

Government of Alberta

Alternative Communications Policy

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For more information on this policy, please contact the Government of Alberta's Communications and Public Engagement Office (CPE).
Communications and Public Engagement Office, Government of Alberta

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Table of Contents

Policy	4
Background	4
Definitions	4
Guidelines and procedures	5
Government publications/productions	5
Means of providing access	5
Formats	5
Charges for services	5
Public meetings and hearings	6
Public notices	6
Charges for services	6
Government services	6
Means of providing access	7
Charges for services	7

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Policy

The Government of Alberta will ensure equitable access to the information intended for the general public in its publications, public meetings and services, to persons with alternative communications needs. Information will be provided within a reasonable time and at a cost that will not exceed that charged to persons without alternative communications needs. Information will be provided in the most cost-effective format possible to meet the communication need of the individual client.

Background

The ability to communicate is essential if people are to give and receive and understand information. Albertans require reasonable access to government information through publications, audio-visual presentations, public meetings and services so that government services and programs are effective and meet the needs of Albertans.

In September 1992 the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities presented to government its Alternative Communications recommendations report. Five areas were identified for policy development: Government, the Justice System, Educational Resources, Sign Language Interpreters and Communication Technology. This policy addresses recommendation one: Government.

Definitions

Persons with alternative communications needs are individuals who, because of age, level of literacy, mental, physical, sensory (deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired) or learning disability, are unable, without assistance, to access government information which would otherwise be available to them, or to understand or be understood by government service providers.

Alternative communications formats may include, but are not limited to: the use of print materials in alternative formats such as audio tapes, Braille, large print or synthesized speech; the inclusion of open/closed captioning for videotapes; the provision of communications assistance from assistive listening devices, sign language interpreters, oral communications facilitators, readers or notetakers.

Guidelines and procedures

The communications branch within each department will coordinate the provision of information for individuals with alternative communication needs. Communications and Public Engagement is designated to gather and disseminate information regarding alternative formats and services, and provide advice and expertise to departments with respect to the implementation of the policy. It is the responsibility and authority of individual departments or agencies to determine the most cost-effective and efficient way to meet the communications needs of their clients, including clients with alternative communications needs.

Formal requests for information under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and regulations will be governed by that act and regulations.

Government publications/productions

Means of providing access

- Self-identification of the need for alternative communications, or identification of need by an advocate or guardian will be accepted as a requirement for access to alternative communications formats.
- Generally, alternative formats of government publications/productions intended for the general public should be made available, upon request, within a reasonable time. If it can be anticipated that there will be a significant demand for a publication by people with print handicaps, alternative formats may be prepared in advance.
- Government documents should contain a statement indicating what alternative formats are available and where they can be obtained.

Formats

- The standard array of alternative print formats should include, but not be limited to, large print (14–18 point type), audio tape and Braille.
- Audio-visual productions should be accompanied by open/closed captions or, where appropriate, descriptive narration or some other form of communications assistance.
- Government libraries should arrange to make available when appropriate the required services of a reader upon request, with reasonable advance notice, in order to provide access to government publications, books and reports containing information intended for the public.

Charges for services

- Cost of services is the responsibility of the departments concerned. Charges to clients will not be higher than those to clients without alternative needs.

Public meetings and hearings

- Generally, alternative formats of communication should be provided at public meetings and hearings when it can readily be anticipated there will be a need for them, or with reasonable advance notice of need. Alternative communications access may include sign language interpreters, materials in large print, oral communications facilitators, notetakers or assistive listening devices.
- The location for meetings and hearings should be physically accessible to persons with disabilities. Physical considerations should include: wheelchair access, washroom access, good lighting, the use of backlit projectors to avoid the need to dim lights, and good acoustics/minimal background noise.

Public notices

- Notices/advertising of public meetings should indicate accessibility by use of international wheelchair and ear symbols. Notices/advertising should state that alternative communications formats will be made available with reasonable advance notice and indicate the person to contact to access those services.
- In those instances where alternative communications formats are being provided, notices of public meetings should indicate what specific formats/services will be available.

Charges for services

- Upon determination by the Department of the type of access needed, the appropriate communication assistance should be arranged and paid for by the Department holding the meeting or public hearing.

Government services

- Services include all those in which there may be lengthy, complex or confidential communications.

Means of providing access

- The range of supports available with advance notice should include, but not be limited to, sign language interpreters, oral communications facilitators, interveners (for deaf-blind), guides or readers, notetakers, and materials in alternative formats.
- Communications branches of departments should ensure telephone access via TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf), through the Government RITE system for low activity areas, and through separate TDD lines for higher volume areas. The availability of a TDD should be listed in telephone directories. Training in the proper use of this equipment should be provided to affected staff.

Charges for services

- Cost of services will be the responsibility of the department providing them.

