



Insights on Engagement with service users with different communication & support needs

JUNE 2026

Community members regularly access a variety of government services and programs. Some people accessing the services may be experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. For example, they may be experiencing financial or social hardship, be subjected to racism and discrimination, speak English as a second language, have lower literacy levels, or have a disability or impairment that reduces their ability and capacity to communicate, be mobile or learn.

Sometimes services are delivered in ways that prioritise organisational and system requirements. They have broad 'one size fits all' solutions that do 'for' people and not 'with'.

Several audits have identified a need for more person-centred approaches that provide greater consideration, time and respect to

understanding the strengths and unique circumstances of service users. Recognising the challenges individuals may face allows for careful consideration when working together, to identify needs and plan appropriate, effective support.

This publication draws on insights the Audit Office has gained from recent performance audits including:

- Management of the Home Buyer Concession Scheme (2026)
- Specialist assessment services for dementia and cognitive decline (2025)
- Planning and delivery of services for young people with moderate to severe mental illness (2024)
- Support for students with disability in ACT public schools (2023)
- Financial management services for protected persons (2023)



Ensure that communication with service users is timely, accessible and consistent in messaging

Communication with service users should be done in a way that enables everyone to access and clearly understand the information. Communication must use easy-to-understand plain English language, be respectful, strengths-based and culturally safe and appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Co-designing communication materials with people using services who have different needs can help to ensure that they are fit for purpose and accessible. Communication methods should be monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure that materials are appropriate and effective.

For further guidance on improving communication through accessible, inclusive and easy to read strategies, please refer to the Australian Government Style Manual: www.stylemanual.gov.au.



Effective communication enables service users to access appropriate support, make informed choices, act with greater self-assurance and plan for their individual circumstances.

Assist service users to connect with other relevant services for support

Some people accessing services may require additional or specialised assistance to support their emotional and social wellbeing and safety. Service delivery staff should have access to up-to-date resources, accurate information and a clear list of services to enable effective referrals. Where appropriate, supporting a person to connect with other services can be helpful.

It is important to develop relationships and active connections with non-government organisations and relevant support services. Working collaboratively provides greater continuity for people being referred and leads to better integration and coordination of supports. It also improves the sharing of information and can contribute to the development of policy and practice more broadly.



Referrals to services are more likely to be effective when a person is actively involved in deciding which service is most appropriate for their needs.



Feedback from people accessing a service can improve its quality and effectiveness

Every organisation can expect to receive compliments, complaints and other feedback about the services it provides. Service users lived experiences, and the impacts of their engagement in a program, are a valuable source of information that can contribute to improving performance and the design and delivery of services.

It is important to have systems in place to enable service users experiencing vulnerability to provide feedback. Implementing a feedback mechanism with clearly defined policies, workflow diagrams and processes to review and respond to the information provided can assist in resolving complaints quickly and thoroughly.



Facilitators with lived experience can be engaged to assist with development and co-design of appropriate feedback mechanisms, such as focus groups and formal surveys.

Use data to review performance and plan for service delivery

Being aware of population changes and potential growth in demand for services can assist with planning for future service delivery and responding to increasing need. Regular analysis of the service pathway through which a person navigates, using supporting data, can identify strengths and gaps and whether the needs of people experiencing vulnerability are being met. Where shortfalls exist, it is important to have a clear, documented plan in place that outlines the actions required to address these needs and a timeframe in which they will be implemented.



Regular data analysis can identify strengths, gaps and challenges in service delivery that can improve the experiences of people experiencing vulnerability using services.



Future Performance Audit Activity

The Audit Office will continue to consider the needs of service users experiencing vulnerabilities in future performance audits. The Audit Office will consider the way that services are being planned, delivered and evaluated to meet their needs.

About the ACT Audit Office

The ACT Audit Office provides an independent view on the accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of the ACT Public Sector.

Performance audits provide the ACT Legislative Assembly with an independent assessment of the quality of the management of public resources and identify and promote better practices. Further information about performance audits and performance audit reports can be found on the ACT Audit Office website (www.audit.act.gov.au).

The ACT Audit Office publishes an annual performance audit program in June each year. The Performance Audit Program aims to balance coverage across ACT Government agencies and focus on topics that are of interest to ACT Legislative Assembly and the community.

Ideas for performance audits can be submitted to the Audit Office via email:

performance-audit-program@act.gov.au