

# What is a Speech Pathologist?

*Please read the Important Notice on the reverse of this Fact Sheet.*

A speech pathologist has been trained to assess and treat people who have a communication disability. Speech pathologists complete a degree at university which encompasses all aspects of communication including speech, writing, reading, signs, symbols and gestures. Speech pathologists also work with people who have difficulties swallowing food and drink.

Speech pathologists or speech-language pathologists were formerly known as speech therapists. They are different from speech and drama teachers.

## Why do we need speech pathologists?

Communication – the process of being able to understand and to be understood – is something most of us take for granted. Communication disabilities are the result of problems with speech, using and understanding language, voice, fluency, hearing, or reading and writing.

One in seven Australians has some form of communication disability. This means that one in seven people has a problem understanding other people or being understood by people.

## Where do speech pathologists work?

Speech pathologists work in a variety of settings, including:

- kindergartens, primary and secondary schools
- nursing homes
- hospitals
- universities
- rehabilitation services
- mental health services
- community health centres
- private practice
- specialist services for those with complex communication needs, arising from disorders such as autism, cerebral palsy and intellectual disability.

## Who do speech pathologists work with?

A speech pathologist's workload might include:

- giving advice on feeding to a mother who has a baby with a cleft palate
- working in a child care centre with a group of children who are hard to understand
- working with a school child who can't understand what his teacher says
- working with a high school student who stutters
- training a teacher who constantly loses her voice to use it more effectively
- rehabilitating a young man who has severe brain injury due to a motorcycle accident
- liaising with the carers of an elderly man, who has dementia
- helping a woman who has had a stroke to regain her communication skills, advising her husband and family
- providing education for teachers, doctors or parents
- providing communication strategies for a person with intellectual disability
- treating a person who has swallowing problems following a stroke
- assisting children and adults who are learning to read



## **How do speech pathologists work?**

Speech pathologists work in a variety of ways including providing individual therapy, working in small groups, working within a classroom, becoming involved in home-based programs, providing resources and information, as well giving advice and direction to clients, their carers and other professionals.

They coordinate the management of clients, work as part of a multi disciplinary team, consult with other agencies, provide workshops and support family members and other caregivers. A speech pathologist is an important member of an early intervention team, an aged care services team and a school therapy team.

The role of speech pathologists is to advocate strongly for appropriate care and services for people with communication disabilities.

### **For further information:**

Contact Speech Pathology Australia - the official body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability.

### **References**

Please contact Speech Pathology Australia's National Office for the references used to create this Fact Sheet.

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