

Patient Communications Policy

Jervis Bay Health Choices

Effective: 8-7-25

1. Purpose

Jervis Bay Health Choices is committed to maintaining respectful, secure, and effective communication with patients to support their wellbeing, health literacy, and access to care.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Jervis Bay Health Choices staff including medical administration officers, clinicians, and contractors who engage in patient communication.

3. Approved Communication Channels

Mode	Use Guidelines
Phone	Primary method. Identity verified using three approved identifiers (name, DOB, address). Sensitive messages relayed professionally.
SMS	Used for appointment reminders and general health alerts. Patient consent obtained during intake.
Email	Used for non-urgent communications. Written patient consent is required, with privacy risks clearly explained.
Telehealth	Consent documented prior to consult. Backup plans implemented for technology failures.

4. Privacy and Consent

- Adheres to the *Privacy Act 1988* and *Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)*.
- Communications involving personal or health information require explicit or implied consent.
- Consent is documented in the patient's record.
- Sensitive results communicated only by clinicians or approved staff.

5. Recording Communication

All communications—successful or attempted—must be recorded in the patient's health record and include:

- Reason for contact
- Content of the communication
- Outcome or action taken
- Internal messaging systems must be used securely

6. Health Literacy & Patient Education

- Communications are tailored to individual literacy levels
- Use plain English and visual aids whenever possible
- Patient materials aim for 5th–8th grade readability

- Employ the **teach-back method** to confirm understanding

7. Digital Communication & Patient Portals

- Use secure messaging systems (e.g., via approved clinical software)
- Establish response time expectations (e.g., 1–2 business days)
- Clearly define information types suitable for electronic sharing

8. Complaints & Feedback Handling

- Patients may lodge feedback via email, phone, or written submission
- Acknowledge within 2 business days; resolution aimed within 10
- Feedback documented securely and reviewed periodically

9. Staff Training & Competency

- Staff undergo training in communication protocols, cultural awareness, and privacy laws
- New hires complete onboarding communication modules
- Use models like **AIDET**: Acknowledge, Introduce, Duration, Explanation, Thank You

10. Cultural & Linguistic Inclusivity

- Preferred languages are identified at registration
- Interpreter services offered (e.g., TIS National)
- Communications respect cultural values and decision-making norms

11. Accessibility

- Support services offered include:
 - **National Relay Service (NRS)** for hearing-impaired patients
 - Printed materials available in large print
 - Staff trained to respond to diverse communication needs

12. After-Hours and Emergency Communication

- Recorded phone message provides clinic hours and emergency contacts
- Urgent digital messages flagged for triage by clinical team
- Communications contingency plan in place for system disruptions

13. Monitoring & Quality Improvement

- Conduct regular audits of recorded communications
- Track and investigate any breaches or issues
- Use surveys to capture patient satisfaction and refine processes

14. Staff Responsibilities

Staff are expected to:

- Communicate respectfully, professionally, and clearly

- Maintain patient confidentiality at all times
- Report communication breaches or concerns to the Practice Manager

15. Review and Updates

This policy is reviewed annually or when legislative, technological, or clinical changes occur.