Accessible Information Standard

The Accessible Information Standard is a new standard that, from July 2016, will apply to all adult NHS and social care services. NHS England are delivering a series of briefing sessions to support health and social care organisations to deliver the standard. Healthwatch Bristol attended one of these briefings and has produced this summary to raise awareness of the standard.

To read the Accessible Information Standard specification and the Easy Read summary produced by NHS England, click here.

NHS England will be hosting a further briefing event in Bristol on 2 March. Click here for more information.

What is the Accessible Information Standard (AIS)?
- The Accessible Information Standard tells organisations how they should ensure that disabled patients receive information in formats that they can understand and they receive appropriate support to help them to communicate.
- AIS is about equality of access; enabling people to access services independently and appropriately.

Which organisations does the Standard apply to?
- All organisations that provide NHS or adult social care must follow the Accessible Information Standard (AIS) by law.
- Commissioning organisations do not have to follow the standard, but must ensure that services that they commission are adhering to the standard.

By when do organisations have to follow the Standard?
- Organisations must follow the standard in full by 31 July 2016.

How will organisations be monitored on their use of the Standard?
- The AIS will be included in Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspections of services.

Which members of the public does the Standard cover?
The AIS tells organisations how to make information accessible to:
- Patients
- Service users
- Carers and parents

Which forms of information are covered by the Standard?

- AIS applies to all information that is needed for a person to access, understand and utilise their health and social care. This includes, for example, letters about screening appointments, leaflets about self-care or managing a long term condition, face-to-face interactions between health and social care staff and the patient/service user/carer, information on websites that the health or social care service is signposting people to, emails.
- General websites are out of scope, unless the patient is referred to a website for information about their care.

What is the legal, strategic and policy context?

- The AIS is in line with: the Equality Act (2010), the Care Act (2014), the NHS Constitution, Equality Delivery System 2.

How should organisations deliver the Standard?

Organisations must consider implementing the standard in:

- Policy
- Procedure
- Human behaviour (to include staff training as part of continuing professional development)
- Electronic systems

Members of staff working with patients, service users and carers, must do five things. They must:
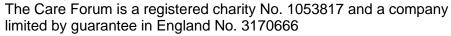
1) **Ask:** does the person have any information or communication needs? And find out how the person's needs can be met. The person should be involved in this process.
2) **Record** the person's needs. Individuals' information and communication needs must be recorded in a set way.
3) **Highlight or flag** up in a person's file that they have communication or information needs and how these needs are to be met.
4) **Share** information about a person's needs with other NHS and adult social care providers.
   Consent must be obtained before information is shared.
5) **Provide** people with information in an accessible way and communication support if they need it.

What is the difference between 'accessible information' and 'communication support'?

- Accessible information is information which is able to be read or received and understood by the individual or group for which it is intended. (For example, written information translated into braille, easy read, large font or audio format; or provision of a BSL sign language interpreter in a face-to-face appointment.)

- Communication support is support which is needed to enable effective, accurate dialogue between a professional and a service user to take place. (For example, the use of picture cards as prompts during a conversation.)

Points to consider when thinking about the information and communication needs of patients, service users and carers:

How are you delivering the information/ what iconic code are you using? (For example, spoken language, written, signed, audio recording.)

- Does the person understand the code you are using? (Do they actually speak British Sign Language or have use assumed this because you know they are Deaf? Do they actually have the literacy level needed to read the appointment letter?)

Is the person able to understand the information you are delivering/ what language code are you using?

- Are you speaking in plain English or using complex terminology?
- Is this the right time to give the person the information?
- What is the person's attention level?
- What is the person's auditory memory ability?
- What is the person's range of known words?

Is the person understanding your meaning/ is the person obtaining your intended meaning or the 'message beyond the words'?

- Is the person required to infer or deduce anything from what you are communicating? Are they able to?
- Is the person able to link new and old information?
- Is the person able to apply the information you are giving them in the present to other (applicable) situations?

More information, including an easy read version of the Accessible Information Standard is available at:
https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/patients/accessibleinfo-2/