

Accessibility Considerations for Public Health Messaging

Emergency public health communication and public health resources must be optimized for accessibility in all stages, from planning and initial design to dissemination and supported follow through of recommended action steps.

“Again, make it more accessible for those who need that accessibility. Not just for the blind and visually impaired, but for the deaf blind community as well. We have, I mean, we are here, we ain’t going anywhere, so they gotta be accessible to everyone. They don’t think about people with disabilities when they [make] these sites and send out this information. And then at the end, especially cuz if you live alone... you have no one that can give you the information you need. Then you wind up being one of the ones who’s not gonna make it.”

Message Planning

Know your audience: Understand what is different about reaching this population and plan to address the specific questions and concerns they have.

1. Many aging adults, people with disabilities, and people with serious mental illness experience complex health conditions. They may be concerned about:
 - What high risk means and who is considered high risk
 - How to differentiate Covid from their specific health condition(s)
 - What special considerations must be given when following vaccination or treatment recommendations given specific health condition(s)
2. Accessibility is of utmost importance to this population.
 - Information needs to be accessible from the start, especially when the information is critically important and time-sensitive
 - Tailored messages need to address the specific needs of this population, but all communications should aim to be universally designed
 - There is no guaranteed availability of social support; do not assume another person will be available to provide support in accessing or interpreting information
 - Access needs vary and may be met through widely available systems/technology, or may be highly specialized and require more intensively specialized individual support system
 - Anticipate and address barriers in message content and design and in message delivery

Message Design and Content

All mass media should incorporate universal design principles. Supplemental messages should be tailored to address the unique needs and concerns of the population being served.

1. Design messages that include relevant content in accessible formats. Good crisis and emergency health risk communication includes action steps to promote public safety during a health emergency.
 - Materials must incorporate universal design principles within the early creation process
 - Read text on screen aloud, open captioned, images described
 - Must consider how design will interfere or support existing accessibility features (example alt text and screen readers)
 - Incorporate plain language
 - Include definitions of key terms (e.g., high risk person)
 - Key information highlighted in manageable quantities – e.g., short list of symptoms to know when to take the test
 - Messages need to be tailored to address the unique needs and concerns of the population
 - Address barriers to identifying covid symptoms when you have other conditions
2. Actionable: Messaging should address the perceived and actual barriers to taking the recommended action. The audience must have the skills, self-efficacy, and resources to follow through on recommended action steps. The recommended action steps and the existing public health services and resources must be accessible to facilitate action.
 - Beware of asking people to do things without addressing the existing barriers they will face trying to accomplish these tasks
 - Identify common/possible barriers and provide strategies and resources to overcome them
 - e.g., Be My Eyes app to read covid test results

Message Delivery

Convey a consistent message through multiple channels to reach all members of the community in ways that are most accessible to them.

1. Optimize accessibility in digital channels of communication
 - Identify who will/will not have access - Public health messaging on platforms that aren't accessible to everyone will have limited reach (e.g., Instagram, radio, TikTok)
 - Visually describe/audio describe based on accessibility of that specific platform (e.g. describe charts on news, transcripts for audio)

- Increased access to that message by incorporating more accessible channels of communication
2. Emphasize low-tech, offline, and community-based channels of communications due to access barriers with digital and online media, social media platforms, and other technologies.
 - Disseminate through community-based sites where people gather in person
 - community spaces like libraries, churches, senior centers, and youth recreation centers
 - Health fairs and community education events
 - Offer the opportunity to access information AND direct access to resources (e.g., vaccination shots)
 - Provide telephone hotline numbers for access to information without a computer
 3. Interpersonal outreach channels provide opportunities for two-way communication and guidance from trusted sources (community leaders, healthcare providers)

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Accessibility Considerations

Public health information must be made accessible in both content and dissemination.

What needs to be accessible?	How do you make it accessible?	Quote
<p>Digital systems and sources of health information and documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Websites• Social media posts• Scheduling platforms• Electronic documents (PDFs)• Scheduling sites• Data sets, dashboards, data visualizations• Electronic health records and patient portals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Universal design• Large text• Accessibility features online (ability to change size of font, contrast/color selection, other view features)• Alt text/visual descriptions• AI image readers• Screen reader compatibility• No auto-scroll, only show one question at a time on forms <p>Special consideration: People may live alone, don't count on a support person being available</p>	<p>"So even scheduling to get the shot is a process. Because... the websites the government rolled out were absolutely not accessible for people using screen readers."</p> <p>"I would say, digitally, making sure that it's an accessible PDF if it's going to be a PDF document. And also that things that are online need to be accessible, the websites need to be accessible, patient portals need to be accessible, database information, like regarding the spread of Covid, et cetera, et cetera... That kind of thing needs to be accessible. Vaccination sites, you know where people make appointments, they need to be accessible."</p> <p>"Have more ads, public service ads, on radio and television. If you're trying to reach everyone, that's even more universal I think than Instagram or social media. Because also people who are senior citizens, some of them don't use computers as much as everyone else does, and that's true for some other populations too. And not just flashing [announcements] on the screen but actually saying, actually reading the text aloud."</p>
<p>Physical documents and signage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vaccination cards• Health records• Drug or treatment informational handouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Braille• Large text• Plain language <p>Special consideration: Plain language, but still includes all information</p>	<p>"I remember when I got the [vaccine] card, nobody told me exactly what was on it. And I thought, 'Oh, do I really need this? Is this something I can just sort of get rid of?' And thank goodness I didn't get rid of it right away. My gosh! I mean, it would be great if those cards had been accessible somehow."</p> <p>"[Doctors] want me to go take these... shots and these vaccines, then [give] me paperwork to fill out and it's not accessible... and your staff don't wanna help. It's not fair."</p>

What needs to be accessible?	How do you make it accessible?	Quote
		“Just like when you're saying all the doctors will tell you this and they give you this and they give you that, but again...when you go into the doctor's office and you tell the staff, ‘Oh, I need assistance filling this out’ - ‘oh, could you just take it home and find someone at home?’ What if I live alone? Why do I have to take it home?”

Existing public health services and resources must be accessible to facilitate action

What needs to be accessible?	How do you make it accessible?	Quote
Prevention and Treatment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social distancing • Masking guidelines • Covid-19 tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge impact of medical trauma • Identify the role(s) of direct care providers and the need for attendant care • Communicate social distancing in multiple ways (e.g., tactile marks on floor for social distancing for people who are blind/low vision) • Make sure signage (e.g. social distancing, masking) accurately reflects current policy • Ensure accessibility when designing self-administered tests (e.g. instructions in multiple formats, results are both visual and audible, equipment is ergonomic for people with limited mobility) 	<p>“The tests themselves are not necessarily accessible. In fact, I would say that the tests that are touted as being accessible... um, are only sort of marginally accessible and they're only accessible for those of us, who are really really savvy.”</p> <p>“I have medical trauma and high anxiety. So like, just wearing a mask is really difficult for me, but at the same time I know it's required.”</p>

What needs to be accessible?	How do you make it accessible?	Quote
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure accessible tests are available at all test distribution locations <p>Special Consideration: Masking may be inaccessible for some people due to sensory and/or communication needs</p>	
<p>Physical locations/Clinical environments (including ambulatory, temporary)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing sites • Vaccination centers • Pharmacies • Clinics and other health centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive/guiding staff, guiding • Follow and enforce safety protocol and procedures • Communicate expectations in multiple ways • Consider complex health care needs (e.g., latex free environment) <p>Special consideration: Even when spaces are made accessible, transportation can be a barrier</p>	<p>“Again, the practicality involved. Can you actually get to a vaccination site? Can you actually, uh, do this? And when you get to the site, will people be helpful and will they know how to, um, guide you to where you need to go, or will they grab you and shove you? Because, after all, we're still supposed to be keeping socially distant, and people think nothing of grabbing a blind person and pulling and pushing them. And you don't know if they're masked or not.”</p> <p>“All of that information is well and good. But if you don't have transportation to get to the doctor you're stuck”</p>