How to support someone who is non-speaking or minimally speaking to access public services

The following key points are important to consider:

- Recognise and respect a person's right to communicate in their own way.

- Provide support, give a person time, assume competence, and avoid assumptions about their ability to use speech.

- Honour requests for support and keep an open mind.

- Remember that some Autistic people and persons with disabilities of all ages use a form of communication called Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

- AAC is a term which describes the strategies, tools and devices which some people use to communicate effectively and to be heard. It helps people who may have difficulties in speaking to express their thoughts and needs.

- For example, people might use a speech-generating app if their speech is unclear or add Lámh signs to get their meaning across.

- Understand that some individuals may use AAC at different points in a conversation if they feel likely to be misunderstood.

- Be mindful that autistic people and other users of AAC with disabilities can also have physical and sensory needs which must be met to allow for meaningful communication.

- Remember that a person's communication needs and preferences can change based on how they are feeling and how they experience their environment on a given day. For example, if they are anxious, overwhelmed or tired.

- Remember to not pass judgement on the type of AAC used, or what that looks like when supporting people

- Treat family members and other supporters as communication partners, rather than speaking for the person.

- Remember that if a person can hold a meaningful conversation, it should be clear that they are sharing their own perspective on any questions asked or issues discussed. If you feel this is not the case, then this may be cause for concern. Otherwise, an exchange should continue as normal.

For more information, please see the National Disability's [Guidance for public sector staff to support non-speaking and minimally speaking people to access public services](#)