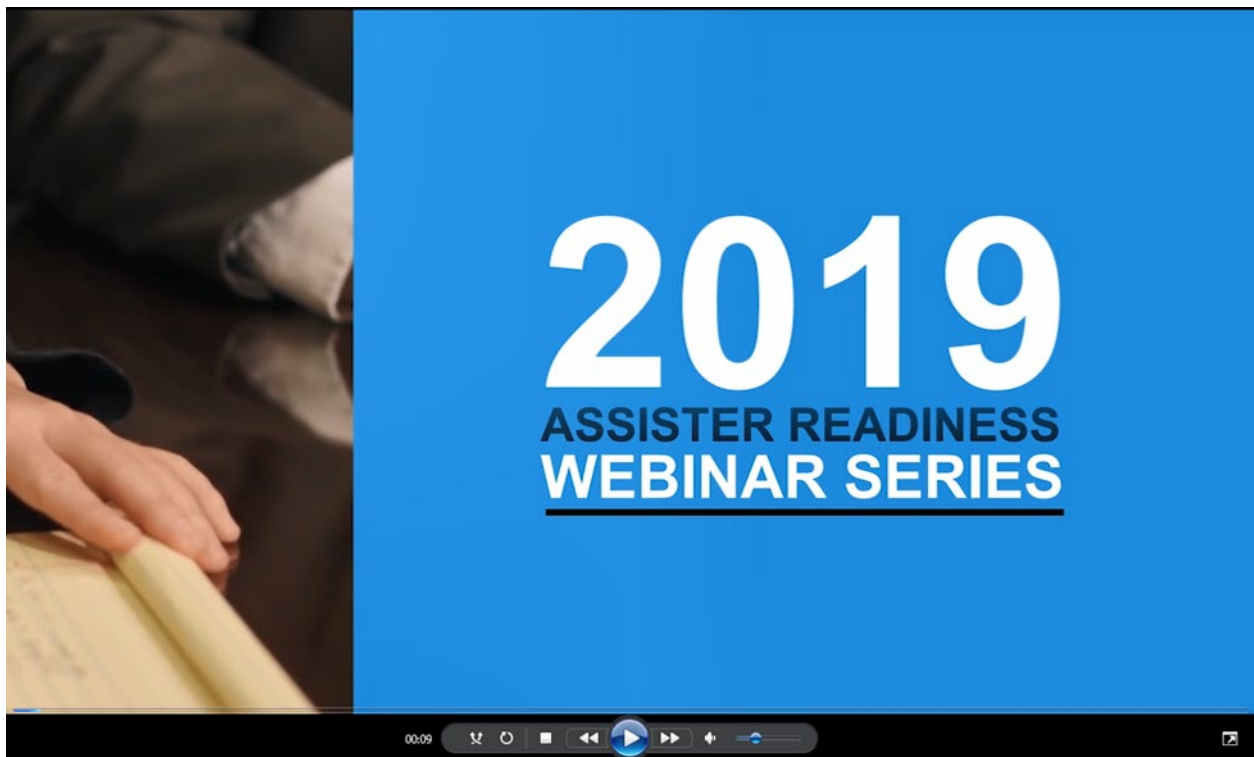


Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Best Practices and Etiquette



This document is a transcript of the Marketplace Assister Technical Assistance Webinar.

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Disclaimer

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Cover Slide

Hello and welcome to the 2019 Assister Readiness Webinar Series! I'm Dara with the Consumer Support Group for the Marketplace, and I'm joined by my colleague Sara. We'll be guiding you through today's webinar. Content in this module focuses on the *Making Coverage Accessible* topic of *Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Best Practices and Etiquette*.

2019 Assister Readiness Webinar Series Overview

Here's an overview of the entire 2019 Assister Readiness Webinar Series. This module, *Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Best Practices and Etiquette*, is situated in the Week 4 installment of the series and falls under the topic of *Making Coverage Accessible*.

If you have not yet viewed the other modules under this week's topic, be sure to do so in advance of our Friday LIVE webinar. On Friday's webinar, you'll also have an opportunity to ask questions, so remember to take notes and please bring your questions.

Titled Slide: Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Best Practices and Etiquette

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Overview

In addition to complying with the federal laws and regulations that apply to your work as an assister, you should follow these best practices and federal requirements when communicating with consumers with disabilities. We will cover three main topics within this module today. First, we'll describe communication techniques and best practices for working with consumers with a disability. Second, we'll identify best practices for communicating with consumers with cognitive or mental impairment. And lastly, we'll identify best practices for communicating with consumers with a speech or hearing impairment.

Guidelines to Remember

Now let's go over a few items to remember. When you interact with consumers with disabilities, remember they shouldn't be treated any differently from consumers without disabilities. Consumers with disabilities are independent and capable so it's important that you always be respectful of consumers and their specific needs.

To the greatest extent possible, consumers seeking health coverage should be the primary source of information and decision making about their health coverage, even if they're accompanied by caregivers, authorized representatives, guardians, or family members. When another person is authorized to represent a consumer, you want to make sure you speak directly to the consumer, focus the discussion on him or her, and make sure he or she participates in the conversation to the greatest extent possible.

Here we have some guidelines and best practices to follow. First, be considerate, patient, and take your time. Don't make assumptions (for example, don't assume a consumer with a disability needs your help; if in doubt, just ask the consumer). Avoid any actions or behaviors that may be viewed as offensive or inappropriate by a consumer with a disability.

Communicating with Consumers with Disabilities

Now, let's talk about how to best communicate with consumers with disabilities.

To ensure you are treating consumers with and without disabilities equally, be mindful of your language. When writing or speaking about consumers with disabilities, it's important to put the consumer first. Group labels such as "the blind" or "the disabled" are discouraged because they don't reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of consumers with disabilities.

Here are some examples of negative phrases to avoid: mental retardation, wheelchair-bound, blind consumer.

Communicating with Consumers with Disabilities (Cont.)

Do not refer to consumers without disabilities as "normal" because it implies that you think consumers with disabilities aren't normal. As a best practice, avoid words such as "disabled" or "handicapped." Instead, use phrases like "a consumer with a disability." Your language should emphasize people, not disabilities. Instead you can try use neutral phrases, such as: consumer with an intellectual disability, consumer who uses a wheelchair, consumer who is blind.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Disabilities

You should always follow best practices when you communicate with consumers with disabilities. Let's go over the list of best practices below to learn more. When you meet a consumer with a disability, it's appropriate to offer to shake hands. Consumers with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is acceptable. If you offer assistance, wait until your offer is accepted before providing help. If help is accepted, listen to or ask for instructions on how to assist. When addressing people with disabilities, treat adults as adults. Use first names of consumers only when extending the same familiarity to all others.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Disabilities (Cont.)

When you encounter working animals (e.g., those that generally wear a harness), don't try to pet, play with, or engage with them. If you have questions or are unsure of what to do, don't be afraid to ask a consumer with a disability how you can best assist him or her.

Also, if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later" when communicating with consumers who are blind or "Did you hear about that?" when communicating with consumers who are

deaf, understand that this happens and don't be embarrassed. And lastly, remember to follow the cues and preferences of the consumer you're assisting. Now I'll turn it over to Dara for a knowledge check.

Knowledge Check Time!

Ok, let's test your knowledge with a quick quiz question. Here's the scenario: you are helping Walter, a consumer who is blind, learn about health coverage options through an FFM. Keeping in mind what you've learned so far about best practices for communicating with consumers with disabilities, what should you do to effectively assist Walter?

- A. You assume Walter needs help communicating so you bring large-print materials for him.
- B. You greet him and offer to shake his hand even though you notice he may have a limited handshake.
- C. You're considerate and patient as you are with all consumers.
- D. You see Walter as a consumer, not as a consumer with a disability.

What do you think the correct answer is? Take a moment to think about it.

Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answers are B, C, and D. You should be considerate and patient with Walter, as with all others, and see him as a consumer as opposed to a consumer with a disability. You recognize it's still appropriate to shake his hand in your initial greeting. You don't assume he needs your help by bringing large-print materials for him because they may not be helpful depending on the type and degree of his impairment. Instead, you can assess his needs by asking about his communication preferences.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Cognitive Impairments

The following sections provide best practices for communicating with consumers with a range of disabilities including cognitive, speech, hearing, and mental impairments. For example, consumers with cognitive disabilities may have more difficulty with mental tasks than other consumers do.

Here are some best practices that might help you communicate with consumers who have cognitive disabilities: speak clearly and directly, make eye contact, keep sentences short, avoid using "yes" and "no" questions.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Cognitive Impairments (Cont.)

Rephrase or repeat questions and ask follow-up questions if needed. Ask consumers to rephrase what you said when you are unsure they understood you. Add more time to your scheduled appointment if needed. Some consumers with cognitive impairments maybe unable to communicate through spoken language. You should work with them to identify their preferred method of communication. For example, sound, drawings, or pictures and communicate with them in the way they choose.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Speech Impairments

Now let's go over some best practices for communicating with consumers with speech impairments. Consumers with speech impairments may have difficulty speaking clearly or at all. Keep these best practices in mind when communicating with consumers who have speech impairments.

Do not speak with these consumers the same way you do with others. Be prepared to offer auxiliary aids and services (for example, audio recordings). If necessary, repeat what you heard the consumer said to give the consumer an opportunity to correct or confirm your understanding. Ask consumers about their preferred way of communicating. And try to ask questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Speech Impairments (Cont.)

Remember, don't finish consumers' words or sentences or assume you know the consumer's preferred way of communicating.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Hearing Impairments

Now let's review best practices for communicating with consumers with hearing impairments. Consumers with hearing impairments may be described as deaf or hard of hearing. Once again, find out how consumers prefer to communicate (e.g., speech or lip reading, writing, sign language). Ask if consumers would like interpreter services and, if an interpreter is preferred, offer to help connect consumers with the service at no cost. Speak at your normal volume unless consumers ask you to speak louder, but don't shout.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Hearing Impairments (Cont.)

Look directly at consumers while speaking, even if an interpreter is present. Don't turn your back or walk around while talking. Make sure your meeting place is well lit so consumers can easily see you. Speak clearly in a normal tone, keeping your hands away from your face. Use short and simple sentences.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Hearing Impairments (Cont.)

Use pen and paper or lip reading only when appropriate for the particular conversation and type of communication. Don't talk while writing a note. Consumers can't read your notes and lips at the same time. Allow family members or friends to serve as interpreters if consumers prefer this. However, you should explain that you can provide a qualified interpreter at no cost.

Best Practices for Communicating with Consumers with Mental Impairments

Consumers with mental health impairments may suffer from disorders that affect their mood, thinking, and behavior. Even though you might not be able to see consumers' symptoms, you should be understanding and provide good customer service. These best practices might help you communicate with consumers with mental health impairments: one, approach the consumer in a calm, non-

threatening, and reassuring manner; two, hold conversations in a setting free of distractions; and three, be patient, flexible, and supportive.

Knowledge Check Time!

And I'll turn it back to Sara for a knowledge check. Let's do a quick knowledge check to test your knowledge. Here is the scenario: Emil visits your office to review his health coverage options through an FFM. He hands you a note that says he's deaf. What best practices might you follow in order to communicate with Emil effectively?

- A. Write a note back to Emil asking how he prefers to communicate. He may wish to use a sign language interpreter, lip reading, or writing.
- B. Speak very loudly to help Emil hear what you're saying.
- C. Assume Emil wants an interpreter and tell him to come back when you're able to schedule one.
- D. After you tell Emil you can provide a qualified interpreter at no cost, ask him if he prefers to have family members or friends help interpret for him.

What do you think the correct answer is? Take a moment to think about it.

Knowledge Check Answer

The correct answers are A and D. Here's why. Since Emil gave you a note, it's safe to assume he can read. Writing him a note is a good way to communicate with him and identify his preferred method of communication. You may ask if he prefers to have a family member or friend help him communicate, but only after explaining that you can provide a qualified interpreter at no cost. You shouldn't speak loudly because you don't yet know Emil's preferred method of communication. Also, you should do your best to help Emil today or the day he comes in for service as opposed to rescheduling the meeting for a later date.

Key Points

Here are the main takeaways from this presentation. First, remember that you shouldn't assume you know consumers' needs; and secondly, be prepared to respond effectively to consumers who have physical or intellectual disabilities, including cognitive, speech, hearing, or vision impairments, as appropriate by treating consumers with disabilities with the same dignity and respect that you would any other consumer.

Assister Readiness Webinar Series Resources

Congratulations on completing the *Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Best Practices and Etiquette* module of the Assister Readiness Webinar Series! Please proceed to the next Week 4 module, *Working with Consumers with Disabilities: Introduction to Application Assistance*.

Also, feel free to visit the Assister Readiness Webinar Series Resources listed on this slide, including training materials for Navigators and other assisters and the assister webinars webpage. If you have topical questions about this presentation: Navigators please contact your Project Officer directly. CACs can email the CAC Inbox at CACquestions@cms.hhs.gov.