



Communication Partner Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Communication Partner?

A Communication Partner is an impartial court appointed officer whose role is to facilitate communication between an accused or supervised person with mental impairment and other people in court proceedings. Communication Partners can also be appointed by the Mental Impairment Review Tribunal (the Tribunal) to facilitate communication in Tribunal proceedings.

Communication Partners are allied health professionals such as Speech Pathologists, Social Workers, Psychologists, and Occupational Therapists.

A Communication Partner is not a support person, advocate, or interpreter. They are not an expert witness, and do not provide comments to the court about diagnosis or symptoms of the accused person.

What does a Communication Partner do?

A Communication Partner assesses and observes a person's communication needs and provides recommendations to the court or Tribunal. They will assess the person's communication, including talking, listening, reading and writing skills. For example, understanding of complex legal terms.

After meeting with an accused or supervised person, the Communication Partner writes a report for the court. The report includes practical recommendations to support the person's communication needs during proceedings.

Court report recommendations may include:

- Use of visual supports, such as pictures and symbols,
- Modifying language to facilitate understanding,
- Access to supports that could improve concentration and emotional regulation such as focus items, scheduled breaks, or support dogs.

Recommendations in the Communication Partner's report are discussed at a ground rules hearing with all relevant parties. At this time, the judicial officer will decide which recommendations will be directed for proceedings and how they will be implemented.

Who can have a Communication Partner?

The Communication Partner Program is a Western Australian statewide service that works with accused or supervised people under *The Criminal Law (Mental Impairment) (CLMI) 2023 Act*. An application for a Communication Partner can be made at any stage in proceedings under the CLMI Act 2023.

How can I request a Communication Partner?

A Communication Partner must be appointed by a judicial officer.

Applications for a Communication Partner can be made to the court or Mental Impairment Review Tribunal and can happen at any point during proceedings if fitness has been raised.

Applications can be made by:

- the accused or supervised person,
- the representative of the accused or supervised person,
- a legal practitioner representing the accused or supervised person,
- the Director of Public Prosecutions, or
- a police officer.

A court or the Tribunal can also appoint a Communication Partner on its own initiative.

How can I contact the Communication Partner Program?

You can contact the Communication Partner Program directly by email, CPPProgram@justice.wa.gov.au or phone, 0458 263 567.

Where can I find more information?

The Communication Partner Program Procedural Guidance Manual is available via <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/court-and-tribunal-services/communication-partner-program>