Information and Communication Strategy

National Housing Strategy for
Disabled People 2022-2027

Contents

Disability Terminology

The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 (NHSDP) was published in January 2022. Extensive consultation processes were held to inform this document.

The NHSDP uses the term 'disabled people' in its title and for general use throughout the Strategy, the Implementation Plan, and related documents. However, terms for specific groups of people, such as 'people with intellectual disabilities' and 'people with psychosocial disabilities or mental health difficulties', will also be used within the Strategy where appropriate.

In keeping with the development process of the NHSDP, and to ensure that all groups are represented, this Information and Communication Strategy will take a collaborative and inclusive approach to disability terminology. This Strategy uses the term 'disabled people' for general use throughout. However, terms for specific groups of people, such as 'people with intellectual disabilities' and 'people with psychosocial disabilities or mental health difficulties', will also be used within this Strategy, where appropriate.

Introduction

1 The Vision

The vision of this Strategy is that *disabled people will have equitable access to information provided by local authorities and other stakeholders in the housing, health and social care sectors and the disability community, and that local authorities and other stakeholders are communicating effectively and proactively with disabled people, in particular on issues that have a direct impact on the lives of disabled people.*

2 Aim of Strategy

The Strategy promotes the use of accessible information and communication methods that are more inclusive of the specific requirements of disabled people. This Strategy will enable key organisations to put practices in place that will assist them to become more accessible and inclusive, and foster an environment of ongoing learning and development. It is important to be clear at the outset that when 'Organisations' or 'Stakeholder Organisations' are mentioned, to start this could be a particular section of a local authority or Approved Housing Body, government department or agency as opposed to making a commitment on behalf of the overall organisation.

The actions in this strategy are set out in three Stages with timelines for each stage as it is accepted that some actions will take longer than others to implement and some will run consecutively to others.

It should be noted that some organisations may already have started their journey on increasing accessibility to information and use of inclusive communication methods. In such instances these organisations may already be in Stage two or Stage three, and this will be recognised as part of the sign up and reporting on the completion of actions. The timelines set out are the time limits for when actions should be completed but organisations can and may complete the actions in a shorter timeline.

When looking at improving the inclusiveness of information and communications for disabled people, there are some key principles to consider. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Accessibility** – All communication must be accessible. This means that people need to be able to access and understand the information being communicated. Communicating with disabled people in ways that are accessible to them gives people more control and choice in their lives.

- **Language** – Language is extremely important. There are many words and terms that are used to identify disability in Ireland and internationally and the way these words are understood can change across different groups. It is important to be aware of this, and if in doubt, to ask people what their preferences are.

- **Respect** – All meetings, events, consultations, and interactions should be carried out with respect so that meaningful dialogue can take place. Avoiding tokenism is extremely important. Tokenism happens when an organisation wants to appear to have engaged with disabled people but has not done so meaningfully.

- **Participation** – Ireland has signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). One of the commitments contained in the UN CRPD is that organisations should closely consult, prioritise and actively involve Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) also referred to as Disabled Persons Representative Organisations (DPROs) in all public consultations that concern disabled people. DPO/DPROs should be able to bring together the experience of a wider community of disabled people that is representative and accountable to their members. This does not mean other disability organisations and individual disabled people should not be consulted, but that stakeholders are aware of the importance of making all efforts to include DPO/DPROs in consultations. DPO/DPROs have the potential to add significant value to public consultation and prioritising the involvement of such bodies can enhance and create efficiencies around the level of input from a lived experience perspective.

3 Background

This Strategy is part of the initial workplan under Theme 4 of the NHSDP 2022-2027 and is also aligned to the commitments made in Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland. Theme 4 of the NHSDP deals with Communication and Access to Information and promotes the importance of providing accessible information and communication to disabled people.

Action 4.1.1 of the Implementation Plan for the NHSDP commits to the preparation and publication of an Information and Communication Strategy to set out how communication will be conducted at a national and local level during the lifetime of the NHSDP.

As part of the development of this Strategy, a consultation process with disabled people was undertaken to ascertain their preferences regarding the ways in which information and communication could be provided to meet their requirements. This Strategy is informed by the input received during the consultation phase.

In addition to the commitments made in the NHSDP and UNCRPD, it is important to note that there are legal obligations on organisations to ensure their services and the information they provide are accessible for disabled people. These obligations are provided for in various pieces of law pertaining to the rights of disabled persons. These include, but is not limited to:
- Disability Act 2005.
- Equal Status Acts 2000-2018.
- Assisted Decision-Making Act 2015.

- European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020.

4 Structure and Content

This Strategy is divided into three main parts with appendices. It should be noted that the actions listed in Section 1 are the minimum that is required of a Stakeholder Organisation, Sections 2 and 3 outline the practical steps that need to be taken. Some of these steps are beyond the basic actions outlined but Stakeholder Organisation will be encouraged to go these few extra steps that will increase accessibility and inclusivity for disabled people.

The sections are set out as follows:

Section 1: This section deals with Stakeholder Organisation participation and how organisations can improve their information and communication accessibility. It details actions that the Stakeholder Organisation should complete to improve their practices.

Section 2: This section focuses on the provision of accessible information. It provides information to organisations on the types of accessible formats, and the development of those formats.

Section 3: This section focuses on creating accessible communication opportunities. It provides information for organisations on ways to make meetings, events, and consultations accessible, to ensure that disabled people have an equal opportunity to participate as they arise.

Appendix 1: Resources – here you will find specific guidance on all the topics covered in this Strategy.

Appendix 2: List of abbreviations and acronyms

Section 1:

Participation and Actions

Stakeholder Organisation engagement with this Strategy is crucial to drive improvements in accessible information and communication across the housing sector, health and social care sectors and the disability community.

Stakeholder Organisations (referred to as organisations) can include:
- CHO areas, section, or teams within the HSE.
- Departments, sections, or teams within local authorities.
- Disability Sector organisations.
- Disabled Persons Organisations.
- Sections or teams within Approved Housing Bodies.
- Sections or teams within government departments.

1.1 Participation and Commitment

To realise the aim and vision of this Strategy, it will require Stakeholders Organisations sign up to the Strategy and to undertake actions to advance accessibility improvements within their own organisations.

It is important to note that the Stakeholder Organisations involved in the housing and disability sector are very diverse in terms of profile and resources and as noted earlier may be at different stages of growing into more accessible organisations.

This Strategy recognises that there are many practical challenges for organisations to make improvements to their accessibility a reality. For this reason, the actions in this strategy are arranged in a staged approach.

The steps to sign up to the Strategy are as follows:
- Registering participation with The Housing Agency by the Stakeholder Organisation giving a formal written commitment to engage with the Information and Communications Strategy and the actions contained.
- Stakeholder Organisation nominating a Champion within their organisation with responsibility to drive through accessibility improvements.
- Using existing forums and groups to engage with the other participating organisations to share learning and experience.
- Engaging with The Housing Agency to feedback progress on their actions and identify other accessibility initiatives they are undertaking.

1.2 Stakeholder Organisation Actions

Stage 1: Within 6 Months of signing up to the Strategy

Action 1 – Organisations should facilitate hybrid meetings where the meetings involve disabled people.

- Timeline – Immediately on signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Meetings are in a hybrid format.

Action 2 – Staff attend training on the production of accessible formats.

- Timeline – within 6 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Training attended.

Action 3 – Staff attend disability awareness training to include the UNCRPD and Equality and Disability legislation.

- Timeline – within 3 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Training attended.

Action 4 – Staff attend training on the purpose and usage of communication tools such as Co-correspondent Form and JAM Cards.

- Timeline – within 3 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Training attended.

Action 5 – Staff attend training on the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and how it will affect their work.

- Timeline – within 3 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Training attended.

Action 6 – Raise awareness with the public that the organisation supports the use of JAM and Sunflower cards in their buildings including public offices, community facilities, arts and cultural facilities and other relevant spaces.
- Timeline – within 5 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Awareness campaign held.

Action 7 – Engage with The Housing Agency to ensure that all accessible information prepared by it is being made available to the public by the organisation.
- Timeline – within 3 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Accessible document identified is made available to the public by the organisation.

Action 8 – Engage with the existing groups such as the Housing and Disability Steering Groups to identify any gaps that may existing in meetings and events being accessible.
- Timeline – within 6 months of signing up to this Strategy.
- KPI – Engagement has been held.

Stage 2: Within 12 Months of signing up to the Strategy

Action 9 – Document procedures on how the organisation will conduct accessible meetings, consultations and events including a mechanism in place to facilitate feedback from disabled people on the accessibility of same.
- Timeline – Within 9 months of signing up to this strategy.
- KPI – Procedures are documented.

Action 10 – Implement procedures on how the organisation will conduct accessible meetings, consultations, and events.
- Timeline – Within 3 months of the procedure being documented and agreed by the organisation.
- KPI – Procedures are implemented.

Action 11 – Complete an audit of relevant documents that are available to the public to identify gaps in accessible information and prepare a report on the identified gaps.
- Timeline – Within 6 months of signing up to this strategy.
- KPI – Briefing document on the identified gaps prepared.

Action 12 – Complete an accessibility audit of websites and web applications to identify accessibility issues to be addressed and prepare a briefing document on the identified gaps.
- Timeline – Within 9 months of signing up to this strategy.
- KPI – Briefing document on the identified gaps prepared.

Action 13 – Use existing software to ensure that all new documents and resources are available in an accessible format.
- Timeline – Within 12 months of signing up to this strategy.
- KPI – All documents are available in accessible formats.

Stage 3: Within 24 Months of signing up to the Strategy

Action 14 – Address the accessibility gaps identified during the audit of relevant documents available.
- Timeline – Commenced within 3 months and completed within 12 months of the audit.
- KPI – Gaps in accessible information addressed.

Action 15 – Address the accessibility gaps identified during the audit of websites and web applications.

- Timeline – Commenced within 3 months with the completion within 12 months of the audit.
- KPI – Gaps in accessible information addressed.

Action 16 – Carry out an awareness campaign to highlight that the organisation has completed all the actions under this strategy (excluding Action 15, as due 12 months after completion of actions) to ensure that disabled people are aware of the improvements made by the organisation.
- Timeline – within 3 months of the completion of all actions under this strategy.
- KPI – Awareness campaign completed.

Action 17 – Carry out an annual review of the accessibility of the information provided and the communication used by the organisation to ensure that good practice is adhered to.
- Timeline – Annual from the completion of all actions under this strategy
- KPI – Review carried out annually.

Section 2:

Provision of Accessible Information

Everyone has a right to access information to help them make informed choices and to participate fully in society. Organisations that provide information in a wide range of accessible formats will ensure that the information can be accessed and understood by the diverse population of disabled people in Ireland. To help organisations achieve this, it is important to include the voice of disabled people in the process of developing accessible information. Being open to input from people with lived experience provides opportunities for organisations to improve the accessibility of their information.

Organisations should remember that not all people have access to, or are comfortable with, using technology. Therefore, to avoid excluding people, it is important to have physical copies of documents available.

However, as technology has progressed, so have the mediums through which information and communication opportunities are provided. This is evident in the growing use of digital media. Public bodies in Ireland have a statutory responsibility to ensure their websites and mobile applications are accessible to all people including disabled people. Web designers used by public bodies should be familiar with the minimum accessibility requirements that are set out in Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1.

Social media has become an essential and useful tool for providing information and communicating with people. Most government departments, state agencies and other organisations in the housing sector, health and social care sectors and the disability community use social media platforms. Ensuring social media content is accessible for everyone will encourage more diverse participation as you will be able to reach a wider audience. However, it is important to remember that social media should never be relied upon to be the only way information is provided, instead it should be used as an accompaniment to broaden reach.

In this section, the most common accessible formats that organisations should be aware of when producing accessible information are explored. In addition, information for organisations on the planning, drafting and design stages in the development of accessible information are also discussed.

2.1 Types of Accessible Formats

For more information and detailed guidelines on the accessible guidelines described below, please go to the Resources Section later in this document.

2.1.1 Plain English

Plain English is a way of writing that is worded, structured and designed so that it helps the reader to understand the information presented to them the first time they read it. It allows people to access, understand and use information quickly and effectively.

2.1.2 Easy-to-Read

Easy-to-Read documents are another form of accessible documentation. Easy-to-Read documents are made up of short, jargon-free sentences that will help you to communicate the most important information that you want to get across. They contain clear, age-appropriate images alongside the text to help people understand the message. Some examples of people who might use Easy-to-Read documents are people who:

- Have an intellectual disability.
- Have learning or communication disabilities like dyslexia or aphasia.
- Have basic reading skills or unmet literacy needs.
- Do not speak English as their first language.

2.1.3 Accessible Documents for Screen Reading Technology

Screen readers are a type of software that reads aloud the content of a computer screen. Screen reading technology benefits people who are visually impaired and people who are dyslexic or people with intellectual disabilities in accessing documents. It allows users to comprehend the text through the navigation of headings, reading aloud of alt-text and identification of links.

Please note that there can be issues with screen readability of PDFs, so to ensure that there are accessible versions available, it is recommended that an accessible Word version is also published and made available.

2.1.4 Audio Versions

An audio version is just a digital recording of a document which allows a person to listen back to it on their laptop, PC, or mobile phone. Depending on an organisation's resources, they may be able to record these in-house, or they may need to procure an external contractor to assist.

2.1.5 Videos

Videos are a great way of communicating information. They can be used for a wide variety of purposes and are accessible for a wide range of people. They are particularly useful if they feature captioning and/or a person using Irish Sign Language (ISL) to communicate the information contained within the video, and/or where they have audio description features which are easily accessible.

2.1.6 Accessible Information Requests

Organisations may not have all types of accessible formats to hand. It is important to make known to the public that accessible formats can be requested from your organisations where they are required. For example, if a person needs a document in a particular format such as Braille, that there is a way for people to do this.

2.2 Developing Accessible Formats

The planning of a document in accessible formats should become part of the planning of any new documents. The content of the document can often be dictated by the scheme that is being launched or the process that is being outlined. However, the development of such documents in accessible formats should follow three main stages - planning, drafting content, and design.

2.2.1 Planning

The first thing to consider is who the likely consumers of the information are. For example, if you know that a person with an intellectual disability needs to access the information, you should plan to produce an Easy-to-Read version as part of the process. Content created in other formats should at least follow plain English guidelines where possible.

Some initial questions you can ask about your intended target audience to help plan the content are:
- What are the most important pieces of information you need to get across to people?
- Where will you put the most important pieces of information?
- Will people be familiar with the terminology you use?
- Do you need to provide any background information?
- Are there things you can assume people will understand?
- Are there things that you will need to explain?
- How will you get your message across as quickly and clearly as possible?
- What examples can you use from everyday life to explain complex information?

Whether you are creating new information or updating existing information the organisation should follow the process that they have set out and agreed under this strategy. The agreement of this process should include engagement with disabled people. To avoid tokenism, disabled people should be consulted with and be given enough time during the process to formulate their responses and/or submissions. This could be done in various ways, including:

- engaging with DPO/DPROs who can provide guidance and feedback from a collective voice of lived experience. You can also link in with other disability organisations and relevant civil society groups.
- engaging directly with the target consumers of the information to check how accessible it is for them.
- engaging the services of organisations who specialise in creating accessible information.
- engaging with the Housing and Disability Steering Groups that are established in every local authority area to get their input on making information more accessible.

- engaging in co-production/co-design of material with disabled people, when appropriate. This means involving the end user in the process, planning, development, delivery, and evaluation stages of the process.

2.2.2 Drafting Content

The language in draft content will depend on a range of factors, including:

- What the intended use of the information is, for example, the language used in an application form will be different from the language used in a policy document.
- Who the intended audience is, for example, content aimed at the public might be different than content aimed at a narrower group of people who have existing knowledge of the subject matter.
- How regulated the information is, for example, whether you will need to use precise legal terminology in a document. If legal terminology is included in your document, provide a Glossary of Terms for readers to refer to.

It is important to be aware that disabled people can have multiple coexisting disabilities. The production of accessible formats should not overly be targeted at one audience over another. Plain English provides a strong base for a wide range of accessible formats. For example, using plain English can provide the foundation of scripts for video content to reach people who are deaf; or ensure that information read by screen reading technology can be easily understood by visually impaired people. When organisations produce information in plain English, it means the production of other accessible formats can be more straightforward. You can find detailed resources on how to produce plain English documents in Appendix 1 of this document.

There are some scenarios where plain English content has limitations. Firstly, where it is not possible to produce the information in plain English, for example wording of legal contracts or information that is fixed by law and cannot be altered. In these cases, it is possible for organisations to produce guides to the information to help explain the content to people. An example of this is the Easy-to-Read guide to completing the Social Housing Support Application Form. By developing guides to this type of information, organisations can make it more accessible.

Secondly, there are people who do not find plain English written content accessible, for example people with intellectual disabilities, or people with unmet literacy needs or language challenges. Easy-to-Read content is a good way to provide information to these groups. The images included in Easy-to-Read information can help prompt the reader to the meaning of the information. Another good way of communicating to people who have difficulty with written information is through video and audio content, they are very helpful for people if the content is scripted well.

2.2.3 Designing Accessible Formats

Information that organisations produce can be designed using the services of a design company but can also be created by staff in your organisation that have experience in this area. Regardless of the way in which the final information is produced, the organisation preparing it will have input on how the text appears on a page or a screen and this is important. Well-designed content that is structured properly will make it easier to understand and will improve accessibility.

Each accessible format has its own set of recommended design considerations which reflect the accessibility needs of the intended consumer of the information resource. Appendix 1 of this document provides extensive information on resources that can assist you to create content. There are some considerations that the formats have in common, in particular written content, as follows:

1. **Fonts:** Some accessible formats have requirements around the choice and use of fonts. For example, Easy-to-Read practitioners recommend at least point 12 font size in Verdana, and to limit the practice of putting words in bold, italics or underlining them. Plain English and information designed for Screen Reading technology also have different preferences regarding font choice and use.

2. **Positioning:** The way text is positioned is important. Typically, it is good practice to align text to the left. The use of justified text, or centred text can be challenging for people. The advice around gaps or spacing between the text can vary across accessible formats. Most formats would recommend that spacing is used in a way that enhances the accessibility of the information, for instance using more space between sentences in Easy-to-Read documents makes it easier of the people reading the document to understand the content. However, the presence of gaps in documents designed for screen readers can pose issues for the technology, so the use of gaps/spacing should be more limited in those documents.

3. **Ordering:** All formats consider the ordering of information as very important. The accessible formats have different conventions for the use of headings, lists and numbering. However, they are all underpinned by the similar concerns about making sure the information can be easily navigated and understood by the person consuming it. If this is done correctly in the first instance, it can save time when producing other types of accessible documents later. For example, properly ordering and tagging your headings means a document can be more easily converted to an Accessible Word or pdf document.

4. **Text boxes and tables:** The use of text boxes and tables within the design of accessible formats can be challenging if not used appropriately. Easy-to-Read documents are typically created using tables because the format requires a combination of text and images to explain an important piece of information. Using tables allows for the easy alignment of images to the left of the text. However, the

advice for screen reading technology is to avoid putting large amounts of text in tables, if any at all, and to instead locate your text in the main body of the content as much as possible. If tables are used, they must be described in detail.

5. **Locking of formats:** Most accessible formats can be locked to prevent editing; however, documents produced for use by screen reading technology should be left unlocked to allow the user to customise the accessibility features to their own preferences.

6. **Tagging:** If a pdf is not tagged properly, users of screen reading technology will have difficulty navigating a document. Tags are a layer of formatting that allow screen reading technology to read a document in the correct order. Tags are applied to all elements of a document such as headings, lists, tables, and images and are used by the software to identify each element. Examples of when tags are used include alt-text for images, if an Irish language word is used and information on the number of rows and columns and column headings in a table. Tags can be applied automatically but this does not always work properly so it is good to check to see they are working, and if necessary to add them manually. Design experience and knowledge of tagging is required to effectively do this.

7. **Images:** When used appropriately, images are a useful way to add meaning and colour to documents. Using images should be kept to a minimum in accessible formats and each format can recommend different ways in which images are used within content to meet the requirements of the intended audience. These recommendations can be around replacing all images with a text-based description of the original image so that screen readers can describe them to visually impaired people. If images are used, provide an alt-text description of the image. Alt-text descriptions are also very important when using social media. Other recommendations can include advice around the size of the images, their positioning, and the wrapping of text around them rather than overlaying the text on a background image.

8. **Contrast/colour:** Colour and contrast are very important for accessibility. Where there is no facility for people to vary the colour and contrast of content, careful consideration should be given to ensuring the content has appropriate use of colour and contrast to ensure it is accessible for a wide range of people. For example, you should avoid having text in multiple colours.

9. **Tech requirements:** As technology advances, there are increasing ways in which information can be made more accessible for people. Screen readers, videos, and audio are all examples of formats that would have their own technical requirements to enhance the accessibility of those formats. For example, using audio descriptions, captioning, and Irish Sign Language in video content.

The NDA is the statutory body that provides evidence-based advice and research to Government on disability policy and practice. Their guidelines provide information on producing screen reader accessible files (SAFs) in Microsoft Word and the appropriate way to format documents and for converting them to the PDF format. For detailed information and guidelines on many of the topics covered in this section, you should consult the NDAs, 'Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service.' This document can be accessed here: gov.ie - Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service (Plain English Guide) (www.gov.ie).

The Voice of Vision Impairment further recommend that when creating downloadable documents that are SAFs, they should be produced in .txt, .doc, .docx, or .rtf formats. These formats tend to be more accessible by default for screen reader users. The accessibility of these formats can be further improved through various formatting features as outlined in this section.

Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) is an emerging technology that offers people a flexible and easily navigable reading experience. DAISY allows a reader to navigate the text by chapter, section, subsection, and page. Currently, it is produced in three different ways. The first is audio-only DAISY which is a set of recordings that the reader hears when playing the book. Text-only DAISY has no audio recording and is instead read with text-to-speech systems or Braille displays. The most comprehensive version of DAISY is full-text, full-audio in which the text and audio are present. This allows the reader to synchronise the two so that they can check spelling, punctuation and any other information that is not clear in an audio only version.

Section 3:

Creating accessible communication opportunities

Communication is a central feature of our lives. As society becomes more diverse, the ways in which public bodies communicate need to adapt to meet the changing environment. When communicating with disabled people, it is important to be mindful that they are autonomous individuals who have the capacity to make their own decisions and should be at the centre of any decision-making related to them. This section looks at three main areas in which you may be in communication with disabled people:

- Meetings,
- Consultations,
- Events.

How and where organisations conduct meetings, consultations, or events, can depend on the accessibility needs of those who will be attending. Where it is practicable to do so, organisations may need to adapt their style as much as possible to meet the accessibility needs of those participating.

Organisations should consider the physical space in which the meeting, consultation or event will take place:

- will it be sufficiently accessible with enough space to accommodate any supports a person may have, or if there is a Personal Assistant with them?
- are there suitable parking facilities available, if required?
- does the venue have Wi-Fi and is it easily accessible?
- will any of the attendees require a quiet space or room?

Whether organising a meeting or engaging in consultation with disabled people, it is important to state clearly from the beginning:

- the level of contribution expected from participants,
- how their input will be used, and
- what constraints may be in place.

Informing participants of this early in the meeting or process, will help build trust and ensure that organisations are being transparent.

3.1 Meetings

A successful meeting would make sure that people are communicated with in the right way. It should ensure that they receive and understand the information given to them and are given enough time to do this. This applies to both formal and informal meetings.

Below are examples of the types of formal meetings:

- Working groups – where a group of people are brought together to work on issues or problems and make recommendations based on their findings.

- Advisory groups – where people with unique skills and knowledge are brought together to offer help and give suggestions to people or an organisation on a particular area or subject.
- Workshops – where people with experience and expertise in a particular field are brought together for discussions and research to increase their expertise.

Informal meetings include:

- In-person meetings.
- Phone or online calls.
- Front of house services such as customer service desks.

3.1.1 Formal Meetings

The first thing to consider when holding a formal meeting is who will be in attendance. It is good practice to send out an invitation with an RSVP at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. The invitation should include an option for attendees to specify any accessibility or support requirements. Knowing these requirements in advance will enable organisations to hold an inclusive and collaborative meeting and will ensure the meeting runs smoothly on the day. This will demonstrate the commitment of the organisation to meaningful engagement with disabled people.

It is important to note that ISL interpreters are in high demand in Ireland. If it is known that an ISL interpreter will be required at an event or meeting, it is recommended that organisations book them as early as feasibly possible to ensure they can be in attendance on the day. It is also important to note that if an event or meeting is going to run for over an hour, organisations may need to book two ISL interpreters.

Disabled people often volunteer their time to attend meetings, so having a hybrid meeting or holding a meeting completely online can help reduce time and difficulties of travel for disabled people.

Not all disabled people attending meetings will need specific requirements to facilitate their attendance. However, specific requirements might include:

- preferring an in-person or virtual meeting.
- arranging an in-person meeting for a time of day that gives people ample opportunity to make it to the venue. For instance, disabled people may need additional time to get to the meeting or they may find it more difficult to travel at certain times of the day.
- providing information such as the agenda, minutes, or resources in accessible formats and sharing these with attendees in advance of the meeting.
- needing an accessible presentation.
- needing ISL interpretation where needed by a disabled person to participate.
- needing a map or visual representation of the space.

- needing a private and quiet space if the meeting is in-person.
- needing an accessible venue.

When the information on specific requirements is gathered it will help organisations to plan the layout of the meeting room. Layout requirements could be providing sufficient space for people with wheelchairs or other mobility aids or having reserved seating for people if required. Autistic people can also have heightened sensitivity to sensory inputs. If there are attendees who have sensory differences, organisers should try to ensure that background noise is minimized and quiet spaces outside of the meeting room are available, if required.

Depending on the audience there may be a requirement to take more breaks and of sufficient duration to cater for people's needs, this is something that should be explored by groups at the outset. Organisations should also take the opportunity following the establishment of a group to ask for feedback on how attendees felt about the meeting and identify ways on how this can be improved. This could be either a physical feedback form or an option to give feedback online.

Speakers at the meeting should state their name before speaking and ensure their delivery of the information is clear and easy to follow.

3.1.2 Informal Meetings

Some general things you should consider when communicating with a disabled person in an informal situation are:

- Introduce yourself and speak in a welcoming manner.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Be patient, understanding, and flexible.
- If possible, wear a badge/name tag to make yourself easily identifiable.
- Face the individual when you are speaking to them.
- Consider the distance you are standing from the person.
- Speak directly to the person, rather than the accompanying person.
- Support the person to understand the information.
- Listen to the person and be patient when waiting for them to respond.
- Take time during the meeting to offer people who have not spoken the opportunity to, some people might not be comfortable contributing in front of others.
- Offer to speak with the person in a quieter room or at a quieter time, if necessary.
- Ask the person if they need any assistance, do not assume that help is needed until you ask.

Most people in Ireland have capacity to make their own decisions with the right support. The Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (ADM) requires that capacity be presumed in all instances unless proven otherwise. It sets out the structures which will be

put in place to support people to make decisions where they may have difficulty in doing so. For further information on ADM, please see: https://decisionsupportservice.ie/.

Organisations should also be mindful that not all disabilities are visibly apparent. For example, brain injury, epilepsy, mental health difficulties, autism, dyscalculia, or developmental disability. It is common for these types of disability to be misunderstood.

JAM cards and Sunflower cards are useful tools for disabled people. Organisations may meet disabled people who are using them, so it is important to know what they are. They can come in digital and physical forms. They are designed to be used by people with a hidden disability or communication barrier. Disabled people may use them to tell others in a private way, that they might need additional time and understanding when communicating. Organisations can also sign up to both cards to avail of materials and training to promote the use of the cards.

3.2 Consultations

Consultation is a way of involving people, getting their experiences and opinions, and using these to inform policymaking and decision-making.

Involving disabled people and Disabled Persons Organisations in consultations is a requirement under Article 4 – General obligations of the UN CRPD. Any engagement with disabled people should be done in a meaningful way by listening to their feedback and as far as is practicable, acting on it. Where possible and if requested, DPO/DPROs should be provided with their own space in the consultation process and engagement with them should be done on their own terms. This can be achieved through collective or bilateral engagement. This will ensure the interaction is not just tokenistic in nature.

Committing to this will help build trust and goodwill between your organisation and participants as well as ensure that the service or policy is suitable to the needs of disabled people.

Consultations can be conducted in a range of different formats, such as:

- Submissions – when organisations request suggestions from stakeholders which are related to policymaking. Usually, they can be made by letter or email. However, people should also be given the option to make video or audio submissions if this is their preference.
- Focus groups (online or virtual) – when a group of people who are part of a certain demographic are brought together to answer questions and provide information on a particular topic.
- One-to-one meetings – when organisations meet one other person for a discussion on a particular topic.

It is important to remember when engaging with disabled people in consultation, to do so in line with their personal preference. Organisations should consider what options they have available to them within their resources to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided for this.

Before any consultation it is important to let people know in writing what the consultation is for and how the information collected will be used. Make it clear what is expected from all participants and what the expected outcome of the process is.

Important details to consider before a consultation include:

- Ensure invite/event poster is in plain English language.
- Make sure the registration process is accessible.
- Place an option for disability requirements on any RSVP with a deadline.

For in-person consultations there are some extra things to consider:

- Ensure that the venue layout is suitable, for example, having sufficient circulation for participants, including wheelchair users or those with other mobility aids.
- Appoint a specific staff member to liaise with the groups or individuals you intend to consult.
- If required, provide an Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpreter.
- Pick a location that is easily accessible via public transport, has accessible parking or has a drop off zone. Include directions or instructions in the invite.
- Provide attendees with information on the accessibility of the building and car parking facilities.
- Time allowances should always be considered when consulting with disabled people. You should give sufficient time for people to formulate and make their submissions and provide an option that allows for follow up submissions should be made available.
- Send out an agenda with the length of breaks included.

After the consultation, organisations should take the opportunity to ask for feedback on how attendees felt about the accessibility and inclusiveness of the consultation and how future consultation events could be improved. This can be either a physical feedback form or an option to give feedback online. For more information on good practice, see here: https://www.nda.ie.

3.3 Events

Figures from the Central Statistics Office based on the most recent census show that 22% of the population declare to have at least one long lasting condition or difficulty. Therefore, it is likely that a disabled person may attend any event you hold. Organising events can be done in a similar way to organising a consultation, as set out above. Unlike consultations you might not know as much about your attendees, particularly if it is an open event. Event venues may be able to provide attendees with access to assistive technology which could be available as part of their facilities. For example, they might have a special type of sound system called a hearing loop or audio induction loop that can broadcast sound directly to hearing aids. When booking a venue, it can be useful to ask if they use any assistive technology that attendees can access.

As many disabilities are not always visibly apparent, you should endeavour to make your event as inclusive and accessible for disabled people as possible. If you do this, you are:

- Ensuring participation for everyone.
- Enabling a wider and varied audience to attend.
- Having more diverse discussions and opinions at your event.
- Promoting inclusion and accessibility; and
- Highlighting the importance of inclusion and access of disabled people.

Any event you hold should be as inclusive and welcoming as possible. This can be achieved in the way you set the tone of the event. Reminding people to be respectful and considerate of other people's experiences and being mindful of the language that they use can go a long way to creating an inclusive space.

3.4 Hybrid and Online

Since Covid-19, the prevalence of online or hybrid consultations, events and meetings has increased significantly. Using technology can increase the opportunities for disabled people to engage directly with public services and other organisations. Organisations should provide facilities for online and hybrid meetings and consultation. Online and hybrid events should also be considered where practical.

When organising online or hybrid consultations, events, and meetings you should:

- Ensure that the online meeting feature of the chosen platform supports accessibility:
  - It must comply with the WCAG 2.1 Standards and EN 301 549;
  - The most accessible platforms according to the NDA would be:
    - Zoom.
    - Microsoft Teams.
    - GoToMeeting.
    - Skype.
    - Google Meet.
    - Cisco Webex Meetings.
  - If you have another platform not mentioned above in mind, please ensure that it adheres to the following accessibility guidelines to ensure your meeting can be as inclusive as possible:
    - The platform should provide the ability to connect to the meeting using a phone line.
    - All controls and features should be accessible to assistive technology, e.g., screen reader software.
    - Realtime captioning should be available.
    - If Irish Sign Language services are required, the platform should support the ability to lock or pin the interpreter's screen, so they are always seen.
    - All controls and features should be accessible through keyboard shortcuts.

- Invitations to the meetings must include the following:
  - Meetings link/meeting ID and password.
  - A list of phone numbers for attendees to dial-in if needed.
  - Ask the participants if they need any accessibility accommodations such as real-time captioning, with a deadline for RSVP.
  - Provide a list of accessibility features and keyboard shortcuts for the online meeting platform.

  Meeting agenda, with scheduled breaks, if required, must be circulated at least one week in advance of the meeting.

- Ensure the speaker:
  - Tries to avoid using too many visuals throughout.
  - Does not use any flashing images or videos.
  - Uses colour contrast on their presentations.
  - Has their camera on and with their face clearly visible to cater to those who are lip reading.
  - Speaks clearly at a slightly slower pace to allow for real-time captioning interpretation.
  - Avoids using acronyms.
  - Mutes microphone when not speaking.

- Post-event
  - Provide closed captioning for video recordings.
  - Email the video to all of those who attended ensuring that permission was received in advance from all attendees to the recording. This can be by highlighting the fact that the meeting will be recorded on the agenda and that attendance at the meeting or event is taken as agreement to the recording.
  - Make transcripts of the discussions available if requested.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Resources

Below you will find specific guidance on all the topics covered in this Strategy.

1. Resources on accessible information formats

General

- Citizens Information Board – AccessibleInfoGuidelines (citizensinformationboard.ie).
- National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) – Technology for Sight Loss - NCBI.
- National Disability Authority – Accessibility Toolkit - National Disability Authority (nda.ie).
- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform – gov.ie - Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service (Plain English Guide) (www.gov.ie).
- Sign Language Interpreting Service – IRIS - Sign Language Interpreting Services (slis.ie).

Plain English

- National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) – Home - Nala.
- Plain English Style Guide for the Public Service – Literacy and Activation (ops.gov.ie).
- WebAim Contrast Checker – WebAIM: Contrast Checker.

Easy-to-Read

- Easy to Read Ireland – Easy to Read Ireland.
- Inclusion Europe – Information for all: European standards for making information easy to read and understand (2113-Information for all-17:Layout 2 (inclusion-europe.eu)).
- Inclusion Ireland – makeiteasyguide2011.pdf (inclusionireland.ie).

Accessible documents for screen reading technology

- AbilityNet – Creating Accessible Documents | AbilityNet.
- The National Disability Authority – Accessibility Toolkit - National Disability Authority (nda.ie).
- Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) – The VVI Manual on Accessible Communications (VVI MAC).

Audio and Video Versions

- Citizens Information Board – "Be ISL Friendly Online", PowerPoint Presentation (citizensinformationboard.ie).
- National Disability Authority (NDA) – Accessibility-Toolkit-2012_Accessible-version.docx (live.com), pp.40-42

- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) – [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible | Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) | W3C](#).

Websites and web applications

- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications – [gov.ie - Digital Inclusion (www.gov.ie)](#).
- Harvard University – [Design for readability | Digital Accessibility (harvard.edu)](#).
- National Disability Authority – [Web accessibility techniques | Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#).
- Recite me – [accessible_fonts_guide.pdf (reciteme.com)](#).
- Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) – [The VVI Manual on Accessible Communications (VVI MAC)](#).
- Voice of Vision Impairment Ireland (VVI) – [5. Accessible Websites and Apps – VVI](#).
- WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools – [WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools (webaim.org).](#)
- WebAim Contrast Checker – [WebAIM: Contrast Checker](#).
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) – [Introduction to Understanding WCAG (w3.org).](#)
- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) – [Tools and Techniques | Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) | W3C](#).
- Some useful websites for shortening URLs are:
    - [URL Shortener - Short URLs & Custom Free Link Shortener | Bitly](#),
    - [Tiny URL | Free Short URL Redirects with Tinycc](#),
    - [TinyURL.com - shorten that long URL into a tiny URL](#).

Social Media

- The following two links provide more detailed information on how to make social media content more accessible:
    - Trinity College Dublin – [social-media - Trinity Disability Service | Trinity College Dublin (tcd.ie)](#).
    - University of Limerick – [Accessibility in social media | University of Limerick (ul.ie)](#).
- Social media accessibility requirements links:
    - Facebook – [Accessibility | Facebook Help Center](#),
    - Google Meet – [Google Meet accessibility - Google Meet Help](#).
    - Instagram – [How do I edit the alternative text for a photo on Instagram? | Instagram Help Center](#),
    - Linkedin – [Accessibility (linkedin.com)](#),
    - Microsoft Teams – [Accessibility tools for Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support,](#)
    - X – [How to make images accessible for people](#),
    - Zoom – [Accessibility | Zoom,](#)

2 Communication resources

Meetings

- Celebrating Disability – [Creating An Accessible Event - Celebrating Disability](#).
- Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHCR) – [Engaging with disabled people: an event planning guide (equalityhumanrights.com)](#).
- Harvard University – [Hosting Accessible Hybrid Meetings | University Disability Resources (harvard.edu)](#).
- National Disability Authority – [Participation Matters: Guidelines on implementing the obligation to meaningfully engage with disabled people in public decision making - National Disability Authority (nda.ie)](#),
- Mencap – [Communicating with people updated (1).pdf (mencap.org.uk)](#).
- National League for Nursing – [Communicating with People with Disabilities (nln.org)](#).
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific – [Disability Inclusive Meetings PDF.pdf (unescap.org)](#).
- Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) – [The VVI Manual on Accessible Communications (VVI MAC)](#) Sections 3 and 11.
- Voice of Vision Impairment Ireland (VVI) – [4. Real World Engagement – VVI](#).

Consultations

- Mental Health Reform (MHR) – A Guide on Effective Consultation Processes for People with Psychosocial Disabilities ([MHR-22-PS-SCREEN-1.pdf (mentalhealthreform.ie)](#)).

Events

- Celebrating Disability – [Creating an Accessible Event - Celebrating Disability](#).
- Equality and Human Rights Commission – [Engaging with disabled people: an event planning guide (equalityhumanrights.com)](#).
- Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI) – [VVI's Manual for Accessible Public Spaces (VVIMAPS) – Voice of Vision Impairment](#).

3 Relevant organisations

- **National Disability Authority (NDA)** are the independent statutory body that provides information and advice to Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of disabled people.

Disabled Persons Organisations (also referred to as Disabled Persons Representative Organisations)

- **AsIAm** are a national organisation who advocate for an inclusive society for autistic people. They support the autistic community and their families to fully engage in Irish life.
- **Disabled Women Ireland** is an organisation which advocates for the rights of self-identified women, girls, and non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-conforming disabled people in Ireland. They represent members who have a diverse range of impairments.
- The **Irish Deaf Society (IDS)** is the only national Deaf-led representative organisation of the Deaf, and it serves the interests and welfare of the Deaf community. It provides a number of education, personal and social services to Deaf children, adults, and their families.
- The **Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)** is a national Disabled Person's Organisation who work collectively to create an independent living movement in Ireland which is led by disabled people and promotes a rights-based social model of disability.
- The **National Platform of Self Advocates** is an independent organisation run by people with intellectual disabilities for people with intellectual disabilities. They aim to be the nationally recognised spokes organisation on policy and issues affecting the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Physical Impairment Ireland (PII) is** a national voluntary Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) founded by physically disabled people, family members, carers and advocates of persons with physical impairments from a number of different counties.
- **Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI)** is Ireland's Disabled Persons' Representative Organisation (DPRO) with particular focus on the rights and needs of blind and partially sighted people. We are very much rooted in the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), and we are based on "representative organizations" – the subject of Article 4 (3) [Consultation], as clarified by the UN Committee's General Comment No. 7, which also deals with implementation and monitoring (Article 33 (3)). This document has in-depth guidelines on how to produce content that can be read by screen reading technology.

Disability Organisations

- **Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI**) is a federation of member organisations working with people with disabilities to implement the UN CRPD and ensure their equal participation in society.
- **Easy-to-Read Ireland** can provide support to organisations who are producing Easy-to-Read documents by checking the accessibility of documents by working with self-advocates who are paid for their work.
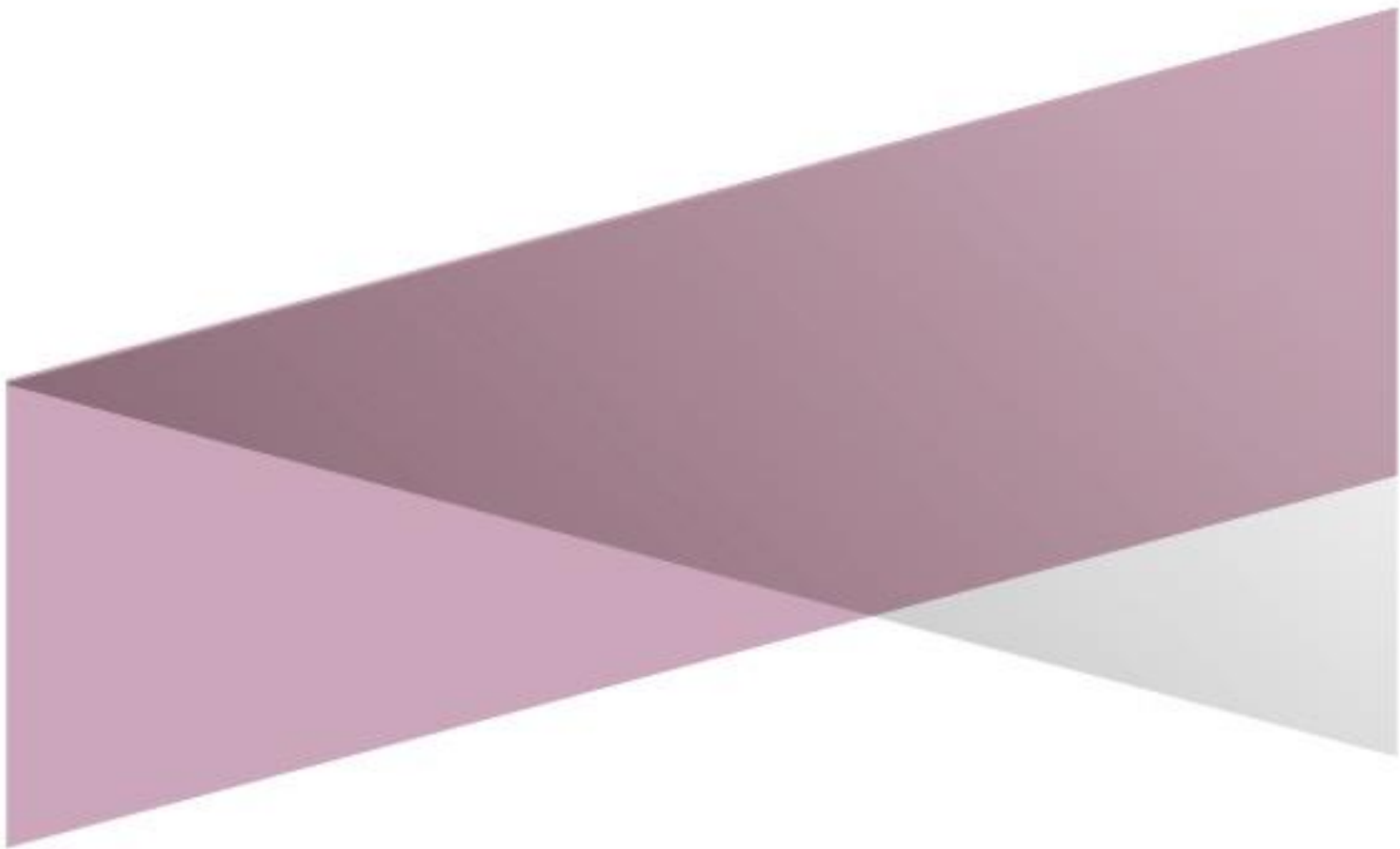
- **Inclusion Europe** are a European wide organization who fight for equal rights and full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in all aspects of society.
- **Inclusion Ireland** are national voluntary organisation who promote the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Cairde** is a community health development organisation that works across Ireland. They are dedicated to reducing health inequalities among minority ethnic communities in Ireland.
- **National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)** are an independent charity who can help people with unmet literacy needs. On their website you can find some useful hints for writing in plain English and various research papers.
- **National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)** aim to transform the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired by helping people to live confidently and independently.
- The **National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers (FedVol)** are the national umbrella organisation for voluntary/non-statutory agencies who provide direct services to people with intellectual disability.
- **Mental Health Reform** is Ireland's leading national coalition on mental health. They are comprised of 81 member organisations who work to drive progressive reform of mental health services and supports in Ireland.

Appendix 2 - List of abbreviations and acronyms

The following is a list of abbreviations and acronyms which are used in this Information and Communication Strategy:

- ADM – Assisted Decision Making
- DAISY – Digital Accessible Information System
- DPO – Disabled Persons' Organisation
- DPRO – Disabled Persons' Representative Organisation
- EHRC – Equality and Human Rights Commission
- FedVol – National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers
- IDS – Irish Deaf Society
- IHREC – Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- IRIS – Irish Remote Interpreting Service
- ISL – Irish Sign Language
- LA – Local authority
- MHR – Mental Health Reform
- NALA – National Adult Literacy Agency
- NCBI – National Council for the Blind of Ireland
- NDA – National Disability Authority
- NHSDP – National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027
- SAF – Screen reader accessible files
- SEB – Standard English Braille
- SLIS – Sign Language Interpreting Services
- UEB – Unified English Braille
- UN CRPD – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- VOIP – Voice over internet protocol
- VVI – Voice of Vision Impairment
- W3C – World Wide Web Consortium
- WAI – Web Accessibility Initiative
- WAVE – Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools
- WCAG – Web Content Accessibility Guidelines