# Accessible Health Information Toolkit

In this Accessible Health Information toolkit you will find:

* Information on the Accessible Information Standard, how it works and what it means for blind and partially sighted people;
* a step-by-step process of how to request your preferred communication format from your GP or hospital clinic;
* template letters which you can fill in and print out;
* a guide on what to do if you don’t get the desired result from your clinic or GP surgery;
* details on how to complain to Healthwatch, the Care Quality Commission and your local health authorities if you do not get your communication needs met; and,
* a feedback form to let us know whether this toolkit helped and information on signing up to be a campaigner with RNIB.

## Background: Accessible Information Standard

In August 2016, the NHS Accessible Information Standard (SCCI 1605) came into force. It mandated that all healthcare and adult social care providers must provide information in a format their patients can read.

We believe this Standard will deliver a step change in patient communication across the NHS, enabling blind and partially sighted people to manage their own health with the same levels of privacy and independence that others may take for granted.

Importantly, the Standard reinforces the existing obligation under the Equality Act 2010 on service providers (including the NHS) to provide information in accessible formats. The Standard has come about because the Government recognised that more needed to be done by the NHS to address the lack of accessible information provision.

### What does the Standard include?

The Standard includes rules about:

* how and when NHS and adult social care services record your information and communication needs
* sharing your information and communication needs across services (with your permission so you don’t have to keep requesting alternative formats)
* how your information and communication needs are met.

### Your rights

## What do NHS providers need to do?

* NHS providers are supposed to have identified and recorded how their patients need to be communicated with. This is the case whether you are visiting them for the first time, or a regular user of their service.
* Patients should receive information in a format they can read.

## What can you do if you don’t get the information in your preferred format?

### Make contact with your GP or hospital clinic:

1. If your GP hasn’t yet made contact with you to record your preferred format you should write to them to inform them of your needs. A **template letter** is included in this toolkit.
2. The Practice Manager is responsible for ensuring that the GP surgery complies with this legal standard and that you receive all communications from the practice in your preferred format – from appointments to treatment notes.
3. You do not have to have the same format for every piece of correspondence. For example, some blind and partially sighted people ask to receive a text message about appointment details, but would rather receive larger documents like treatment plans or information about medication by email or in Braille.
4. If after 4 weeks you have not received a response in your preferred format to confirm that your communication needs have been flagged and that your preferred format has been recorded, you should approach the Practice Manager to discuss this issue, or use the **template reminder letter** included in this toolkit to ensure that they take action.
5. This method works for a hospital clinic or other NHS provider as well as a GP surgery.

### What happens if I still don’t receive my medical information in a format I can access?

1. If you haven’t received a response from your GP practice (or other NHS provider) after 4 weeks of your original letter and 2 weeks of your reminder letter, RNIB suggests that you escalate this matter and complain to the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The CCG is the decision-making body when it comes to providing health services in your local area, and they are responsible for ensuring that GP practices follow their contracts. To find out the details of your local CCG, please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Clinical-Commissioning-Group/LocationSearch/1>. There is a template letter in the template section of this toolkit that you can use to make contact with the CCG.
2. If you do make a complaint about this, it is worth considering also telling the Care Quality Commission (CQC) about the problems that you are experiencing. After RNIB’s intervention the CQC decided to make complying with the accessible information standard part of their inspection regime. Whilst they can’t intervene in your complaint, letting them know of your experiences will help them to form a picture of how well your GP practice cares for the people who use it. More details can be found here: http://www.cqc.org.uk/share-your-experience-finder or by emailing enquiries@cqc.org.uk or by telephoning 03000 616161.
3. If you’re complaining about your eye clinic or hospital department then RNIB recommends that you contact your local Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) department. They can guide you through the process of making a complaint and can help you make it. More information can be found here: [https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363](https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-%28PALS%29/LocationSearch/363). You can contact them by telephone through your hospital switchboard and many branches have an office within the hospital grounds that you can visit. You can also complain to your local CCG about hospital clinics as well, as they are responsible for them too.
4. There are local Healthwatch groups in every area of the country. They are independent organisations, and exist to make healthcare services better by sharing the experiences of patients with people who have the power to make local services better. If you are experiencing any problems with the care that you receive from the NHS, including around accessible information it is worth making contact with them. You can find your local branch here: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch> or by calling 03000 68 3000.

## Still experiencing problems?

Following the suggestions in this toolkit will work in all but the minority of cases.

However, if you are still experiencing problems with getting health information in an accessible format then it is open to you to make a complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman or even launch a legal complaint.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman will only accept a complaint when you have exhausted the internal complaints process of the NHS. For more information about the process and the information that they will need, visit <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint> or telephone 0345 015 4033.

If you want to make a legal challenge under the Equality Act then RNIB has a toolkit to help you do that. You can find our information on our website at [www.rnib.org.uk/equalityact](http://www.rnib.org.uk/equalityact).

## Templates

### Template letter: notifying your provider

**Your name**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Service provider**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Date**

Dear [insert name],

As you may be aware, NHS England published a new information standard about accessible information which came into force in 2016. It is called SCCI 1605.

The standard sets out rules for communication formats and represents a real step forward for people who are unable to read standard print to be able to access health information and appointments in a format that they can read.

With this in mind, I would like to notify you that I have a sight impairment and cannot read ordinary print. Therefore, I’d like to request that any documentation that you send out to me be in the format indicated below:

My required alternative format for written communications is: [insert your preferred format/s here]

This request applies to all forms of written communications, including personal patient information and general information which you normally provide to service users in ordinary print. I would be grateful if you could ensure that my information format needs are captured and flagged up on your patient record system.

If you need further information, the read codes for my request above are located in the SCCI 1605 full specification document on the NHS England website.

I would be grateful if you could confirm in the format specified above that my accessible format needs have been recorded on your patient record system and on my summary care record under the communications and information needs section.

Yours faithfully,

[insert signature here]

### Template letter: no response from provider

**Your name**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Service provider**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Date**

Dear [insert name],

I recently wrote to you to notify you of my communication requirements. This request was made in relation to the new NHS Accessible Information Standard (SCCI 1605).

The “identify needs and record” part of this new standard came into force on the 1 April 2016. It is in place so that blind and partially sighted people can receive their health information in a format they can access, whether Braille, large print, email or audio. Importantly, the new Standard reinforces the existing obligation under the Equality Act 2010 on those providers who offer a service on behalf of the NHS to ensure patient information and communication needs are met.

In my letter of [insert date here] I asked that your practice recorded my communication needs, which are [insert preferred format here].

The notification I made requested that under the new standard a relevant note was placed on my patient record and that I was informed that this has been done, or if there are any reasons why it wasn’t possible.

Guidance on complying with the standard can be found on the NHS England website.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that you have received my original request, that I will in future receive communications in a format that I can read and in relation to the 31 July 2016 commencement date for the full implementation of SCCI 1605.

Please respond within 14 days.

Yours sincerely,

[insert your signature here]

### Template letter: raising an issue with the Clinical Commissioning Group in your area

**Your name**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Clinical Commissioning Group**

**Address**

**Town**

**Postcode**

**Date**

Dear [insert name],

As you may be aware, NHS England published a new information standard about accessible information which came into force in 2016. It is called SCCI 1605.

The Standard sets out rules for communication formats and represents a real step forward for people who are unable to read standard print to be able to access health information and appointments in a format that they can read.

With this in mind, I recently made contact with my local GP surgery to request that they made a note on my record of my preferred formats for communication, and asked them to confirm in the relevant format that they had done so.

The request applied to all forms of written communications, including personal patient information and general information which are normally provided to service users in ordinary print. I also asked that they could ensure that my information format needs are captured and flagged up on their patient record system and on my summary care record under the communications and information needs section.

I am disappointed to say that my request has not been actioned, and despite sending follow-up correspondence I am yet to receive confirmation that the surgery will comply with the standard GP contract and the law as set out in the Health and Social Care Act.

I would be grateful if you could look into this matter for me as the body responsible for providing local services.

Yours faithfully,

[insert signature here]

## Toolkit feedback

Did the toolkit work for you? We want to make sure that we're delivering the best possible service for blind and partially sighted people, so we'd like to know if our toolkit has helped you.

Please complete and return the feedback form below in an envelope addressed to RNIB Campaigns, 105 Judd Street, London, WC1H 9NE. Alternatively, you can email the form to campaigns@rnib.org.uk.

1. What do you think was the most useful part of the toolkit?
2. What have you done since reading the toolkit or what do you plan to do?:
* Made a complaint: Yes / No
* Taken legal action: Yes / No
* Contacted RNIB for further support and advice: Yes / No
1. Did you use the example complaint letter? Yes / No
2. Did you use the example reminder letter? Yes / No
3. As a result of the Toolkit, do you feel more confident and able to address similar issues that may arise in the future? Yes / No

**Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback.**

## Further Information

For further information on our policy and campaigning work, including how you can get involved please visit [www.rnib.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.rnib.org.uk/campaigns).

You can also contact the RNIB Campaigns team by emailing campaigns@rnib.org.uk or telephoning 020 7391 2123.