# A, B, C of getting accessible health and care information in Northern Ireland

If you are accessing the health or social care you have the right to be communicated with in a format you can read and understand. It is important you follow these three simple steps, the A, B, C of accessible health and care information, to ensure you get information about your care in the format you need.

If you live in Wales, Scotland or England, guides to request accessible health and care information can be found at [www.rnib.org.uk/myinfomyway](http://www.rnib.org.uk/myinfomyway), or you can contact RNIB’s Sight Loss Advice Service to ask for a copy (contact details below).

## A: Ask

When you access any health service, or publicly funded social care, it is important you ask the provider to record on their systems your communication needs. For example, you can let your GP practice, hospital or your local social care service know you need information by email, text, large print, audio or braille.

## B: Be aware that you have a right to receive accessible information

Everyone in Northern Ireland, has the right to receive information in a person’s required format, that they can access and understand. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care organisations are also bound by the “Quality Standards for Health and Social Care” (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety 2006). This requires them to consider the diverse needs of the public, services users, carers and staff alike, in any information and communication.

Five standards were also introduced in the publication “Improving the Patient & Client Experience” (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council for Nursing and Midwifery, Royal College of Nursing 2008).

One of those was the Communication Standard, which was defined as: “all health and social care staff communicate in a way which is sensitive to the needs and preferences of patients and clients.”

Additionally, there is a legal requirement under the Human Rights Act 1998; Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; Race Relations Order 1997; the Disability Discrimination Order 2006 and the Health and Social Services (Reform) Northern Ireland Act 2009, to ensure that health and social care, make their services, including information, accessible.

## C: Complain or raise a concern

If you do not get information and correspondence in the required format – despite requesting it – your next step is to make a complaint, or raise a concern, to the provider. You can also complain if you did not receive the communication / information at all.

Health and social care services complaints systems have been set up to encourage both positive and negative feedback so organisations can provide better services. Once a complaint is received, the relevant organisation is required to record and act on it.

You can make a complaint in several ways. You can also ask someone to make a complaint on your behalf, such as a carer or a family member. You can do this in writing, or email, by stating that you are giving consent for a family member, carer etc to act on your behalf – or by providing verbal consent over the telephone alongside the person who is acting on your behalf.

### Process to make a formal complaint or raise a concern

To telephone or speak to someone:

* Ring the GP surgery and ask to speak to the practice manager.
* Ring your local Health and Social Care Trust and ask to speak to the Complaints Manager, or Service User Feedback Department.
* Speak to someone in person during your visit or arrange a meeting afterwards.
* Details of the procedure for Regulated Establishments and Agencies, Independent Providers, and Self-Funded Care and Treatment, can be found at NI Direct [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)
* Health and Social Care Trust staff, or the Patient Client Council, can give you further information on how to raise a concern or make a complaint about health and social care services provided by the Trust or commissioned by the Trust from regulated establishments and agencies or independent healthcare providers.
* The Patient Client Council also provide a Freephone number for assistance with the process, 0800 917 0222.
* The Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the Department of Health can provide you with help about family practitioner services.
* Ring the GP surgery and ask to speak to the practice manager.
* Ring the hospital’s switchboard and ask to speak to the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS).
* Ring your social care provider / council and ask to speak to the service who you have been dealing with.
* Speak to someone in person during your visit or arrange a meeting afterwards.

To put your complaint in writing:

* You can make a complaint via Health and Social Care Trusts’ websites using an online form if they have one, or via the relevant email address. This is often the quickest way to get your complaint filed – and there is also a record of the communication.
* You can also write a letter to the organisation.
* Your complaint should be acknowledged within two or three working days of receipt.

You should receive a full response within 10 working days if your complaint was about a family doctor, dentist, pharmacist or optician and made directly.

If the complaint was made with the help of the SPPG Complaints Team, a response takes 20 working days.

If your complaint was about a hospital or social care service, you should receive a full response within 20 working days.

Please note, some complaints will take longer to resolve than others. You should be told if this is the case and be given an explanation.

If you are not happy with a response to a complaint, then please contact RNIB who will be able to advise you on next steps. RNIB’s Sight Loss Advice Service can be contacted by email at helpline.mailbox@rnib.org.uk or by phone on 0303 123 9999, 8am to 8pm on weekdays and 9am to 1pm on Saturdays.

### What to include in your complaint

In your complaint you should provide details of the inaccessible information, or communication, you have received.

Ideally, this should include:

* What was received and the format.
* When it was received.
* Which department it came from.
* What format you need to receive the information in.

You should also remind the provider of their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as mentioned above, and ask what steps they intend to take to ensure it does not happen again.

Document ends.