

# **Disaster and Emergency Readiness for People with Communication Challenges**

## **Targeted Materials, and Ideas for Trainers**

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**Draft- For Discussion Only**

# Communication during Emergencies and Disasters

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## Introduction

In emergency situations, communication breakdowns between those in need of help and caregivers can have dire consequences. They can, and often do, create huge barriers between first responders and people in need of immediate help. These communication breakdowns can be attributed to new and/or chronic speech and/or comprehension difficulties, medical problems, language barriers with non-native speakers, cultural barriers *etc.* People in these situations regularly report instances in which communication barriers result in feelings of anxiety, fear, frustration, untreated pain, and overall loss of control.

First responders face an especially critical need for communication. As the first to reach people in trouble, often under emergency conditions, first responders must be able to accurately assess a patient's need in order to administer the proper care in the field. With little access to interpreters, these hard-pressed heroes must rely on simple, low-tech products to enable them to give the best possible care to their patients.

Language boards are among the most helpful tools for communicating in the field. Whether a patient does not have a clear command of English, is too ill or traumatized to speak clearly, or has a chronic speech problem, language boards enable patients and first responders to communicate through words and pictures. These boards include pain scales as well as picture sets to express nausea, dizziness, and other common symptoms. Although language boards are simple devices, they can quickly provide paramedics and EMTs with the communication skills necessary to assess a patient's condition. Additionally, a variety of mobile phone and tablet apps that can be instantly referred to in the field are now also available, and in the list that follows we have included some that deal with communication issues, as well as some that can help communication vulnerable people become better prepared to cope in an emergency.

Although communication boards can be invaluable, nothing replaces the ability to speak directly to a patient. As the number of persons of limited-English proficiency rises in the United States, first responders have found it increasingly important to speak other languages, especially Spanish. With this in mind, we've included a number of tools (in both English and Spanish) that focus on the phrases and vocabulary first responders are most likely to encounter while on duty. In addition, many materials originally developed for health care settings (see below) can also prove useful in emergency settings. The contents herein are beta (draft) versions and have been developed exclusively for educational purposes.

## **Workshop Opener: Think-Pair Share Expand**

[Think-pair-share-expand is a collaborative learning strategy where learners work together to solve a problem or add to solutions. This strategy requires learners to (1) think individually about a topic the instructor wants to raise; and (2) share ideas with a single colleague, and then the group.]

**Disasters can strike without warning. Any emergency situation, whether it be a flood, a fire, an earthquake, a tornado or the loss of electrical power, puts people with communication challenges at risk. Communication during an emergency can often be scary and complicated for everybody, but for people who for various reasons are communication vulnerable (speak a foreign language, have pre-existing medical conditions that limit communication capabilities) this can be heightened drastically. While each situation is different and not everything can be anticipated, planning and preparation ALWAYS results in better outcomes.**

**This module focuses on how to best prepare for effective communication during emergencies and disasters. The module covers the importance of developing a communications plan and includes various proven techniques and effective tools (such as pamphlets, language boards and apps) that can be used to communicate with people with communication challenges during a time of crisis.**

**Some of the more common communication tools that can help first responder personnel facilitate communication while in the field include:**

- **language boards in dual languages that enable patients and first responders to communicate through words and pictures or symbols,**
- **pain scales that enable people in pain to indicate pain level or nature of pain non-verbally,**
- **“tips” about how to communicate with someone with “....”that the person with a communication challenge can carry around and hand to emergency personnel**

**These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg of the many tools available to support communication during disasters and emergencies. . On the back of this page, please jot down a few others you may know about.**

## Annotated curated videos

- **[Disaster & Preparedness – Your Emergency Communication Plan](#)**: A funny video that could be used as a brief intro to the module. Underscores the importance of having a communications plan BEFORE a disaster/emergency hits. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ryel3RUdlw>
- **[Communication in an Emergency](#)** – This video could serve as a basic introduction to how difficult communication can be in the face of an emergency. This video explores how even for people without pre-existing communication issues, worry and stress can affect how our brain processes information during an emergency situation. Emergencies are rare and stressful events and can cause a level of panic that makes it very difficult to think clearly in a situation for anyone. There is an emphasis in this video on the importance of planning ahead <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vreKNWude0>
- **[CDC's CERC: Psychology of a Crisis](#)**- Details how a crisis situation generally causes people to process information differently. This video is an hour long, so it likely would not be shown in a class, but could be offered as a resource for people who want to better understand the difficulties of communicating during a crisis. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=-DV9huwBFz8&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=-DV9huwBFz8&feature=emb_title)
- **[Inclusion Saves Lives](#)** – Quick video detailing the importance of considering people with disabilities or complex communication needs in disaster preparedness. Good intro to the importance of taking people with unique needs into consideration when planning for an emergency. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sK1ip-4baJg&list=PLBDwPnveHho9IE3O7EH\\_CxNInoDPq-wM\\_&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sK1ip-4baJg&list=PLBDwPnveHho9IE3O7EH_CxNInoDPq-wM_&index=2)
- **[Emergency communications board – Weau Channel 13 News](#)**: good intro video that shows how communication boards are helpful for many different people, particularly in times of crisis. <https://www.weau.com/content/news/Emergency-communication-boards-aim-to-help-during-times-of-crisis-486986421.html>
- **[Partner Assisted Auditory Scanning](#)** – Very helpful video detailing how to communicate with someone who is non verbal and is unable to move. Utilizing a communication board of letters. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLb6-Oi3uR0>
- **[Disaster Preparedness for People with Complex Communication Needs – Web Cast Series](#)**: In this presentation, Pamela Kennedy describes her experiences as an individual with complex communication needs and a survivor of the Grand Forks flood of 1997. She describes the 7 steps for emergency preparation that are critical for all individuals with complex communication needs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tfNj5mIJFCI&feature=share&list=PL37FF80ADC7B737A1>
- **[AAC and Disasters Are You Ready](#)** - . This webinar focuses on actions/ resources key to disaster preparation, response, relief and recovery. We will highlight a family's perspective and discuss the importance of planning, as well as staying flexible. We will also discuss long term recovery issues and the emotional toll disasters inflict on those impacted. All people who use AAC should have access to their communication tools at all times. This video is an hour long, so it likely

would not be shown in a class, but could be offered as a resource.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqBDd4bJSrM>

- **[Barriers in Emergency Situations](#)** - Many of us who have communication disabilities, experience the same barriers as people who have mobility, sensory and other disabilities. In addition, we may experience unique communication barriers due to a pre-existing speech and language disability or an acquired communication disability related to the medical emergency. **Focuses on barriers to communication for people with disabilities during an emergency.** <https://www.cdacanada.com/resources/access-to-healthcare/about/barriers-in-emergency-situations/>
- **[How first responders overcome language barriers](#)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL1Od56ZdQ8>
- **[PWU AAC in Emergencies and Disasters: Tales from the Trenches](#)** - This seminar reflects on the experiences of people who use AAC and their families affected by the 2017 natural disasters, and USSAAC's efforts to assist them in recovery. Responsibilities of providers to assist PWU AAC in thinking about emergency preparedness are reviewed. Based on lessons learned, suggestions for personal preparedness and resources are provided. **This video is an hour long, so it likely would not be shown in a class, but could be offered as a resource.**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1386&v=RRveSVQg49g&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1386&v=RRveSVQg49g&feature=emb_logo)
- **[AAC 101 for First Responders](#)** - First responders frequently do not receive much training on how to interact with individuals who have disabilities and much less for individuals who use augmentative/alternative communication (AAC). **This video is an hour long, so it likely would not be shown in a class, but could be offered as a resource.**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wuZGcyt-EY&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wuZGcyt-EY&feature=emb_logo)

## List of annotated curated downloads

- **[Paramedic & EMS Symbol Board](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/paramedic-board.htm)**: symbol communication board created as a tool to assist the Paramedics and those in Emergency Medical Services in interacting with any individual for whom speech is difficult or impossible. Available in English and Spanish. <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/paramedic-board.htm>
- **[Hospital Symbol Board](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/medical-encounter-board.htm)**: symbol-based communication board created as a tool to assist hospital staff in interaction with any individual for whom speech is difficult or impossible. Available in English or Spanish. <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/medical-encounter-board.htm>
- **[Police Symbol Board](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/police-board.htm)**: symbol communication board created as a tool to assist the Police in interacting with any individual for whom speech is difficult or impossible. Available in English and Spanish. <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/police-board.htm>
- **[School Nurse Symbol Board](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/school-nurse-board.htm)**: symbol communication board created as a tool to assist school nurses in interacting with any individual for whom clear speech is difficult or impossible. Available in English and Spanish. <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/school-nurse-board.htm>
- **[Patient Communication Sheet](https://widgit-health.com/patient-communication-sheet.htm)**: downloadable sheet designed to support patients communicating in a hospital. Accessible for all languages and reading abilities. Features all major requests and replies along with a pain scale and body diagram to support communication in a hospital setting. <https://widgit-health.com/patient-communication-sheet.htm>
- **[Autism Communication Board](https://www.autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/resource/emergency-communication-board)**: Communication board with symbols made by the Govt of Queensland in Australia, designed specifically for people with autism in mind. Provides visual support for people to express their needs in a medical situation. Comes also with interaction tips for user. <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/resource/emergency-communication-board>
- **[Going to the Hospital – Explanation kit with symbols](https://widgit-health.com/easy-read-sheets/pdfs/Going%20to%20Hospital%20-%20full%20symbols.pdf)**: symbol-based explanation of what happens when one goes to the hospital. Can be used with patients that need additional support in understanding what happens during a hospital visit and what he/she should expect. <https://widgit-health.com/easy-read-sheets/pdfs/Going%20to%20Hospital%20-%20full%20symbols.pdf>
- **[Medical Encounters Board](https://widgit-health.com/download-files/medical-encounter-board/MEB-grid-A4.pdf)** - Provides an easy-to-use and readily available resource for patients with communication vulnerabilities facing medical interactions. <https://widgit-health.com/download-files/medical-encounter-board/MEB-grid-A4.pdf>
- **[Emergency Communication 4 ALL – Picture Communication Aid](https://disabilities.temple.edu/aacvocabulary/e4all/EprepPictureAid.pdf)**: Communication aid in English and Spanish (in the same PDF) with symbols containing common words, important phrases, numbers, a small letter “keyboard” and a pain scale. <https://disabilities.temple.edu/aacvocabulary/e4all/EprepPictureAid.pdf>

**{A Note on Communication Boards** Communication Boards can range from simple alphabet boards with a few key vocabulary items to elaborate boards with symbols, pain scales and alternative languages. Communication Boards are a means to support a two-way conversation. To gather information from a person who cannot communicate easily, simply show the individual the board, point to an appropriate picture and verbally ask the question that fits the symbol. Communication Boards can be used for people with:

- Autism,
- Learning disabilities,
- Spoken language disorders,
- Poor articulation due to cerebral palsy,
- Non-English Speakers,
- Deaf individuals,
- Patients with Alzheimer's or similar syndromes,
- Lost or frightened children.}

## URL's for on-line material not in PDF but downloadable and adaptable

**[International Download Center by Widgit Health](#)**: this online resource contains medical encounter boards in 6 languages, bedside messages in 28 languages, along with other resources such as country-specific communication boards and a range of other free easy read symbol sheets with AAC patients. <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/languages.htm> Direct links below:

- **[Medical Encounters Board](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/medical-encounter-board.htm)** - <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/medical-encounter-board.htm>
- **[Bedside Messages](https://widgit-health.com/downloads/bedside-messages.htm)** - <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/bedside-messages.htm>

## Forms that can be filled out

- **[Communication Passport for Accidents and Emergencies](http://www.jik.com/CommunicationPassport-Accident-Emergency.pdf)**: comprehensive communication passport to be filled out by patient (ahead of time), and for patient to give to nursing and medical staff before any interventions are conducted. <http://www.jik.com/CommunicationPassport-Accident-Emergency.pdf>
- **[Health Passport](http://flfcic.fmhi.usf.edu/docs/FCIC_Health_Passport_Form_Typeable_English.pdf)**: comprehensive health passport to be filled out by patient (ahead of time), and for patient to give to nursing and medical staff. Gives important information about the patient. Passport must stay with the individual. [http://flfcic.fmhi.usf.edu/docs/FCIC\\_Health\\_Passport\\_Form\\_Typeable\\_English.pdf](http://flfcic.fmhi.usf.edu/docs/FCIC_Health_Passport_Form_Typeable_English.pdf)
- **[ICE Communication Card](https://widgit-health.com/ICE-communication-cards.htm)**: symbol communication sheet that gives a quick visual tool (and can be used by anyone) to clarify understanding in disasters and medical emergencies. Side 1 contains an "About Me" section, "My Health Information" section and space for 3 emergency contacts; Side 2 contains a Communication Sheet. <https://widgit-health.com/ICE-communication-cards.htm>
- **[Augmentative Communication Booklet](#)**: comprehensive communication board that also gives space for the individual to fill out certain personal information.



<https://www.amyspeechlanguagetherapy.com/uploads/7/5/7/4/7574967/aug-cc-booklet-1.pdf>

- **[Emergency Communication 4 ALL \(Letter/word communication aid\)](https://www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/aacvocabulary/e4all/EprepLetterWordAid.pdf)**: two-sided PDF that contains a communication board on one side (with letters, numbers and common responses) and space to fill in important personal information on the other side. <https://www.temple.edu/instituteondisabilities/aacvocabulary/e4all/EprepLetterWordAid.pdf>
- **[Disaster Preparedness for People Who Have Limited Speech](https://aac-lerc.psu.edu/images/file/EmergencyChecklist(2).pdf)**: Checklist and questions to ask yourself to ensure you are prepared for a disaster. [https://aac-lerc.psu.edu/images/file/EmergencyChecklist\(2\).pdf](https://aac-lerc.psu.edu/images/file/EmergencyChecklist(2).pdf)

### Available free pamphlets and how to obtain

- **[Tips for First Responders](http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/php/115/115_guide.pdf)**: Comprehensive tips sheet that covers how to respond to patients with disabilities and/or communication barriers. Meant for emergency responders who need quick, easy-to-understand guidance on how to effectively work with people with a wide range of physical and cognitive disabilities in emergency situations. [http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/php/115/115\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/sites/default/files/public/php/115/115_guide.pdf)
- **[Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications Toolkit](https://www.calhospitalprepare.org/post/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communications-toolkit)**: toolkit that provides detailed resource materials to assist in effectively managing and communicating during an emergency or crisis. The Tool Kit is specifically designed to support writing and implementing a communication plan (which clearly defines objectives and actions). Obtain by clicking the above link, scrolling to “Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications Toolkit” and then clicking “Download the Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications Toolkit” (in Word). <https://www.calhospitalprepare.org/post/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communications-toolkit>
- **[Complex Communication Needs](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/58540/complex-communication-needs.pdf)**: developed by the Gov’t of Australia. Overview presentation/pamphlet that gives a solid explanation on complex communication needs and how various stakeholders can support them. [https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/58540/complex-communication-needs.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/58540/complex-communication-needs.pdf)
- **[Guidance for Integrating People with Disabilities in Exercises](http://www.jik.com/pubs/ExerciseGuidance.pdf)**: PDF guide for a broad audience to show how to integrate people with disabilities into a variety of preparation exercise (ie walkthroughs, workshops) to ensure their safety during emergencies. <http://www.jik.com/pubs/ExerciseGuidance.pdf>

## List of possible sub-topics

- How can you work with your community to ensure that emergency plans are in place and communicated to all necessary parties, and that these plans include considerations for people with complex communications needs?
- How could you help people who have complex communication needs to prepare for communicating during potential disasters or emergencies? How could you work with them to plan ahead for being able to communicate non-verbally with a stranger?
- Take into consideration that during an emergency, it may be the most crucial to be able to communicate with first responders. How could you best assist first responders in working with people with communication disorders?
- Brainstorm the most common words/ideas that would need to be communicated during or following an emergency situation. After brainstorming, examples of useful vocab to use in emergency situations is available here:  
[https://disabilities.temple.edu/aacvocabulary/e4all/2018/EprepPictureAid\\_EngSpan2018\\_8-5x11.pdf](https://disabilities.temple.edu/aacvocabulary/e4all/2018/EprepPictureAid_EngSpan2018_8-5x11.pdf)
- Discuss the communication barriers specific to non-English speakers. Review the list of vocab words brainstormed in the sub-topic above. How could you communicate these to a person who spoke another language?
- Discuss the communication difficulties for people experiencing high levels of anxiety or stress. How could you facilitate accurate communication in this situation?
- Consider communication difficulties that could arise due to injury (ex: head injury), and how you could assist people suffering from such injuries.

## Possible class handouts

- **Critical Kids Communicator**: child-friendly pictures and vocabulary, encompassing food, medical needs, toys, as well as a pain scale that facilitates providing for the immediate comfort and personal needs of children in critical care situations – in both English and Spanish (Cost = \$39.75) <https://www.alimed.com/the-critical-communicator-for-kids.html>
- **Critical Communicator**: tool that assists with staff and family interactions with patients, residents, or clients to help communicate medical problems or emergencies, or for those who have temporary difficulty communicating even basic needs. Visual and word cues with dual-language tags in 18 languages make problem identification for an attending clinician or first-responder easier. Sold in packs of 30 or 10, or as an 18-language set. Might be a good thing to hand out during trainings. (Cost = \$35.75) <https://www.alimed.com/the-critical-communicator.html?pid=67493>

- **[Greenhouse Publications Health Care Communication Board](https://greenhousepublications.stores.yahoo.net/hecacobo.html)**: communication board that contains a pain scale, alphabet, numbers, and 72 pictures depicting wants, needs, ailments, comforts, questions, etc. Available for purchase (cost = \$49.00 for 200 boards). Available in English and Spanish.  
<https://greenhousepublications.stores.yahoo.net/hecacobo.html>
- **[First Aid Communication Book](https://widgit-health.com/first-aid-communication-booklet.htm)**: booklet designed to help those carrying out first aid to ask questions and understand responses from people for whom communication is difficult (Cost = \$7.81 per booklet, discounts available if purchased in bulk.)  
<https://widgit-health.com/first-aid-communication-booklet.htm>
- **[CERC Wallet Card](https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/index.asp)**: a quick reference for communicators during an emergency. Wallet-sized card available in [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [French](#).  
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/resources/index.asp>

### Suggested group activities

- **Practice Using + Responding to a Communication Board**: Pair with a partner. Use one of the previously mention communication boards (free or for purchase) to do a range of tasks from simple (ie tell the person your name) to more difficult (ie have a conversation sharing pain scale and medical conditions).
  - *Part 2*: The moderator could create different scripts for people to act out in front of the class to show proficiency in using the Communications Boards
- **[Crisis and Emergency Risk Communications Toolkit](https://www.calhospitalprepare.org/post/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communications-toolkit)**: Description and “how to obtain” above. Using this toolkit, families could plan out their own communications plan to follow during an emergency or disaster. <https://www.calhospitalprepare.org/post/crisis-and-emergency-risk-communications-toolkit>
- **[Quiz for Communicating with People with Disabilities](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/887931/NDCO_Communicating_effectively.pdf)**: could be a good level-check on what to do/not to do when communicating with people with disabilities in disaster relief and emergency preparedness.  
[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/887931/NDCO\\_Communicating\\_effectively.pdf](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/887931/NDCO_Communicating_effectively.pdf)

## Related iPhone/android apps

Mobile apps have the special appeal of ease of access and convenience in situations where time so often is of the essence, and space is so often limited (*e.g.*, inside ambulances). The apps listed below represent just the tip of the iceberg of the resources that are now so quickly becoming available, but they illustrate the broad range of purposes that can be met by mobile apps in emergency settings, for people with language and cultural differences, for people with transitory or long-term communication difficulties, for those with low health literacy, and for other significant segments of the population.

- **[PhraseBoard Keyboard](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/phraseboard-keyboard/id916976066)**: app designed for people with speech difficulties. Users can indicate where and how much they hurt with scrollable lists and a chart of the human body. PhraseBoard also lets users type custom messages, or even draw messages. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/phraseboard-keyboard/id916976066>
- **[SmallTalk Intensive Care](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-intensive-care/id403057381)**: provides picture-based vocabulary of phrases that patients can use to communicate their feelings and needs. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/smalltalk-intensive-care/id403057381>
- **[ICE – In Case of Emergency – Medical Contact Card App](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.lagache.sylvain.ice_android&hl=en_US)**: Self-proclaimed as “The World’s #1 Emergency Medical Contact Information App”, in this app you can store emergency contacts and other essential information needed in emergencies and disasters (ie vital statistics, such as blood type, allergies, medication and medical conditions). All information can be displayed on your lock screen, meaning that even if you are unconscious, first responders and emergency personnel will be able to access your vital medical data as long as your phone is operational. High rated score (4.6/5). [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.lagache.sylvain.ice\\_android&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.lagache.sylvain.ice_android&hl=en_US)
- **[Siren GPS](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sirengps.mobile&hl=en_US)**: app that features a “red panic button” that the user can press for instant 911 assistance, making sure to send dispatchers your exact coordinates with or without strong wireless connection. [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sirengps.mobile&hl=en\\_US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.sirengps.mobile&hl=en_US)
- **[EMNet find ER now](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/emnet-findernow/id376928203)**: app that will locate the closest ER with just one click using a comprehensive national database. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/emnet-findernow/id376928203>
- **[Proloquo2Go](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/proloquo2go/id308368164)**: symbol-based app that helps users learn how to express themselves. Communication tool for people who cannot speak or need help being understood. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/proloquo2go/id308368164>
- **[VidaTalk](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/vidatalk/id869685427)**: interactive, multilingual communication tool for non-vocal and critically ill patients across the spectrum of communication capabilities. Can be installed on iPad and android. <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/vidatalk/id869685427>

# **Attachment A: Overcoming Communication Barriers in Emergency Situations: Some Basic Tools**

by Harvey Pressman

Community Emergency Response Volunteers of the Monterey Peninsula, Inc.

In emergency situations, communication breakdowns between victims and caregivers can have dire consequences including unnecessary pain, misdiagnoses, drug treatment errors, unnecessarily long hospital stays, and even death. They can, and often do, create huge barriers between patients and caregivers. These communication breakdowns can be attributed to new and/or chronic speech and/ or comprehension difficulties, medical interventions, or language barriers with non-native speakers, *etc.* People in these situations regularly report instances in which communication barriers result in feelings of anxiety, fear, frustration, unrecognized pain, and overall loss of control.

First responders face an especially critical need for communication. As the first to reach people in trouble, often under emergency conditions, first responders must be able to accurately assess a patient's need in order to administer the proper care in the field. With little access to interpreters, these heroes must rely on simple, low-tech products to enable them to give the best possible care to their patients.

Language boards are among the most helpful tools for communicating in the field. Whether a patient does not have a clear command of English, is too ill or traumatized to speak clearly, or has a chronic speech problem, language boards enable patients and first responders to communicate through words and pictures. Products such as the Kwik Point Medical Translator have boards aimed specifically at emergency situations. These boards include pain scales as well as picture sets to express nausea, dizziness, and other common symptoms. Although language boards are simple devices, they quickly provide paramedics and EMTs with the communication skills necessary to assess a patient's condition.

Although communication boards can be invaluable, nothing replaces the ability to speak directly to a patient. As the number of persons of limited-English proficiency rises in the United States, first responders have found it increasingly necessary to speak other languages, especially Spanish. Several organizations have risen to this challenge by developing language programs geared specifically toward first responder needs. SpanishOnPatrol offers online Spanish classes that focus on the phrases and vocabulary first responders are most likely to encounter while on duty. Spanish 4 Emergencies also offers a variety of products that serve as an easy reference while in the field. In addition, materials originally developed for health care settings (such as Vidatak boards, see below) can also prove useful in emergency settings.

Listed below is a selection of some of the more common communication tools that first responder personnel can use to facilitate communication while in the field.

### **Kwikpoint Medical Translators**

Kwikpoint Medical Translators (<https://www.kwikpoint.com/disaster-recovery/>) are laminated booklets that facilitate communication between first responders and non-English speaking patients. The cards includes pictures for basic emergency-related topics and assistance phrases that patients can point at to express their needs. Translators are available in Spanish and French as well as for health care situations (Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, etc..)

### **Emergencia! Emergency Translation Manual**

by Lisa Maitland de Hernandez (<https://www.amazon.com/Emergencia-Translation-Lisa-Maitland-Hernandez/dp/0766836266html>)

EMERGENCIA! Emergency Translation Manual is a language reference for English speaking medical caregivers who need to communicate effectively with Spanish speakers in emergency situations. Translations of a wide array of medical emergencies include phonetic pronunciations of words and phrases and relevant questions that require only "yes" or "no" answers. Diagrams of the human body labeled in Spanish and pages of commonly used words and phrases further facilitate communication and ultimately quicken response time.

### **Spanish on Patrol**

[www.SpanishOnPatrol.com](http://www.SpanishOnPatrol.com)

SpanishOnPatrol offers complete Spanish courses in public safety to help officials gain the language skills they need to respond in a safe and effective way. Online classes are offered for law enforcement, fire/EMS, 911 dispatch, park rangers, and corrections officials.

### **Critical Communicators/Pocket Communicators**

<https://www.alimed.com/the-critical-communicator.html> These communication boards assist staff in interacting with patients who cannot speak or who have limited English proficiency through the use of pictures. Content includes pain scale, pictures for immediate needs, and comfort among others. The Critical Communicator is available in over 20 languages.

### **I Speak Card**

[http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/76/2016/06/VDH-OHE\\_Identify-language-Poster-largFINAL.pdf](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/76/2016/06/VDH-OHE_Identify-language-Poster-largFINAL.pdf)

The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division publishes an **I Speak Card** containing 38 languages to help first responder personnel identify the language their patients speak. The card can be downloaded for free [here](#).

### **Vidatak Communication Boards**

[www.vidatak.com](http://www.vidatak.com)

The EZ Board enables health care providers to communicate with patients with impaired communication. The board is intended for use with patients who cannot speak and with non-English patients. Boards are 17 x 11, two-sided, dry-erase boards with new research-based content and are available in 17 languages.

### **Communication Picture Board**

[http://tube-enterprises.com/page/1b7dk/Partner\\_Link\\_1/Servision.html](http://tube-enterprises.com/page/1b7dk/Partner_Link_1/Servision.html)

The Communication Picture Board was designed initially to help bridge the communication gap between emergency first responders and people who are deaf. The picture board has proven also to effectively

enhance the communications needs between first responders and non-English speaking populations, children, people with developmental disabilities, as well as those impacted by a traumatic event. It has also been used extensively in hospital settings. The Communication Boards contain pictures with a word describing the picture underneath in both English and Spanish. On the back of the board, a number of other languages are listed, so that (literate) non-English speakers can identify their language, if other than English or Spanish. [learn more](#) or to order these boards, contact office at [mail@eadassociates.com](mailto:mail@eadassociates.com)

**Tips for First Responders** (<http://cdd.unm.edu/products/tipsforfirstresponders.htm>) Tips for First Responders is a 14-page, color-coded, laminated 4.5 x 5.5-inch field guide, incorporating “tip sheets” that provide information that first responders can use during emergencies as well as routine encounters. They are not meant to be comprehensive, but contain specific information that can be read quickly either before or while responding to an incident, and can be downloaded free or purchased in laminated field guide form. Tips are included for persons with a wide range of disabilities, as well as Seniors, People with Service Animals, People with Mobility Challenges, People with Mental Illness, Blind or Visually Impaired People, Deaf or Hard of Hearing People, People with Autism, People with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, People with Cognitive Disabilities, and Childbearing Women and Newborns.

**Health Care Communications Board** <http://www.greenhousepub.com/hecacobo.html> Designed originally for use in hospitals, rehab units, acute care, emergency rooms, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, clinics, hospice care and in the home, the Health Care Communications Board can provide an inexpensive alternative for communication in emergency situations (200 boards for \$39.00). It includes (1) pain scale for determining where and scale for determining where and how bad one hurts (2) 68-clear, 4-color pictures depicting wants, needs, ailments, comforts, questions, emotions, etc., (3) easy to understand instructions for patient response alternatives, (4). Alphabet for spelling out words, and (5) numbers for numerical information.

**Speak Unlimited** - <http://www.papremisealert.com/id74.html> - Speak Unlimited’s nonverbal communication boards are full page laminated communication boards with icons on both sides, which fit on a clip board for easy use and access. They have been designed to assist, EMTs, other emergency personnel and people who cannot make their circumstances clear due to the fact that they speak another language or have a medical condition such as autism, Alzheimer's syndrome, stroke, traumatic brain injury, unfamiliar or impaired speech, or other difficulties. The full color icons on the boards are designed to be easily understood, and the text is in both English and Spanish. Speak Unlimited also provides boards for EMT’s, hospital personnel, and school nurses. Available in letter size in English and Spanish for free download @ <https://widgit-health.com/downloads/paramedic-board.htm>

### **Communication Displays.**

#### **EAD & Associates, LLC.**

EAD & Associates, LLC provides expertise in emergency management and special needs planning that ensures people with disabilities are prepared for natural and manmade disasters, emergencies and their consequences. EAD and associates a disaster Readiness Wheel for people with disabilities. One side of the wheel provides preparedness steps while the reverse side provides response information.

<http://www.eadassociates.com/disabil.html>

*Servision* provides readymade and customized Communication Picture Boards to meet the needs of people who rely on AAC and the partners they may meet in emergency situations. *Servision*’s communication boards can be helpful in a variety of settings: field hospitals, ambulances, shelters and assistance centers.

**Other Organizations:**

**United States Department of Justice**

An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities.

<https://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm>

**June Isaacson Kailes (JIK)**

Disaster Resources for People with Disabilities, Disability-related Organizations and Emergency Managers.

[www.jik.com/disaster.html](http://www.jik.com/disaster.html)

***The Red Cross.***

This is where you will find information on “Go Bags.”

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) [www.redcrossstore.org/shopper/ProdList.aspx](http://www.redcrossstore.org/shopper/ProdList.aspx)

**Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/Special Needs**

This guide from Canada provides information on preparing an emergency plan and kit for people with disabilities / special needs *and* for caregivers.

<https://www.getprepared.gc.ca/cnt/rsrccs/pblctns/pplwthdsblts/pplwthdsblts-eng.pdf>.



## **Attachment B: Picture boards help bridge language gap in health emergencies**

**By LINDA A. JOHNSON**  
**The Associated Press**

**TRENTON, N.J. - With more ill and injured people unable to speak English, hospitals, clinics and rescue squads are turning to picture boards to bridge the communication gap with easily understood images.**

**The large, double-sided panels let patients point to icons showing their problem , such as pain, a burn, breathing trouble or a fall , as well as the part of the body that is affected. They also can point to their native language in a list so an appropriate interpreter can be located.**

**"They ought to be in every ambulance, in every hospital, in every clinic," said Dr. Fred M. Jacobs, head of New Jersey's health department. "Communication barriers lead to adverse impacts on (care) quality, misunderstandings and even medical errors."**

**His department is partnering with the state's hospital association to distribute thousands of the boards to all New Jersey hospitals, rescue squads and public health clinics.**

**Use of the panels is likely to spread under a new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services program aimed at helping hospitals to determine their patients' communication needs and to find tools to meet those needs. At least nine state hospital associations have signed on: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah and Washington.**

**At University Hospital in Newark, up to 15 percent of patients speak Spanish, Portuguese or another language besides English, said triage nurse Robert Cagadoc. Since getting the picture boards last month, he's used them a couple times every shift to help patients arriving in the emergency department.**

**They help "big time," he said .**

**According to the American Hospital Association, up to 23 million U.S. residents have limited English proficiency, and a recent survey found 48 percent of hospitals encounter patients with limited English skills daily.**

**Hospitals are required by federal law to provide interpreters as needed for patients, so they generally subscribe to commercial services provided by telephone or, as New Jersey hospitals are now doing, train bilingual staff members. The boards also are helpful for patients who are deaf, hard of hearing or mute, or who cannot speak because they have had a stroke or have a breathing tube down their throat.**

**The boards originated in Florida after Hurricane Andrew in 1992. They sold by Servision Inc., mainly through licensed distributors. Servision founder Michael Weston said he came up with the idea after serving as director of the greater Miami Red Cross and seeing how many people didn't get needed help after Andrew because of communication difficulties. The boards also are helpful for patients who are deaf, hard of hearing or mute, or who cannot speak because they have had a stroke or have a breathing tube down their throat.....**

**The Metropolitan Chicago Health-care Council has distributed at leased 5,000 copies of the boards to nursing homes and every hospital in the state, used them successfully in disaster drills and is ordering 2,000 more, said spokesman Patrick Finnegan.**

**"When I found this thing, I was like a kid in a candy store because this is exactly what you need," he said.**

”

On the Net:

Picture board supplier: <http://www.eadassociates.com/products.html>

September 2, 2007 11:10 PM

## Attachment C: Spanish English Picture Board

A	B	C	H	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	Ñ	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
		si yes 		beber drink 	cuándo when 	dónde where 	médico/a doctor 	enfermera/o nurse 	no no 	0																	
		acostar lie down 	sentar sit 	bajar la cabeza lower head 	levantar la cabeza raise head 	encendido on 	apagado off 	silencio quiet 	2																		
		arreglarse grooming 	mi medicina my medicine 	ropa limpia clean clothes 	gafas glasses 	aparato auditivo hearing aid 	leer read 	televisión radio 	4																		
		estoy bien I'm fine 	mal bad 	triste sad 	solo lonely 	temeroso afraid 	confundido confused 	nervioso nervous 	6																		
		quiere decir algo mas I want to say something else 	pareja partner 	padres parents 	hijos children 	amigos buddies 	hermanos brothers sisters 	religión religion 	8																		
										9																	

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