July 2021

[Dear practice]

**NHS Accessible Information Standard 2016**

As you may know, 31 July 2021 marked the five-year anniversary of the Government’s Accessible Information Standard (AIS).

This standard legally obliges all NHS organisations providing care, and publicly funded social care, to abide by a specific approach to making information accessible to people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments.

The accompanying implementation guidelines further stressed five key stages to ensure this not only occurs universally, but that it is also understood by staff and reflected in information systems. Specifically, the five steps require that access support needs must be identified, recorded, flagged, shared and met, wherever this pertains to patients, service users, carers or parents with disabilities including sensory impairments.

Sight Loss Councils are concerned that, while standards rise following introduction of the NHS AIS and positive patient accounts grow more common, consistent application of this standard, and its widespread understanding among all NHS staff, are still to be achieved.

We are writing to urge you to refamiliarize yourselves with the AIS and re-examine how you currently follow the five steps listed above.

With this in mind, we would encourage you to consider the following:

* The benefits of a specific AIS policy, or Trust-wide accessibility policy which makes special reference to the AIS. The AIS makes it doubly easy to abide by legislation such as the Equalities Act 2010, by outlining ways in which health bodies can give all people equal access to information and create a working culture where this is normal.
* Accessibility Training – a useful way to embed objectives of the AIS and give information access equal weighting to some of the more traditional, physical components of such training.
* Regularly requesting reports on accessible information from the senior leadership teams over which you have jurisdiction.
* The Government’s Digital Accessibility Requirement – A set of regulations for all public sector websites and apps, dictating that all such digital resources be made accessible by 2020.
* Greater consultation of blind and partially sighted people, by far the most positive driver to ensure and monitor compliance with the AIS, while guaranteeing associated protocols are fit for purpose and stand the best chance of seeing accessibility designed in as they evolve.

I am sure you will agree that it remains vital that people with a visual impairment should continue to be able to access their personal health information, and receive accessible notifications pertaining to them, in order that they may receive the same service standards as any other member of the public.

I would be grateful, therefore, if you could reply to this letter to set out the approach your practice adopts for managing and responding to the Accessible Information Standard.

If you need any further advice on these issues, please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

[volunteer name]

**Background information**

You may find the guidance below useful in respect of AIS.

1. Implementation guidance for the Accessible Information Standard: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/accessible-information-standard-implementation-guidance/>
2. The 2017 guidance regarding the Government’s Digital Accessibility Regulation: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps>
3. Information on the Equalities Act 2010 along with explanatory notes: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>