

# Health information in Northern Ireland for people with a learning disability. How easy is it for them to understand?



Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

By the Equality Commission for  
Northern Ireland

## Who is this document by?



We are called the **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**.



We work to make sure everyone in Northern Ireland is treated in a good and fair way.

## What is this document about?



We looked at information about **health** for people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland.



We wanted to find out how easy it is to understand.

74 people with a learning disability and 178 carers looked at health information to see how easy it was to understand.



They looked at information from places like

- doctors, dentists and hospitals
- pharmacies (where you buy medicine)

They looked at things like



- **written** information about health. This is things like leaflets, letters from the hospital and labels on bottles of medicine



- information that people who work in health, like doctors and dentists, give people with a learning disability when they **speak** to them

## Why did we look at health information?



- People with a learning disability should have the same good healthcare as everyone else. This means they need good information about health that is easy for them to understand.



- A law called the Disability Discrimination Act says people with a learning disability must be treated in a good and fair way by people who run services.

## What we found out

### 1. Written health information (things like leaflets and letters)



The people with a learning disability we asked found written information about health hard to understand.

Nearly every person needed help to understand the information. Some people still found it hard to understand the information even after they got help.



This is because health information at the moment is not made to be easy for people with a learning disability to understand.



Many people with a learning disability said they would not even pick up the information in the first place because it looked too difficult to understand.



## **2. Information that people like doctors and dentists give people with a learning disability when they speak to them**



We found that people who work in health were often good at talking to people with a learning disability to give them information.

We found that dentists were often good at this.

But we found some problems. For example



- Sometimes people who work in health do not speak to people with a learning disability in a way that is easy for them to understand.



- People who work in health may not know that much about learning disability and how to talk to people with a learning disability.

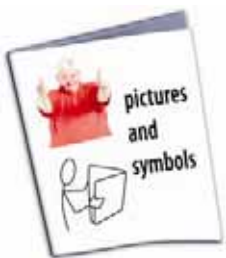


- Time could be a problem. For example, some people may not have enough time in their appointment to understand the information they are given.

## **What written health information for people with a learning disability should be like**

It should have

- ✓ Large writing
- ✓ Easy words and short sentences. If difficult words have to be used they should be explained
- ✓ Lots of space around the writing
- ✓ Easy to understand pictures that help explain the writing.



## How people who work in health should talk to people with a learning disability to give them information

They should do things like

- ✓ Speak to the person with a learning disability first, not the person they are with.
- ✓ Speak clearly using easy to understand words. But make sure they speak to the person like an adult, not like a child.



People who work in health should also

- ✓ Give the person with a learning disability time to understand and reply.
- ✓ Use signs, pictures or anything else that will help the person with a learning disability to understand the information.
- ✓ Check with the person to make sure they have understood the information.



## What should happen next?



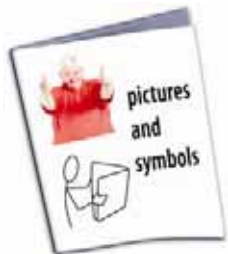
We have found that good ways of giving people with a learning disability information about their health are already happening.

But we think a lot more needs to be done.



These things do not cost a lot of money and can help lots of other people as well.

We think



- ✓ There should be written health information just for people with a learning disability. For example, it should use Makaton or be written in easy words with pictures.



- ✓ A part of the Government in Northern Ireland called the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should make sure this happens.

We think the Government in Northern Ireland should make sure



- ✓ People with a learning disability can help in making the health information.



- ✓ A letter is made that can be sent out to people with a learning disability when they have to go for a hospital appointment. The letter would be easy for them to read and understand.

## Training



- ✓ Everyone who works in health should get the right training to help them understand how to help people with a learning disability in the best way.
- ✓ Local groups of people with a learning disability should give this training where possible.

## Keeping good information about people with a learning disability



- ✓ Doctors should keep good information about the people with a learning disability who come to see them.
- ✓ Checks should be made to see if this is happening or if more needs to be done.

## Other things



- Doctors should have a person they can work with to help make their service better for people with a learning disability. This person would be part of the team that is in charge of services for people with a learning disability in the local area.



- Each main hospital in Northern Ireland should have a special nurse to help make healthcare in the hospital better for people with a learning disability.



- People with a learning disability should have a small booklet to take with them to places like the doctor and the hospital. The booklet would talk about them and how they like information to be given to them.

## What next?



- We think it is the job of the Government in Northern Ireland to make sure these things happen.



- We will check to make sure the things we have talked about happen.
- We want to have meetings with the Government to talk about how well it is doing to make sure these things happen.



- We will write a report in 1 year to talk about this.



- Then we will think about what more we need to do to make sure these things happen.



## For more information about this document

Phone Rosalynd Harkness on **028 90500574**

Or Paul O'Neill on **028 90500577**

## How to get in touch with the Equality Commission NI

You can write to us at

The Equality Commission NI  
Equality House  
7-9 Shaftesbury Square  
Belfast  
BT2 7DP



Phone us on 028 90890890



Textphone us on 028 90500589

You can use **Typetalk** to contact us.



Email us at **information@equalityni.org**

Go to our website at **www.equalityni.org**