



Scottish Accessible Information Forum

Information and advice services

**What disabled people should
expect and receive**

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2007**

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Scottish Accessible Information Forum

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Feedback

SAIF is very keen to get your views on this publication.

- Email any comments you have to info@saifscotland.org.uk
- Use the feedback form on our website.
- Write to us at the above address.

Introduction

This booklet is a practical guide for disabled people. It tells you what standard of service you should get from:

- information or advice providers
- local authorities and others that plan and fund these services.

This booklet is part of the SAIF Standards for Disability Information and Advice Provision in Scotland. The Standards aim to ensure that service providers consult with and involve disabled people on all matters which affect them.

There is no excuse now if this does not happen.

The recent introduction of the Disability Equality Duty (2006) requires by law that public authorities:

- encourage participation by disabled people in public life
- involve disabled people in developing a disability equality scheme
- promote equality of opportunity
- eliminate discrimination
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people
- take account of the needs of disabled people.

The SAIF Standards are based on a social rather than a medical model of disability. They aim to remove the barriers which prevent disabled people from equal access to information. These barriers can be created by an organisation, the environment or attitudes.

The Standards have been developed through extensive consultation with disabled people and service providers and are designed to encourage disabled people to:

- make demands on service providers
- participate in ongoing improvements.

Key issues raised by disabled people were:

- inaccessible design and layout of buildings
- lack of information in different formats
- poor awareness, attitudes and knowledge on the part of staff.

Solving these issues may incur some costs and will need commitment by management – if the service is to comply with the law and be accessible to disabled people. For example:

- if a ramp is required
- if copies of an annual report need to be produced in other formats
- if staff need equality training.

The role of the SAIF Standards

The Standards are intended to help agencies make their information and advice services accessible to disabled people.

The Standards recognise that disabled people should be able to get information and advice from many different sources, just as everyone else does.

These may be agencies which are:

- specialists in disability issues
- general advice services which target all members of the public
- only offering information or advice as a small part of what they do.

The Standards are relevant to all agencies, large and small, urban and rural, public and private. Limited resources are no reason for not aiming for high standards. Sometimes an agency only needs to consider good practice ideas and then implement them.

What do the standards mean for disabled people?

Any agency which puts the Standards into practice will provide a service to disabled people that:

- is accessible
- identifies what information or advice is needed
- gives accurate information or advice
- can meet your communication support needs
- can provide information in your preferred format
- is private and confidential
- provides a referral if appropriate
- provides follow-up action if necessary
- acts upon complaints.

The Standards also show how disabled people can be involved in the delivery, management and planning of services.

Please remember that the Standards will be waste paper unless disabled people continue to make clear demands to be equal citizens. Only then will planners and managers of services respond fully to the needs of disabled people.

Reception standards

To become a user of any information or advice service you need to be able to access the service.

You should expect organisations to provide a service that:

- clearly states the types of information and advice it provides and how it does it
- is in a physically accessible building
- is available when you need it.

Process standards

Once you are able to use a service you need to be confident that you will be treated with respect by people with the skills to assist you.

You should expect a service where:

- staff have the knowledge to help you
- staff are trained in disability equality issues
- information is available in the format you need and can be provided within a timescale agreeable to you.

Standards of service

You need to be sure that the organisation has policies to ensure that the information or advice you get is accurate, timely and appropriate.

You should expect an organisation to provide a service that:

- is independent and works in your interests rather than its own. Or, if it is part of a larger organisation such as a local authority, it could mean that they explain any limits to the advice they provide. For example they may not advise you on taking legal action against the local authority.
- has policies and procedures to protect your confidentiality
- allows you to access the information which they keep about you
- has the information resources to meet your needs
- has the systems to ensure the smooth running of your casework
- has good relationships with other service providers to make sure that any referral you need goes smoothly.

When things go wrong

If you are not happy with the service you receive the organisation should have:

- a complaints procedure that is simple to use and allows you to continue using the service – and provides details to you in the format you need
- the means to compensate you for any loss because of their negligence or poor service
- a means of telling you about any changes they have introduced because of your complaint.

Getting involved

Organisations should have ways of telling you, as a service user, about current services and plans for the future.

In addition they should have ways of consulting you about:

- services provided
- ways in which services are delivered
- places from which services are delivered
- plans and priorities for the future.

As a **disabled person**, a **carer**, or a **parent of a disabled child** your local authority should have a means of informing you, consulting with you on and involving you in:

- its current information and advice services
- its plans for providing future information and advice services.

Local authorities should be working closely with organisations of disabled people. One of the issues they should be working on is putting into practice the SAIF Standards.

You may not be satisfied with the range or quality of information or advice services in your area. You may feel that as a disabled person you don't have access to the services you need. If so, voice your concerns through:

- local organisations of disabled people
- your local disabled persons' forum if there is one
- your local authority.

This publication is available on request in the following formats:

- braille
- large print
- audio CD
- electronic format
- British Sign Language

It can also be downloaded in PDF and Microsoft Word from the SAIF website.

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