| *National Guidance on Good Communication in Health and Social Care: Using Plain Language* | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Organisation(s):** | Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) | |
| **Country:** | Ireland | |
| **Contact:** | policy@esn-eu.org | |
| **Theme:** | ☐ Ageing & Care<br>☐ Asylum & Migration<br>☐ Young People<br>☐ Support for Children & Families<br>☐ Community Care<br>☐ Integrated Care & Support<br>☐ Co-Production<br>☒ Disability<br>☐ Housing & Homelessness<br>☐ Artificial Intelligence<br>☐ Digitalisation<br>☐ Quality Care | ☐ Labour Market Inclusion<br>☒ Social Inclusion<br>☐ Technology<br>☐ Workforce and Leadership<br>☐ Social Benefits<br>☐ EU Funding<br>☐ Social Services' Resilience<br>☐ Mental Health<br>☒ Person-Centred Care<br>☐ Research & Use of Evidence<br>☐ Management & Planning<br>☐ Other, please specify: |
| **Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights:** | ☐ 1. Education, training, life-long learning<br>☐ 2. Gender equality<br>☐ 3. Equal opportunities<br>☐ 4. Active support to employment<br>☐ 5. Secure and adaptable employment<br>☐ 6. Fair Wages<br>☐ 7. Transparent employment conditions<br>☐ 8. Social dialogue<br>☐ 9. Work-life balance<br>☐ 10. Healthy, safe work environment | ☐ 11. Childcare and child support<br>☐ 12. Social protection<br>☐ 13. Unemployment benefits<br>☐ 14. Minimum income<br>☐ 15. Old age income and pensions<br>☒ 16. Health care<br>☒ 17. Inclusion of people with disabilities<br>☒ 18. Long-term care<br>☐ 19. Housing and assistance to homeless<br>☐ 20. Access to essential services |
| **Current status of the practice:** | ☐ Concept and Design Phase<br>☐ Testing or pilot phase<br>☐ Temporary practice that has terminated<br>☐ Temporary practice that is ongoing and has a termination date<br>☒ Established and ongoing practice<br>☐ Scaling Up and Transformation Phase<br>☒ Other (please specify): | |
| **Summary:** | Developed by the Health Information and Quality Authority, this national guidance supports frontline staff in health and social care in their day-to-day practice. The guidance promotes the use of plain language and inclusive design in all spoken, written, and digital communication. In doing so, it helps health and social care staff to communicate in a way that everyone can understand. | |
| **Context/social issues addressed:** | Good communication is a key component of Ireland's national standards and is vital to providing high-quality, safe, person-centred health and social care. Yet information about health or social care services can be complex and difficult to understand. For example, the | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2024 National Inpatient Experience Survey highlighted patient difficulties in understanding a diagnosis and how to manage a condition after discharge. One in five adults in Ireland has a literacy difficulty, and just over one in four have low health literacy, making it particularly difficult to understand and act on health information. This guidance is designed to support health and social care staff to use plain language in all communication with people using services. Plain language helps ensure that everyone receives information in a clear, accessible, and easy-to-understand manner. |
| **Objectives:** | 1. Help the implementation of national standards in health and social care.<br>2. Support the use of plain language in all forms of communication with people using health and social care services.<br>3. Promote inclusive communication that will help staff deliver person-centred care and support. |
| **Activities:** | The development of the guidance was informed by a review of international resources on good communication in health and social care, and supported by a Working Group with representatives from relevant sectors, including the Health Service Executive (HSE), the National Disability Authority, HIQA Regulation, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), SOLAS – Adult Literacy for Life, Tusla – Child and Family Agency, and the National Patient and Service User Forum. The design process involved an iterative review cycle to ensure clarity and accessibility. Health and social care staff provided feedback on a draft via a survey, and a quality assurance review of the final text and its visual design was undertaken by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). NALA awarded the guidance its Plain English Mark, showing that it adheres to international plain language guidelines. To ensure better accessibility, the guidance has been made available in multiple formats, including as a webpage. |
| **Outcomes:** | The national guidance was published in December 2025 both in print and online. Almost 1,000 hard copies were disseminated through direct contacts in health and social care services, conferences, and requests from quality managers, university lecturers, and students. The digital version has also been promoted to all health and social care services, including those working specifically with children, people with disabilities, and older people. As of the end of September 2026, this reached 1,847 downloads.<br><br>This guidance was nominated for the 2026 European Social Services Awards in the 'Disability and Accessibility in Social Services' category. |
| **Funding source:** | EU Funds: ESF+ ☐ INTERREG ☐ ERDF ☐ ERASMUS☐ RRF ☐ other ☐<br>☒ National Government Funds<br>☐ Regional Government Funds<br>☐ Local Government Funds<br>☐ Private Sponsorship / Public-Private Partnership<br>☐ Financial contribution of People using Services<br>☐ Other, please define: |
| **Links to supporting documents:** | https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/guide/national-guidance-good-communication-health-and-social-care-using |
| **Comments and tips:** | Communicating in plain language is vital to providing high-quality, safe, and efficient health and social care services. Frontline staff and service managers deal with information that can be difficult to read, understand, and communicate to others. Often, this information is long and complicated. It may also contain jargon.<br><br>Using plain language: |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Helps people using services be more involved in and informed about their care.<br>• Makes a service's communication more effective.<br>• Makes a service more accessible.<br>• Makes a service more efficient. |