### Promoting Communication Access in Healthcare: Allied Health Provider Perspectives

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Alberta Health Services

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### Background

- Communication difficulties can impact a person's ability to access health services, resulting in poorer health outcomes, increased risk of adverse events, and reduced health-related quality of life.<sup>1-4</sup>
- AHS implemented a **Communication Access** initiative in 2018 to provide staff with resources and strategies to support effective communication with patients.
- Neither the uptake nor effectiveness of these resources have been formally evaluated until now.



### Aim

Guided by AHS's Patient-First Strategy, this study aimed to examine the:

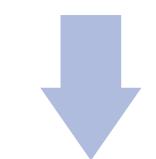
- Experiences of current patients with communication difficulties within AHS.
- Perspectives of allied health professionals in providing services to individuals with communication difficulties.

#### Methods

This is a mixed methods study involving qualitative stakeholder engagement and survey methodology.

# Stage 1: Interviews Individuals with communication difficulties

- 6 semi-structured interviews were completed in-person or virtually by a person with aphasia or speech-language pathologist.
- We used an inductive, thematic approach for analysis.



## Stage 2: Survey Allied health professionals

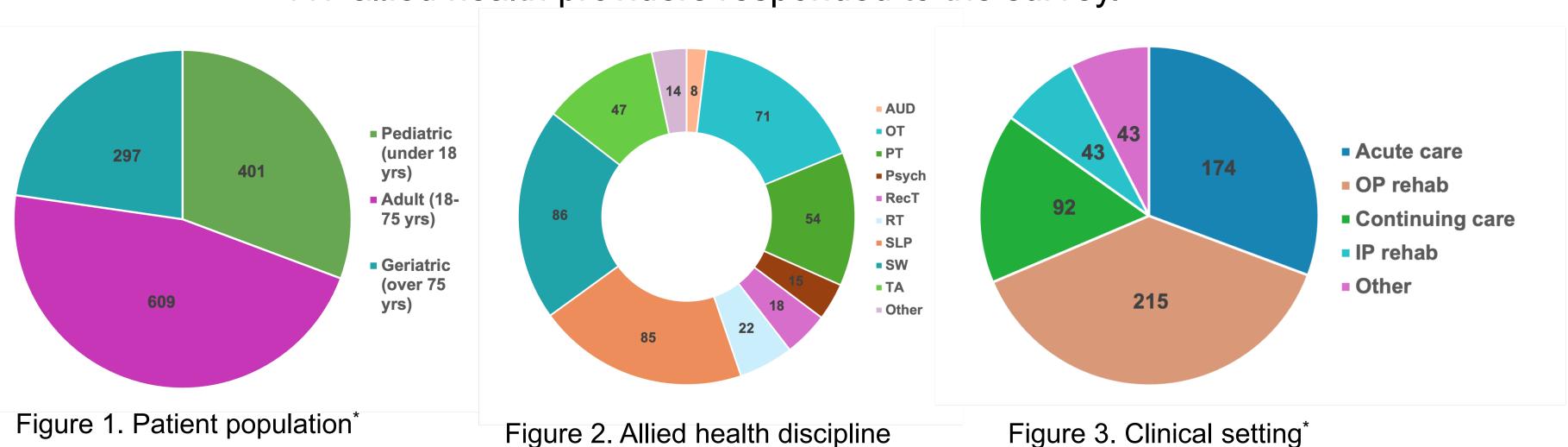
- We distributed an on-line survey to eleven allied health disciplines across AHS.
- No previous knowledge of the Communication Access initiative was required.
- We analyzed results using composite scores, pairwise comparisons and regression analysis.



- Allied health professionals will participate in follow-up virtual focus groups to elaborate on survey findings.
- This stage is in progress.

### Respondent characteristics (Stage 2)

417 allied health providers responded to the survey.



\*Categories are not mutually exclusive

Abbreviations: AUD, Audiologist; CD, Communication Disability; IP rehab, Inpatient rehabilitation; OP rehab, Outpatient rehabilitation; OT, Occupational Therapist; RecT, Recreation Therapist; RT, Respiratory Therapist; PT, Physical Therapist; Psych, Psychologist; SLP, Speech-Language Pathologist; SW; Social Worker; TA, Therapy Assistant

### Stage 2 Survey Results

- Allied health providers are changing their communication with patients with CD but have lower selfreported knowledge of strategies and confidence in interacting with these patients.
- Provider-informed **barriers** to communication access included: limited access to materials and resources, poor interdisciplinary practices; **enablers** included: provider-led initiatives and involving family members.

Allied health with over six years of experience reported readily adapting their communication with patients with CD.

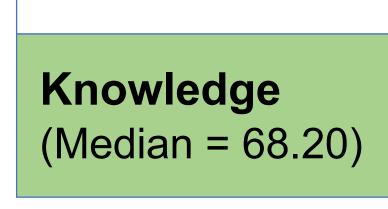
Responsiveness

Allied health who frequently work with patients with CD reported significantly higher confidence in using strategies.

Allied health working in rural locations reported significantly higher knowledge of CD and communication strategies.

Responsiveness
(Median = 88.67)





Allied health in smaller, rural areas reported higher awareness of Communication Access compared to larger, urban areas.

Communication
Access
(Median = 72.30)

Allied health in one smaller, rural zone reported better access to environmental factors supporting communication (e.g., time, resources).

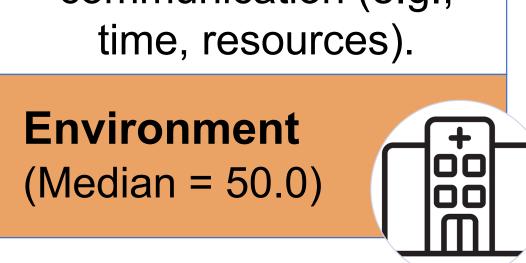


Figure 4. Sample composite scores for each of the five subscales measured in the survey.

### **Next Steps**

- Identifying factors impacting use of the Communication Access initiative will help to identify strategies
  to improve its accessibility and utilization.
- Findings across the three phases will be integrated to inform next steps in adapting and sustaining the Communication Access initiative.

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AHS
Communication
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