Disability Information

What is disability information?

This quick guide looks at how to find information about disability issues and how to produce information for and with disabled people.

There are different ways of looking at disability and therefore disability information – one that focuses on the individual and their impairment; one that looks at services and support and another that approaches it from a rights and equality perspective.

There are many definitions of disability, the one used under the Equality Act 2010 (the act that replaced most of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is:

A person has a disability if:

- they have a physical or mental impairment
- the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities

For the purposes of the Act, these words have the following meanings:

- 'substantial' means more than minor or trivial
- 'long-term' means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months (there are special rules covering recurring or fluctuating conditions)
- 'normal day-to-day activities' include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping

People who have had a disability in the past that meets this definition are also protected by the Act.

This definition has been criticised for focusing too much on the individual and what they can’t do, or from what might be called a medical model perspective.

There are two main ‘models’ of disability which are important to understand prior to any work with disabled people.

1. **The social model of disability**
   The social model of disability states that it is the barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society that disables people.

2. **The medical model of disability**
   The medical model of disability views disability as a problem that belongs to the disabled individual and that it is they rather than society that needs to change.

   An example from a consumer health information perspective would be a blind person requiring information about breast cancer. The medical model would say the reason the person can’t access the information is because they are blind. The social model would say it is because the producer of that information has not produced it in a format suitable for that individual.

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Where to find information about disability issues

Information on disability issues can be broadly divided into information about an individual’s impairment (for instance cerebral palsy), services and support a disabled person may use, and information on rights and equality issues.

Impairment specific information

There are a wide range of organisations whose primary focus is supporting people with a particular impairment or condition. These are often membership based charities and include information about the impairment, daily living issues, services, campaigns and local support. Examples of these include large organisations such as The Stroke Association and Diabetes UK through to smaller organisations working with rarer impairments, or just providing a single service such as information or a helpline.

A comprehensive list of links to useful organisations can be found at:
www.scope.org.uk/help-and-informatopm/scope-response-resources/links

Contact a Family provide a comprehensive list of impairments and conditions, including some of the rarer conditions: www.cafamily.org.uk/medicalinformation/conditions/azlisting/a.html

Information on services and support

Many disabled people are well aware of their impairment or condition and their main information needs are about what services and support is available to enable them to live an independent life. This includes information on equipment, housing, welfare benefits, employment, leisure opportunities and much more.

Each local authority will provide details of the services and support it provides for its disabled residents, and under the Equality Act they need to show how they are promoting disability equality i.e. going beyond just making reasonable adjustments to the services and support they provide.

More general information can be found on the Direct Gov website at:

DIAL UK has a network of 120 local Disability Information and Advice Line Services (DIALS) at: www.dialuk.info

Disability Information Scotland provides a comprehensive disability information service at: www.update.org.uk

Rights and equality

There is increasingly a focus on equality and human rights issues with an active disability rights movement in the UK and a growing number of Disabled People Organisations (DPOs). These are organisations which are run and controlled by disabled people. Many of these provide services often focused on campaigning, capacity building and information work.

Information on disability and the Equality Act 2010

Organisations working in the field of disability equality, who are also providers of information include:

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

United Kingdom Disabled People’s Council (UKDPC)
www.ukdpc.net

National Centre for Independent Living
www.ncil.org.uk

Disability Awareness in Action
www.daa.org.uk

Radar
www.radar.org.uk

Disability Law Service
www.dls.org.uk

Disability Alliance
www.disabilityalliance.org

People First
www.peoplefirstltd.com
How to produce information for and with disabled people

Beyond applying best practice in producing information, there are some further things a producer or provider of information may wish to consider:

- Not everyone considers themselves to be disabled and the majority of impairments are age related with most disabled people being aged over 65.
- Those who legally come under the Disability Discrimination Act (now Equality Act) include conditions not previously considered a ‘disability’ such as cancer.
- As far as possible information should be produced by, or in co-production with, disabled people.
- When considering information provision for disabled people it is important to consider a wide range of access needs including mental health support needs; conditions related to old age including memory loss and frailty; communication impairments; long term and progressive conditions; learning difficulties, and physical and sensory impairments.
- It is important to recognise that what is accessible to one individual or group of people may be a barrier to others – a large print document may meet the needs of someone with a visual impairment, but means a lot of page turning for someone with dexterity issues.
- Disability information by its very nature is quite specialised, but as far as possible general good practice rules for the production of information should apply. Everyone benefits from an easy to read well written leaflet, in the same way automatic doors make life easier for everyone.
- Do some research about the needs and preferences of your users and consider accessibility in its widest sense. Be prepared to be flexible and creative, and consider using a wider range of tools and formats than usual.
- Don’t jump to conclusions – a person is blind therefore we provide them with information in Braille, without checking if they actually read Braille.
- The way we produce accessible information and the way it is accessed is always changing so keep up to date with developments, particularly in the field of social media and the production of electronic information.

- Dissemination is also important – the most accessible leaflet is not accessible if no one knows it exists, or it is hard to find or disseminated in an inaccessible way. There is an active disability community providing the means to ensure information reaches its audience, such as Disability Now magazine www.disabilitynow.org.uk or the websites and newsletters of the organisations listed in this guide.
- Ensure information depicts positive and appropriate images of disabled people. A public health poster that suggests people should take the stairs rather than the lift as a form of exercise has little relevance to an audience of wheelchair users.
- Many people are scared off producing accessible information or working with disabled people due to fear of getting it wrong or using the wrong language or upsetting someone. Do I say blind or visually impaired, do I just produce everything in large print, what if I can’t understand what they are saying? Many disabled people will be familiar with this and the only way to overcome it is to ensure that disabled people are included in the production of information from the start.

Useful links

Producing better information for disabled people

The Office for Disability Issues
http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
www.rnib.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss (RNID)
www.rnid.org.uk

RNIB National Library Service/Library Catalogue
http://librarycatalogue.rnib.org.uk/

CHANGE – advice on producing information in clear words and pictures
www.changepeople.co.uk

Ability Net – adaptive computer technology
www.abilitynet.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk