

Inclusive use of digital and non-digital communications

Tips for Commonwealth Home Support Program Providers

Older Australians are generally embracing new technology well, but many CHSP clients remain digitally excluded or uncomfortable in relying on these technologies to access services. Providers need to carefully consider how they use the right mix of digital and non-digital communications.

Basic things to remember include:

- 1 Proactively engage with clients on their preferred methods of communication as early as possible & be prepared to provide information in multiple forms.
- 2 Be alert to the need for assistive technology or support personnel to facilitate use of digital communications especially where the client has a known disability.
- 3 Assure clients that concerns such as privacy breaches and scams - while very real - are relatively uncommon in this context and that protections are in place.
- 4 Help transition clients to greater use of digital communications over time with the help of a range of training and self-learning activities.
- 5 Apply principles of good communication for older people regardless of the technology - eg repetition and reinforcement, minimal visual and auditory distraction, diagrams and pictures, varied speed of delivery.
- 6 Allow time to accommodate different modes of communication – eg longer appointments for individuals who require more time to use slower, non-digital methods.
- 7 Remember communication is a two-way process so whatever vehicle is used needs to allow for the client to both understand information presented and respond effectively (possibly using different technology).
- 8 Be alert to signs from clients that communication methods used may not be suitable – eg asking repeated questions, frustration, anxiety or lack of engagement in activities.

At the same time, be careful not to:

- 1 Assume a client will have a support person to help them use digital technologies or that they are comfortable asking a family member to help.
- 2 Swamp clients with excessive paperwork as the only alternative to receiving electronic online information and forms.
- 3 Assume that clients are actively using email, SMS or social media even if you know they have access to these.
- 4 Appear to judge clients for a lack of skill or unwillingness to use modern technology, or for expressing anxiety about issues like privacy and scams.
- 5 Overcompensate for diminished client capacity – physical or cognitive – by resorting to “simpler” communication platforms when this entails loss of functionality and nuance.
- 6 Compromise use of inclusive, non-discriminatory language by relying on platforms that do not give these issues the attention they need.
- 7 Allow the cost or immediate availability of assistive technologies to dominate decisions on the most appropriate and preferred communication platform.
- 8 Use negative feedback from some clients as an excuse for not investing in and applying improved digital or non-digital communication tools for your wider client group.