Hosting accessible and inclusive meetings

Introduction

Around one in five Queenslanders has a disability. This fact sheet helps you to plan activities which are accessible for staff and consumers with disability.

Simple changes can help you to engage with diverse consumers and make it easier for people to access and participate in your events.

STEP 1: Ask about my access and participation needs

- People with disability are the experts in their own needs and often know the solutions which work for them. It is important to ask people about their access and participation needs during orientation, planning or booking processes.

- Ask participants "Is there anything I can do to assist with any access or participation needs?"

- You may want to give examples such as: space for mobility aids, parking or drop off information, public transport information, interpreter access, wheelchair access, room set up, or if a support person is also attending. You may also want to check if support people need any assistance for their roles.

STEP 2: Make reasonable adjustments to meet my needs

- **Choose an accessible venue**
  - ☐ Decide if online attendance is possible and offer this to participants.
  - ☐ Check if the venue has accessible parking or a drop off area near the entrance. You need to consider parking costs and reimbursement for consumers.
  - ☐ Check that the room is in an accessible part of the building – look for steps, lift access, trip hazards and doorway lips.
  - ☐ Confirm if there is an accessible toilet near the meeting room.

- ☐ Check that all parts of the room are accessible (e.g. podiums, raised platforms).

- ☐ Ensure the room can fit extra support people, wheelchairs and mobility devices.

- ☐ Check if the room has built-in hearing loop technology.

- ☐ People have the legal right to bring certified assistance animals (e.g. guide dog) into most public places. If you are meeting in a healthcare service, check if any restrictions apply in this setting.

- ☐ Have a clear contact person for the event so that participants can ask questions or discuss access and participation needs.

- **Book communication support services**
  - ☐ **Interpreters:** A certified interpreter should be used if someone needs language support for Auslan sign language or a spoken language.

  - ☐ **Captioning support:** Participants who are hard of hearing may need captioning support so they can read what is being said.

    - The participant may bring their own device with captioning support.

    - You can start a meeting in MS Teams and enable live captions (and project it to the front of the room).

    - The participant may prefer a captioner (stenocaptioner). These workers provide real-time captioning. You may need to speak with your manager about budgets and contact your audiology department about captioning services.

  - ☐ **Hearing loops:** Hearing loops send an audio signal from a microphone or sound system to a person's hearing aid. This helps the person to hear more clearly. If your venue doesn't have hearing loop technology, you can borrow a mobile hearing loop. Contact your hospital audiology department.

- **Room set up**
  - ☐ Set up the room in a round/square format so people can see each other's faces, eye contact and body language.

  - ☐ Ask the person and any interpreters, captioners or support people about the seating they prefer.

- Ensure enough chairs for all participants and support people. Allow space if people have mobility equipment.

- Allow space for guide dogs or assistance animals.

- Close the door and minimise background noise and distractions.

- Ensure even lighting in all parts of the room and check whether lighting can be adjusted.

- **Documentation and pre-reading**
  - Where possible, write all minutes and agendas in plain English. Use clear language, explain acronyms or clinical terms and use 12 point font or larger.

  - Send documentation to participants early, ideally one week before your meeting or event. This includes documents for blind participants or those with low vision to review at home with assistive technology. Give participants the option of receiving electronic or printed versions.

- **Welcoming people to the event**
  - In very large buildings, such as a hospital campus, you may want to organise a central meeting point (e.g. front entrance) and guide people to the meeting rooms.

  - Have enough staff available to greet people as they arrive at the meeting room and offer assistance as needed.

- **Meeting process and chairing**

  The role of the chairperson is critical. The chair should establish clear process and actively encourage participants to follow process.

  - The chair should remind participants that only one person speaks at a time.

  - A large Easy Read agenda at the front of the room can help participants to focus. The chair should read out any written information on whiteboards or powerpoints.

  - Encourage participants to speak slowly and clearly, use plain language and avoid acronyms.

- The chair should summarise key points – especially if people are attending online or by phone. The chair will also need to verbalise any body language or nodding for people with low vision.

- If you are using a microphone or hearing loop ensure that people only speak when they have the microphone.

- Consider any activities or exercises being used during the event which involve moving, reading and group discussion. Consider how someone will participate if they have hearing, vision, communication or mobility issues.

- Have an additional staff member available to assist with unexpected issues during the event.

STEP 3: Offer the option of online meetings

Online attendance options can assist more people to participate in your meetings. This is especially useful for participants with needs related to health concerns, fatigue, carer responsibilities, mobility or travel difficulties.

- Many communication apps such as Microsoft Teams or Skype have built in text captioning functions. These functions provide real-time text captions and allow people to read what is being said. This can be helpful if someone is hard-of-hearing or there is background noise, computer audio issues or a poor internet connection.

- If an Auslan interpreter is present, participants can select 'sign language view' in Microsoft Teams to prioritise signers on their screen or use the 'pin for me function'. As a host you can use the 'spotlight for everyone' function to keep the interpreter video onscreen at all times.

- Actively prompt participants to mute and unmute their microphones to minimise background noise.

- Encourage people to 'raise their hand' either physically or virtually (with the raise-your-hand icon) and verbally check with blind or low vision participants if they have anything to add on each topic discussed.

- Read out loud any content which is projected to the screen. Remember to describe graphs, diagrams or images.

- Position microphones in the physical meeting room so that online participants can hear all participants.

- Have a structured agenda which is shared with all participants prior to the meeting.

- Allow participants the option of sending in extra thoughts or feedback via email after the meeting.

- The chair will need to remember to engage and invite participation from online participants.

SEE ME. HEAR ME. RESPECT ME.

IMPROVING HEALTHCARE
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY