

Coming of Age- The Australian Communication Access Symbol

Disability policies internationally focus on the importance of community inclusion and the right to access local services. A pre-requisite of community access for people with complex communication needs (CCN) is the extent to which their communication is effective and successful in unfamiliar settings. Creating communication accessible environments means that the responsibility for achieving this lies both with the individual *and* with businesses/organisations in which they communicate. The Australian Communication Access Symbol (CAS), represents concrete actions that organisations can implement to demonstrate evidence of communication access.

‘Communication access occurs when people are respectful and responsive to individuals with communication difficulties, and when strategies and resources are used to support successful communication,’ (Solarsh, Johnson, West and Rezzani, 2013). The Communication Access Symbol identifies places where the appropriate standards have been met through an audit process by trained Communication Access Assessors who have CCN.

Aims of Workshop:

1. Present background and development of the Australian Communication Access Symbol (CAS)
2. Describe communication access in Victoria, Australia – Communication Access Licence Agreements for businesses and organisations
3. Present a model for implementing communication access nationally and internationally- Communication Access Licence Agreement for Assessment Organisations
4. Describe the roll out of the first international communication access project in the United Kingdom in collaboration with Communication Matters (UK)
5. Consider the importance of research and networking
6. Describe employment opportunities and implications for services/organisations employing people with CCN as communication access assessors- their role, contribution and reflections
7. Identify ways we can work together to build an international movement of communication access

Learning goals:

1. For participants to become aware of the concept of communication access and understand what communication access means for people with CCN in their countries
2. To learn about the development of the Communication Access Symbol (CAS) in Australia
3. To learn about the different licence agreements for awarding the Communication Access Symbol.
4. To learn about becoming a Communication Access Assessment Organisation to carry out communication access assessments in your country
5. Lessons from the first international rollout of communication access
6. To learn about employment opportunities and the implications for employing people with CCN as Communication Access Assessors

7. To consider the opportunities and challenges for networking, research and creating a world wide movement for communication access

In 2011 the CAS was identified by following the Australian Standard®, AS 2341-1992: Development, testing and implementation of information and safety symbols and symbolic signs. In 2013, the certificate of registration for copyright of the CAS was awarded by the Australian Registrar of Trade Marks. In 2014, rules for applying the communication access trade mark, the CAS, were registered with the Australian Consumer and Competition Board. In 2015 four Communication Access Licence Agreements were approved. These licence agreements relate to places and organisations where the symbol is awarded, and to organisations that make an application to Scope, to carry out communication access assessments. The four Communication Access Licence Agreements include:

1. The Communication Access Licence Agreement for an Approved User (1-10 staff)
2. The Communication Access Licence Agreement for an Approved Organisation (11-50 staff)
3. The Communication Access Licence Agreement for an Approved Organisation (51 + staff)
4. The Communication Access Licence Agreement for an Approved Assessment Organisation

For licences 1-3, there are minimum standards for the initial and ongoing award of the Communication Access Licence and symbol.

Licence 4 is the renewable licence that an organisation wishing to carry out communication access assessments can purchase.

When an Approved Assessment Organisation Licence is awarded, Scope will provide a licence pack including:

- A manual of all the policy and procedure required to set up an organisation to carry out communication access assessments,
- All required documents including the Communication Access Checklists, review documents, templates for a range of letters, reports, approvals etc.
- Examples of the Communication Access Symbol and collateral for the promotion of communication access
- Resources for preparing settings to become communication accessible including communication access surveys, training power points, training videos etc
- Examples of communication aids and resources provided to different businesses, services or organisations
- Resources for employing and training communication access assessors
- Ideas for developing a communication access website
- Case studies
- FAQ's

Communication Access Assessors have played a leading and essential role in the development of communication access. Their contribution laid the foundation for the development of the Communication Access Checklists and the minimum standards followed by current research into the reliability and validity of the tools and standards. In addition the real-time assessment of peoples' skills and attitudes when interacting with people with communication difficulties can only authentically be judged by a person with a communication difficulty.

At present Scope has six Communication Access Assessors who are casual employees, all of whom use AAC. Each assessor has an individualised work-place contract which takes into consideration their individual abilities and 'reasonable adjustment' needs. Issues related to selection, induction, training, paid hours and support will be addressed. Their role includes training, participation in project advisory groups and carrying out mystery customer evaluations. Assessors may also be required to carry out assessments regionally requiring overnight stays. An assessor is supported by a communication access consultant at all times.

Since the launch of the Australian Communication Access Symbol in November 2011, over 180 Communication Access Symbols and licences have been awarded across 12 sectors. Places that have been awarded range from small retailers such as individual café's to small organisations such as the Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, and finally to large organisations such as V/Line Regional Rail.

In 2015 the first rollout of the CAS was initiated through a collaboration between Scope and Communication Matters, United Kingdom. The aim of this pilot is to explore issues related to implementing communication access in a different country, and to addressing the adaptations that may be required.

This workshop presents the coming of age of communication access in Victoria, Australia. Participants will have the opportunity to share what we have learnt and explore ways to work together to build an international movement for communication access.

References:

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What was received? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| Salary | In kind |
| Consulting fee | Grants |
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| Royalty | |
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For what role? (Check all that apply)

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What is the nature of the non-financial relationship? (Check and complete all that apply)

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For what role?

Volunteer employment

Volunteer teaching and speaking

Board membership

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Volunteer membership on advisory committee or review panels

Other volunteer activities (please describe):