with self-advocates and family members.

We connected with a group in Nunavut. The Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society (NDMS) worked with us. They shared the document with some of their members to review. They presented it to community members to discuss the barriers. We asked them to tell us if they agree or let us know if we missed anything.

In total, 14 people took part. They represented all 3 regions in Nunavut, as below.

- 6 from Iqaluit
- 2 from Rankin Inlet
- 2 from Gjoa Haven
- 2 from Cambridge Bay
- 1 from Arviat
- 1 from Pangnirtung

What did we learn from the Discovery phase?

We studied what we learned from the different parts of the Discovery phase. These are the 5 main themes that we found.

1. Use a 'nothing about us without us' approach.
2. There are gaps but there are also opportunities.
3. Accessibility takes work but it is necessary.
4. No single format is perfect so offer more than one.
5. Support people are important.

Here is more information about each theme.

Theme 1: Use a 'Nothing about us without us' approach.

Accessible information needs to be made with the group it is meant for. This means working directly with self-advocates and support people. It means working with their community organizations. This will create materials that are accessible for them. This key finding came up again and again. It came up in all of the Discovery phase activities.

“Hire someone from the disability community who has lived experience...It’s important for people to feel connected.”

- *Self Advocate*

Theme 2: There are gaps but there are also opportunities.

There is not much law on accessible information in Canada. The laws and policies that we found were not very good. They did not fully consider the communication needs of people with intellectual disabilities. There are many areas that need to be improved. The Discovery phase showed ways to address these gaps. Here are some examples of what can be done.

- Make any current laws stronger. This can be done by making standards. These can provide specific guidelines. This will help to communicate information that is accessible for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Use the expertise that already exists. Government has different areas of expertise about accessible communication. These areas need to be brought together. They need to form a resource hub. This will improve knowledge. It will help others follow the best practices that have already been found.
- Work with community organizations. Work with the groups who work with people with intellectual disabilities. Everyone has a part to play to make and promote accessible formats.

Theme 3: Accessibility takes work but it is necessary.

It is not easy to make accessible information. It takes time, effort and resources. It also takes advocacy and political will. These are needed to advance standards in both policy and practice. The work may be challenging but it is necessary. It will help meet the information needs of people with intellectual disabilities. It will also help Canada to follow the Convention. It will help Canada meet its commitment to making information accessible.

“Sometimes society assumes that if we have disabilities, that we can't understand stuff, so they hold back when explaining. And that's not fair, because everybody deserves access to information. So, I think it's important to include the details so we are included.”

-Self Advocate

Theme 4: No single format is perfect so offer more than one.

People with intellectual disabilities are not all the same. They have diverse needs and skills. We found out that there is not one specific format that is preferred by all people with intellectual disabilities. This was found in the focus groups, surveys and interviews as well. It is important to have different formats. There isn't one way that works for everyone. Even with different formats, some people may still want or need help.

But there were some common things in all accessible formats.

- They use clear and simple language.
- They use visual aids.
- They use consistent formatting.

Theme 5: Support people are important.

Support people have an important role. They help people with intellectual disabilities with information. Family members also help with this. They help them find it. They help them make sense of it. They help them use it. Support people can also help with finishing tasks. They can help with

getting to appointments. Although many people with intellectual disabilities have support people, not all do.

Accessible information can help people do things on their own. It can help them be independent. But support people still have an important role. Some people have major barriers when it comes to communication. They will need help with information. Support people need to be able to understand information so they can share it. Support people need to be thought of as part of an approach to accessible information.

“I have a PSW [Personal Support Worker] I always get help from. She completes forms and prints them for me and helps me file and find them later.”

-Self Advocate

We used what we learned from the Discovery phase. This helped us to make test materials. These included Easy Read documents, guides, videos and audio tracks.

Testing Phase

This phase of the project was about using what we learned. We used what we learned in the Discovery phase and made sample materials. The goal of this phase was to test and evaluate the different formats.

Creating the Materials

We picked the topics and the formats for the test materials.

The topics we picked came from a question in our survey. The question asked people about what kind of government information they look for. We used the topics most people picked, as below.

- Disability Tax Credit
- Voting
- Passports
- Status Cards

The formats we picked came from all the parts of the research we did. We created the following materials.

- Easy Reads that use drawings of people and objects.
- Easy Reads that use photos of real people and objects.
- Easy Reads that have an option to hear the words in audio.
- An Easy Read that has a participation guide.
- Video that uses drawings of people and objects.
- Video that uses photos of real people and objects.

We made these materials in both English and French.

Easy Read is an accessible way to show information. It uses short simple words and sentences. The font is big. There is lots of white space. Information is divided into clear sections with headings. The information is shown in bullet points. Images are used next to the words to help with understanding.

A Participation Guide is a tool. It helps families or workers to involve the person they are supporting as much as possible. The guide has ideas and tips. It shows how to work together. It explains how to connect the topic to the person's everyday life. It shows how to explain information in a way that is easy to understand. These guides often come with other documents like application forms or Easy Reads.

Testing the Materials

We tested our materials in 2 ways.

- The first round of testing was through a website. This was a private website. People could look at the materials and type in their feedback.
- The other rounds of testing were through focus groups. We listened to what people said about the material.

We put all of our materials on a private webpage. We asked people to give us their feedback. We asked people to look at the different types of material. We asked people to compare them to each other. We asked them some questions about each one. We asked if they understood the information. We asked what formats they liked best. We followed up with people who made comments on the webpage. We wanted to better understand their feedback. We wanted to know why they liked some formats more than others.

“It was really good. Exceptional. Because it's a video explaining to someone who hasn't voted much, they should be putting this in the high schools.”

-Self Advocate

We looked at all the feedback. We made some changes to the test materials. Then we did focus groups. In the focus groups, we showed people the updated materials and asked for their feedback.

“Sometimes navigating the government's website is really difficult. And sometimes when you think you found the direct link, you found a link that maybe just has some information, but not the actual application. So, I think that including the link makes it really nice and straightforward.”

-Self Advocate

The Testing and Validation phase confirmed some of our findings. Self-advocates and family members agreed with us. They also thought that many of the themes from the Discovery phase were important. They also

added more details. This helped us understand the parts that made the information accessible for them.

“We need to go to the people whose needs are not being met, for them to critique and provide input.”

-Family Member

Here is an example. The Discovery phase showed how important it is to have many different formats. The literature review showed that there is not one format that is better or more preferred. The Testing and Validation phase helped us to understand why.

It confirmed that people with intellectual disabilities are a diverse audience. They have diverse needs. They have different preferences. Our testers liked that materials had visuals. This helped them to understand. But some liked the drawings better. They found them familiar from school. And some did not like the drawings. They thought the drawings were childish. They preferred photos of real people.

We looked at how the content and the context had a role in what people liked best. This helped us when we made our best practices guidelines. (See Appendix E)

The Discovery phase also showed the important role that support people play. They help self-advocates find, understand and use government information. So we tested a tool made with supporters in mind. We got some tips from families. We put these ideas in a format that will help involve people with intellectual disabilities. This kind of tool will help the government of Canada. It fits well with the country's commitment to the Convention. (See Appendix D)

"We're the ones that have been advocating for the entirety of our kids lives, to be included, and to have meaningful participation and to live a good life. It's when we hand our kids off, when they leave home - If staff don't understand or recognize how important that is for that individual, they may or may not choose to support that individual in that process."

- Family Member

Validation Phase

This phase of the project is about confirming information. This is called validation. We review, summarize and validate what we learned in the other phases.

We took what we learned from the Discovery and Testing phases. We put these into draft recommendations. We did 3 focus groups to validate the information.

There were 20 self-advocates and families from across Canada who took part. We had 2 English groups and 1 French group. Some of the people had already tested some of our materials. But some had not. The goal of these focus groups was to confirm our findings. We wanted to make sure what we learned was correct. We wanted to see if it made sense to people in the focus groups.

We also spoke to Indigenous communities in Nunavut. We held 2 consultations. We wanted to get feedback from the community and Elders. We wanted to know if they agreed with our recommendations. Twelve Nunavummiut with disabilities and 6 Elders took part in the consultations. There was live translation so everyone could take part.

We made some changes based on what people told us. We made a second draft of the recommendations. We presented the second draft to our Advisory Committee. They reviewed it. They gave us feedback. The Advisory Committee has members from each research partner. There are also 2 self-advocates and a family member on the committee.

Finally, we are presenting what we learned from this project in this report. It has our Recommendations. It also has Best Practices for creating accessible communications.

Recommendations

We did three phases of testing. We learned a lot. Self-advocates and family members looked at materials and ideas. They told us what they thought.

We put what they told us together. Then we made 9 recommendations. These are things government should do.

We heard that government materials do not meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. They are not easy to read. They are not easy to use. This can change. There are better ways to present information. It can be made easier to read and understand.

Only people with intellectual disabilities can tell us what is accessible to them. They use government information. They know what they need. They should be included in all steps of creating accessible communications.

“If you're actually embedding [including] somebody with intellectual disabilities from the very beginning, helping you make decisions about how to communicate and what to communicate, that is the best practice.”

-Key Informant Interview

People with intellectual disabilities and their families are diverse. They may also need other accommodations like these below.

- Sign language
- Braille
- Large print
- High contrast
- Devices that help people read and communicate

This report comes from what people with intellectual disabilities and their families told us. It is about what they need. It is not intended to replace other accessibility requirements. For example, it is not intended to replace the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These are also important. We want to show other ways to help.

Here are our recommendations.

Recommendation #1

The government should always use clear and simple language.

Materials should use clear and simple language. This helps people understand them. All government materials should have a version like this.

Documents should use short sentences and simple words. These are some examples of clear and simple writing.

- Easy Read documents
- Plain Language documents

People from Nunavut told us how clear and simple language helps them. It helps everyone understand. It shows that the government is open and honest in their information.

Elders told us simple language brings people together. Everyone understands things the same way. This makes it easier for them to work together and help each other.

Read more about Easy Read and how to use it in Appendix A.

“Plain language is important if you’re struggling to understand...

Plain language makes the information more accessible.”

- Self Advocate

“This extends to serving people with identified disabilities and the entire population. I think it would improve trust in political systems and in government, where language is clear, and not cloaked in flowery writing.”

- Family Member

Recommendation #2

The government should offer more than one way to get information.

People access information in different ways. They should be able to get it in different formats.

Some people do not know how to use computers or smart phones. Some people do not have access to the internet. Some people cannot afford to pay for these things. Information that is online should also be printed on paper.

People like to get information in different ways. They like to read, listen and watch. This means there should be more than just one way to get

information. For example, information could be written and also in a video. Or it could be written and also have an audio recording.

Different formats are important for different cultures. For some people, speaking and telling stories is important. It is how they teach history. It is how they pass on their culture. Elders told us audio recordings help with this. It is the way their culture shares information.

Read more about using videos to communicate in Appendix B. Read more about using audio to communicate in Appendix C.

“When I’m explaining something we had to repeat things many times and we had to show her [our daughter] in many different ways. Multiple format is really handy.”

- Family Member

“I think information should be easy to access and available in a bunch of different formats to make it accessible to anyone including those who don’t speak or read English and people who have all different kinds of disabilities.”

-Self Advocate

Recommendation #3

Government materials should be simple but still have all the main details.

All the important information must be in all documents. It cannot be left out of plain language or Easy Read documents. Every format must have the same information. Everything in the written document has to be in the video. Everything in the video has to be in the audio recording.

People with intellectual disabilities have a right to equal access to information. They have to get the same information as everyone else.

It is hard to know what to include in every document. People with intellectual disabilities and their families can help. They can say what is important.

When there is a lot of information it can be broken up. There can be a series of short videos or Easy Read documents. This helps people understand. They can get the information in smaller pieces.

Some people want more information. The government should tell them where they can learn more. This should be part of every document.

“I definitely agree with this, because it's not fair to keep some information from us just because of our disabilities. We have a right to know everything that everybody else does.”

- Self Advocate

“To deliver something like information about COVID or taxes in a very plain language way that we can start at one level and scale up as needed would be so helpful.”

- Family Member

Recommendation #4

Government materials should explain what people need to do and why.

Sometimes the government asks people for things. They are asked to answer personal questions. They are asked for private information like their birthdate or their gender. They are asked to do something like fill out a form or visit an office. People with intellectual disabilities told us they want to know why. This helps them decide what information they want to share. It helps them decide what to do.

Elders in Nunavut told us the same thing. They want to know the reason for doing something. This lets them make better decisions. It helps create trust.

People should be told all the things that could happen. They need to be told what happens if they do not answer all the questions. They need to know what will happen if they do not follow all the instructions.

For example, passports need a photo. The photo has to be signed by 2 people. People want to know why the photo needs to be signed. They should be told why.

They should also be told what happens if the photo is not signed. They could be told that it will take longer to get passport. They could be told they will not get a passport.

“Explain why you have to prove yourself and why can another person vouch for you”

-Self Advocate

“This concerns our private lives and confidential information”

- Self Advocate

Recommendation #5

Government materials should be provided in many places at the time it is needed.

Government materials should be easy to find. People with intellectual disabilities are everywhere. They will look for information everywhere. They will look in person and online. Here are some places materials should be provided.

- First Nation offices
- High schools
- Universities
- Libraries
- Government offices
- Hospitals

Materials should be printed out and online.

There are other ways people with intellectual disabilities get information. They have groups they trust. This includes disability group and agencies. It also includes support people.

Some people with intellectual disabilities get most of their information from groups like these. These groups should get government materials. They can share them with people with intellectual disabilities.

Clear and simple versions should be part of all new information. They should go out at the same time as other versions. It is how the government shares information with everyone. It is important.

For example, the government could make new rules for passports. These rules will be sent out in English and French. They should be sent as an Easy Read document at the same time. This will make sure everyone can read them right away.

“Yeah, I definitely agree. And I would also add that it should be a similar setup. Everywhere you go... people can easily identify wherever they are, where the information is.”

-Self Advocate

“Frontline organizations on the ground can be better used. These non-profits are having to do a lot of different things but sometimes they’re the only means of access to government supports or materials.”

- Family Member

Recommendation #6

The government should include tools for family and supporters.

Some people with intellectual disabilities get help from families or support workers. They help explain things. They support people with intellectual disabilities when they make decisions. The government should make tools for families and supporters. They can use these when they help people with intellectual disabilities.

The tools must treat people with intellectual disabilities as adults who can make their own decisions. They have to be part of the process. They have to consent or agree to what happens.

An example is a document called a Participation Guide. This is a tool for families or support workers. It tells them how to include the person they are supporting. It gives tips and ideas about how to do the following.

- How to work together
- How to connect the topic to everyday life
- How to explain things in a way that is easy to understand

These tools can help people with intellectual disabilities and their families and supporters.

The tools need to be easy to understand. They should be available in other languages. They should include different cultures.

Read more about making a Participation Guide in Appendix D.

“In this guide, there could be a resource for the helper. And maybe they could get tips on how to feed me new information.”

- Self Advocate

“Having a daughter who does not communicate in any way, I think it’s about meaningful participation for her and how she’s included in the process.”

- Family Member

Recommendation #7

Government materials should have a phone number and website address.

Websites are a way to give more information. They can have extra information that is not in a printed document. People often go to websites to learn more.

Websites should be in plain language. They should include other languages. They should include other cultures.

There should always be a phone number. People can call the number to speak to a real person. This is a way to get answers to their questions.

It should only take a few steps to reach a real person. It should be easy to understand how to do this.

People should be able to call at a time that is good for them. The phone service should be there on weekends and after working hours. It should be free.

Phone service should be available in other languages. There should be people to talk to who understand different cultures.

“And I would also like to suggest that the phone number should be available on weekends, too because people have lives to live and still do stuff on the weekend.”

- Self Advocate

“I'm definitely more computer savvy than savvy on the phone. So, I love when there's a clickable link.”

- Self Advocate

Recommendation #8

The government should write documents that have clear information and use the same format.

Information should be broken down into smaller sections. People can read a little bit at a time. This is easier to understand.

Processes should be broken down into steps. Each step should be simple. It should be explained in clear language. This makes the whole process easy to follow.

Documents should be short. There should not be too many words on each page. There should not be long areas of text to read.

Documents should have the same formats. Things should look the same in different documents.

This helps people understand different documents. They learn what to look for. It makes it easier to move around in a document. It makes it easier to find information.

“I agree, because if it’s the usual format that we see.... we're used to it. It could help us understand that information better.”

- Self Advocate

“Even those without disabilities could use this. This should be the default for all government communication.”

- Family Member

Recommendation #9

The government should use images to help explain the information.

Every document should have one format with photos or drawings. These help explain information. For example, Easy Reads and videos will have photos or drawings.

Formats that do not have images can be used. These include audio recordings or documents that just have text. These should be for extra information. They should not be the only format.

Images should show all kinds of people. They should reflect what people in Canada look like. There should be people with and without disabilities. There should be people from different cultures. There should be people who look different from each other. They should all be included.

People with intellectual disabilities want to see people who look like them in materials. They want to see people with disabilities and other people together. They want to see everyone together in the community.

Read more about using images in Appendix E.

“I think it sort of brings it into the real world. Seeing real people makes it easier to think ‘Well, you know, I could do that. I could be one of those people who applies for a passport and gets to go everywhere’.”

- *Self Advocate*

“When people... with intellectual and developmental disabilities go to get our passport, or at least apply to get one.... sometimes it's really anxiety inducing if it's the first time you're planning, or something like that. And so to help ease with some of the anxiety, by having real people in the pictures”

- *Self Advocate*

Conclusion

The Government of Canada has made important progress towards a more accessible country. They have removed barriers and created tools. Laws like the *Accessible Canada Act* help. Plain language guidelines are a good start.

But these resources are not enough. They do not fully address the communication needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

This report will help. Our Best Practices toolkits will help. They will help government. They will show how to create and communicate accessible materials.

There are more than 755,000 people with an intellectual disability in our country. They have many supporters.

It is good that the Government of Canada has a strong communications system. It can be used to follow the recommendations. Appendix F has a roadmap. It shows the possible next steps. It will help to put into practice

accessible communications standards. This will be much quicker and easier to do if we use the resources and platforms that the government already has.

Appendix A: Best Practices for Easy Reads

What is Easy Read?

Easy Read is a way to show written information. It uses simple words and short sentences. The font is big. There is lots of white space. There are clear sections with headings. Information is in bullet points.

Easy Read uses images as well as words. Images are photos, graphics or other visual information. Images are used next to the words. Images support the message in the words. This format makes information easy to understand.

This format also makes Easy Read documents simple to recognize.

Is Easy Read the same as plain language?

No, plain language is different from Easy Read.

Plain language is based on the text or words. Plain language can be presented in many different formats. It can look like any kind of standard writing. It can use images or not. It does not use images in the same way as Easy Read.

But plain language and Easy Read do have some things in common.

What do Easy Read and plain language have in common?

Both use similar ways to make information easy to understand. Both use the following approaches.

- Use simple, everyday words.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
- Explain unfamiliar or technical words.
- Use titles and headings.
- Use bulleted lists.
- Allow for lots of white space.
- Include a table of contents or glossary or both.
- Test the material with the intended audience at every stage.

How to structure an Easy Read

There are no strict rules about how to create an Easy Read document. But there are some important guidelines. They are described below.

Length

- Keep it short.
 - Documents should be 16 pages or less.
 - Documents should have a maximum of 1,600 words.
 - Each page should be no more than 100 words.
 - Pages should be numbered.
 - It should be short enough to use in 15 minutes.

Tone and approach

- Use an approachable, friendly tone.
- Start with an introduction.
- Be clear about what the document is about.
- Be clear about who it is meant for.
- Put the most important information first in each section.
- Use short paragraphs, about 3 sentences long.

Layout and structure

- Put the images in a column on the left.
- Put the text that goes with the image in a column on the right.
- Use 1 image next to each paragraph of text.
 - Images should be 5 to 6 cm (centimetres) in size.
 - Each page should have about 4 or 5 images.
- Keep everything aligned left.
- Use size 30pt font for headings.
- Use at least size 16pt font for body text. Larger font sizes like 18pt or 21pt are even better.
- Be consistent with formatting. For example, use the same way to highlight unfamiliar words. A glossary can be used. The word can be bolded. Or the word can be defined in a text box close by. Use the same format each time.

How to check the quality of an Easy Read document

Only the intended audience can say if an Easy Read document meets their needs. It is essential to involve members of the intended audience. They

need to be involved when the document is being made and when it is being reviewed.

Learn more about Easy Read

Learn more about Easy Read at these links.

- [Photo Symbols](#)
- [Inclusion Europe](#)

Important notes

Easy Read documents should be tested in many ways. They need to be tested for accessibility. They need to be tested with screen readers. They need to be tested with other assistive technology. Files like PDFs need to be accessible. Other parts of the document also need to be tested, like the colour contrast and the font.

Appendix B: Best Practices for Videos

“It is helpful to see a real person go through the process. This helps eliminate some of the fear someone might be feeling.”

Self Advocate

Video information

Videos are very engaging. They allow the audience to use many senses. The audience can look at the images. They can listen to the narrator. They can read the captions. Or they can do all of these together.

Videos can be really helpful. They can explain or show how something is done. Videos can help an audience become familiar with a new experience. Fear and anxiety can be reduced through video. People can see what is involved in a process or new experience.

Key video elements

These are some of the main elements that make a video accessible.

- The video is short. It should be 2 to 3 minutes maximum.
- There is a series of short videos if there is a lot of information to present.
- The video speed can be changed. The audience can make it go faster or slower.
- The narrator speaks clearly. The speaking pace is slow. Testers liked 150 words per minute.
- The video is simple and focused on the important content.
- There is no distracting background music or noise.

- There are no distracting visuals.
- The video has captions.
- The video has accessibility features when required by the audience. This includes described video, signed languages and other features.
- The video buttons are easy to see and locate.
- The video has diverse people. It shows different groups interacting with each other. It shows people with an intellectual disability alongside other people in the community. It shows an inclusive community.
- The video is created in an inclusive way. The intended audience is involved. Our test videos were developed this way. Self-advocates and family members were involved. They helped to create the script. They provided input on the visuals.

Important notes

Videos should be tested in many ways. They need to be tested for accessibility. They need to be tested with screen readers. They need to be tested with other assistive technology.

Other parts of the video also need to be tested. This includes things like the colour contrast and the font.

Plain language principles apply to videos too. Use short, everyday words. Explain any technical words or ideas.

Appendix C: Best Practices for Audio Resources

Audio information

Audio can be a helpful format for information. It can be used on its own. It can be used together with written text. Audio is helpful for many groups of people. This includes people with low literacy. It includes people who are blind or have low vision. It includes people who find it hard to focus. Many people also prefer to listen rather than read.

"It's hard to read and it takes effort because of my tics. With videos I had to concentrate all the time. When I hear it read at my own pace, I have to make less effort to understand."

Self Advocate

Key audio elements

These are some of the main elements that make audio accessible.

- The audio speed can be changed. The audience can make it go faster or slower.
- The narrator speaks clearly. The speaking pace is slow.
- Control buttons for the audio are easy to find and use. This applies across different sources like webpages or PDFs or other places.

- A transcript is available. This is a copy of the audio written out in words. Some people want to use the audio and transcript together. This can help them further understand the information.
- The audio is created in an inclusive way. The intended audience is involved. Our test audios were developed this way. Self-advocates and family members were involved. They helped to create the script. They were audio narrators.

Important notes

Audio formats should be tested in many ways. They need to be tested for accessibility. They need to be tested with screen readers. They need to be tested with other assistive technology.

Plain language principles apply to audio formats too. Use short, everyday words. Explain any technical words or ideas.

Appendix D: Best Practices for Participation Guides

What is a Participation Guide?

A Participation Guide is a tool. It is meant to help people. It can help them take part in a process. It can help them learn about a new thing. It can help them guide another person.

A Participation Guide should help families and workers to involve the person they are supporting. The guide has ideas about how to work together. It has tips on how to connect the topic to everyday life. It explains information in a way that is easy to understand.

Participation Guides are often available with other documents. They can come with application forms. Some Easy Read documents also have a guide.

Why are Participation Guides important?

Information comes in many different formats. It can be very accessible. But some people may still require support. They may not be able to find, understand and use the information on their own.

Participation Guides are helpful to many groups. They help people with disabilities. They help people who work with newcomers to Canada. They help people to understand government information.

Our research confirmed that some people with intellectual disabilities get help with government information. They get help from family members. They get help from paid workers.

Family members help the person understand the information. They also help by making the person feel less worried about the information. Paid workers help by offering resources. They also help by reading existing information.

More than half the time the help is given to simplify the language.

People are already getting help with understanding information in everyday life. A Participation Guide can help this process even more. Guides can give supporters ideas about how to explain complex information. Guides can give ways to encourage the person to be involved in the process.

Supporters want and need tools to help with this process.

What should be included in a Participation Guide?

Participation Guides must promote supported decision-making. People with disabilities should be treated as capable adults. This means including them in the process. It means doing things with their consent.

Language in the guide should be about 'doing with' rather than 'doing for.' There should be plans and actions for how to involve the person being supported. All the information in a Participation Guide is based on these ideas.

Here are some key parts to include in a Participation Guide.

1. Tell supporters to prepare and explain the situation before they start talking. Ask them to explain why the topic is important. Ask them to explain why it matters to the person. People like to understand **why** they're asked to do something. They want to know why it is important to them on a **personal level**.

Example: Disability Tax Credit

Scenario: A family member is helping someone apply for the credit. The Participation Guide will encourage talking about the Disability Tax Credit. Discuss what the credit will mean for this person. Talk about the practical ways it will help. Explain what paying less income tax means. Explain how the person will have more money. They can use that money for groceries or rent or other things.

2. Make sure everyone understands the basics. Give supporters the information they need to explain ideas clearly. This could include a list of important words, a checklist, or answers to common questions. People advocating for themselves and those helping them can use these tools. It will help them to make sure they're on the same page.

The Participation Guide might have a glossary. This would explain terms like 'income tax' in plain language. It might have a Frequently Asked Questions section. This would have answers to the usual questions on the credit. This includes questions about whether someone has to apply for the credit each year.

3. Give advice on how to break the work into smaller parts. Present those parts over several sessions. This can be useful for things that are complicated or not very interesting. Start to talk about who should be part of the process.

The Participation Guide might suggest a pace to follow. It could start with talking about the idea of the Disability Tax Credit. This would include why it matters to the person. The guide might suggest showing the person the application form on another day. The next step might be talking about the medical visit.

The guide might suggest involving different people. Ask the person who they want involved in the process. Consider inviting the person's siblings. Or invite people from the person's support network. The process can be more than filling out the form. It can be a chance for social connection.

4. Give different ways to include the person in the process in a meaningful way. Supported decision making believes that everyone is able to make their own decisions. Participation Guides think everyone can and should be included. It doesn't matter if their disability is complex. It doesn't matter if their communication is not clear. Families or supporters who know the person well can often understand what they like and how they communicate.

The Participation Guide will suggest many ways to involve the person in the process. The person may be involved in all parts of the process. They may understand all the details. But other people may not. They may understand some of the process. For example, a family member may explain what they are doing for the person. They might explain that they are doing this to help the person save money and have a better life

The guide highlights 2 important ideas. One is that it is important to inform the person of what is happening. The other is that it is important to get the person's consent or agreement.

5. Plan with universal design in mind. Government information should be easy for everyone to use. Lots of people could find a Participation Guide helpful. It's not just for people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters. Participation Guides help everyone get information easily. They should be set up so people can find them easily with forms or documents.

The Participation Guide may be valuable to other groups. It may be useful to people with dementia and their supporters. It may help to engage the person and explain complicated ideas.

6. Use plain language for everything. If your Participation Guide mentions other material to look at, make sure those are easy to understand too. Sending people to things with hard words or legal

language might create more barriers. If the Participation Guide has to include those items, it can remind supporters to read them first so they can explain them better.

Important notes

Participation Guides should be tested in many ways. They need to be tested for accessibility. They need to be tested with screen readers. They need to be tested with other assistive technology. Other parts of the document also need to be tested, like the colour contrast and the font.

Plain language principles apply to Participation Guides too. Use short, everyday words. Explain any technical words or ideas.

Appendix E: Best Practices for Using Images

Images

Images help us understand things better. They can be photos, drawings or icons. Images can be used in Easy Read documents. They can be used in other written materials or in videos.

Most research shows mixed results when it comes to what kind of image is most useful. Our testing offered some guidelines to follow when using images. The audience has diverse needs and preferences. Using many different formats of images is often the most accessible way for the diverse audience.

Here are some key elements to think about when using images.

- Photos are often the best way to show real people. Photos and videos using real people are helpful to tell a story. These are also helpful when doing role play or getting ready for a scenario. The expressions on real people's faces help the audience to understand. It helps the audience relate to the people and the information.
- Drawings can be helpful to show everyday things like a mailbox. Drawings can also be used to show things we can't see like feelings or a virus. Some research shows that drawings might be better to use if the subject matter is hard to talk about like death or abuse. These emotions might also be hard for real people to act out.
- People with intellectual disabilities want to see themselves in images. Photos and drawings should include them. Images should show diverse people. They should be interacting with each other in an

inclusive community. People with intellectual disabilities should be shown as equals with other community members. All models used for images should be fairly paid for their work.

- Pictures should be chosen or made with help from the intended audience. We made Easy Read documents for testing. We took photos for the documents. We had models for the photos. The models were people with intellectual disabilities.
- Images should make sense to the people looking at them. Images should consider the lived experiences of the audience. For example, images of cars could be used to show transportation. But if the audience mostly uses public transport like buses, the image of cars will not mean the same to them.

Important notes

Images should be tested in many ways. They need to be tested for accessibility. They need to be tested with screen readers. They need to be tested with other assistive technology. They also need to include alternative text or captions.

Images should show the same diversity as the audience who will use the material. This must include the many different identities that people in Canada may have.

Appendix F: Roadmap for Implementation

Research with government staff

Part of our research was done through interviews. We interviewed communications staff that work for federal or provincial governments. We asked them the following questions.

- What is the process the government uses to produce and publish communications materials?
- How is accessibility considered when communications materials are developed?
- What is the approval process for government communications?
- Are there training processes to introduce new communications standards or share best practices?
- What would make it easier to apply and use accessible communication standards?

We learned a lot from these interviews. We learned that each government department has its own communications team. Each has its own process to create communications. The sizes of the teams are different from one department to the next. The ability of each team is different. Some teams do most of the work internally. Some of the teams outsource work to other departments. Some are working early in the process on content. But others don't start work until the content has already been developed.

There was one part of communications that was similar across all parts of government. That part is tight timelines. These timelines can be a barrier to accessibility. Accessibility may be overlooked when a communications

response is needed right away. It is hard to make sure everyone can understand it before it is sent out. Sometimes accessibility is only thought about in terms of websites.

Staff had ideas about how to apply and use accessible communication standards. They thought about using things the government already has, like resources and platforms. Here are some suggestions they came up with. These can help put accessible communication standards in place.

1. Give more time to design for accessibility. This is like the time given for web accessibility. Or the time given to translate from English to French or the other way around. New tasks should not be added without enough time and resources to do them.
2. Make sure accessible communication standards are clear. Include concrete examples of how it is done.
3. Use the knowledge government already has. Use it to make and promote information about accessible communication. Use it to make a place where resources are available to everyone. It helps everyone learn more about making accessible communications when these groups work together. The following list shows different departments and their communications areas.

a. **The Treasury Board Secretariat**

Has the Government of Canada's communications policy and Federal Identity Program.

Has a Strategic Communications Group. This group sends information to every government department and agency.
May have information about who is using accessible communications and who is not.
May have information on which areas need to be improved.

b. The Office of Public Service Accessibility

Has the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service.
Supports plans, programs and laws.

c. Communications Community Office

It is part of the Privy Council Office.
It created an Accessibility Portal in 2020.
The portal supports the government communications community.

d. Public Services Procurement Canada

May have information about how the government uses plain language writers and editors. May have information about how much work is done in-house and how much is contracted out.

e. Canadian School of Public Service

Central arm of the federal government that provides training and learning services.
May have resources about accessible communication.
May be a platform to reach civil servants.

May be able to use the platform to educate about best practices for accessible communication.

4. Involve people with intellectual disabilities. Involve them when materials are being made and reviewed. Make sure all focus groups include people with an intellectual disability and their family members. This includes when contracting out services. Make sure people with an intellectual disability are involved in training. This can be in both the design and the delivery parts. Hire advisors with an intellectual disability. They can help review materials. Contract a self-advocate group. Engage them to help with this work.
5. Work closely with disability organizations. Work with them to make content that meets the needs of the community. These needs may be about accessibility and culture.

Try sharing information through disability organizations. The audience may have a relationship with the organization. They may already trust the organization. Consider working with national disability groups. Work with them to create different audience identities. These identities can be used by government communications teams. The identities can help those teams understand the needs of the audience when it comes to communication. These identities can also increase the understanding of how diverse accessibility needs can be. The identities also help to break down myths about people with disabilities. It may also be possible to work with existing groups of

stakeholders.

6. Find the people who support accessible communication standards. These people can be inside or outside of government. They must understand accessibility. They must be willing to do more than just check a box. Accessibility must become part of the process and culture. It must be part of every government communication.

7. Make sure any new accessible communications standards work with the old ones. Many accessible materials share the same values and approach. Plain language and Easy Read follow many of the same principles. Both were created with universal design. Both leave it to the audience to decide if the material meets their needs. Both consider wording as well as structure and design. Do not make standards more complicated than they need to be. Do not make separate or special standards.