# Accessible Health Information Toolkit

In this Accessible Health Information toolkit you will find:

* Information on the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 and Access for All under NHS Scotland, 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 seek further advice from the Patient Advice and Support Service
* details on how to complain to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman 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: Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011

In March 2011, the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 aims to improve patients' experiences of using health services and to support people to become more involved in their health and health care.

The Act included the statement ‘Communication about a patient’s health and wellbeing is clear accessible and understood.’

A Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities accompanied the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 which summarised the existing rights and responsibilities of patients using the NHS in Scotland. This included ‘You have the right to be given information about your care and treatment in a format or language that meets your needs (for example in audio format, British Sign Language or in a language other than English).’

NHS Health Scotland’s ‘Access for All 2016’ is a clear example of the sector taking responsibility to help people manage their own health and wellbeing by recognising that they need to provide high-quality accessible health information.

‘Access for All 2016’ states ‘If we produce content that is inaccessible we are discriminating against this group of users. Risk: Inaccessible content risks falling short of legal obligations provided by the Equality Act 2010.’

## What does the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act includes?

The Act gives all patients the right that the health care they receive will:

* Consider their needs
* Consider what would most benefit their health and wellbeing
* Encourage them to take part in decisions about their health and wellbeing, and provide them with the information and support to do so.

## 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 health provider: To complain about an NHS service – such as a hospital, GP or dentist – you should complain to the person or organisation. For example if it's a complaint about your doctor, you could complain to the surgery.

1. If your health provider 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 health provider is responsible for ensuring that they comply with the Act and that you receive all communication 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 hospital clinic, NHS provider as well as a GP surgery.

If you don't want to complain directly or your complaint hasn't been resolved, contact your local health board.

There are different complaint procedures for NHS 24, the Golden Jubilee National Hospital, the Scottish Ambulance Service and the State Hospital.

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

### The Patient Advice and Support Service can:

* Help you to give feedback or comments, raise concerns, or make complaints about the treatment you have received from the NHS.
* Support you if you are going to a meeting.
* Help you write letters and make phone calls.
* Help you access your medical and clinical records.
* Help you access the treatment, care and support you need.

For more information please visit: <https://www.cas.org.uk/pass/>

# Are you 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 Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman will only accept a complaint when you have exhausted the internal complaints process of NHS Scotland. For more information about the process and the information that they will need, visit <https://www.spso.org.uk/making-a-complaint> or telephone 0800 377 7330.

### Template letter: notifying your provider

Your name

Address

Town

Postcode

Service provider

Address

Town

Postcode

Date

Dear [insert name],

As you may be aware, the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 aims to improve patients' experiences of using health services and to support people to become more involved in their health and health care.

The Act includes the statement ‘Communication about a patient’s health and wellbeing is clear accessible and understood.’

With this in mind, I would like to notify you that I am visually impaired 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.

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 Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011.

The ‘clear accessible and understood’ part of the Act came into force on the 11 March 2011. 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 Act 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 Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 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 Scottish Government 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 11 March 2011 commencement date for the full implementation of the Act.

Please respond within 14 days.

Yours sincerely,

[insert your signature here]

### Template letter: raising an issue with the Health Board in your area

Your name

Address

Town

Postcode

Health Board

Address

Town

Postcode

Date

Dear [insert name],

As you may be aware, the Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 aims to improve patients' experiences of using health services and to support people to become more involved in their health and health care.

The Act includes the statement ‘Communication about a patient’s health and wellbeing is clear accessible and understood.’

With this in mind, I recently made contact with my [enter health service] 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 [enter health service] will comply with the Act and the accompanying Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities.

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 Scotland Campaigns, 12-14 Hillside Crescent, Edinburgh, EH7 5EA. Alternatively, you can email the form to…

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 <https://www.rnib.org.uk/scotland/campaigning-rnib-scotland>.