MEDIA RELEASE

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Spread the word on Global Accessibility Awareness Day May 16

Whether you're writing reports for the boss, a grant application to update the tuck shop or a Facebook post for your small business, words matter.

But what if nearly half the population can't read them, or even find them in the first place?

Global Accessibility Awareness Day on May 16 is a time to think about how we get the information we need – including the 44 per cent of Australians who live with low literacy.

Low literacy can affect anybody. You may be a great reader today, but tomorrow a stroke, car accident or sporting injury could see you join the 44 per cent.

Cathy Basterfield is a speech pathologist and the pioneer behind writing nearly anyone can read: Easy English. It's based on decades of clinical research and real-world testing to make it as accessible as possible, even for adults who can only read at a grade one level.

"Easy English gets straight to the point," Ms Basterfield says. "It's cutting the fluff and the jargon to find the information the reader really needs, and expressing it in the simplest possible way.

"Every single thing about Easy English is deliberate. Every word, every punctuation mark, every colour choice, every line of illustration is there for a reason, and that reason is always to enable the reader."

Information you can read isn't just nice to have – it's a human right, and essential to getting by in today's information-based society.

Global Accessibility Awareness Day looks at the words we use, and crucially where we put them. With more information **only** accessible online, people who can't use the internet are being left behind. That's two thirds of all adult Australians.

"Everyone has the right to the same information and resources as their peers, and the right to access it in a way that works for them," Ms Basterfield said.

"That might mean printed Easy English versions of paperwork. It might mean a letter in the mail or a phone call instead of an email."

For interviews or more comment, please contact:

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It also means making websites that work for all users.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, spearheaded by father of the internet Tim Berners-Lee, is a global how-to guide to make websites work for people with disability.

But a recent study of the busiest million websites found more than 95 per cent failed these guidelines right on their home page, and that figure has barely changed in five years.

"If information is to be online, it needs to be accessible," Ms Basterfield says.

"If you have to click six links to find the information you need, if you have to make sense of intricate navigation systems or deal with things that flash or blink or move around, that's not accessible. And it's not good enough."

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More information:
- Global Accessibility Awareness Day: https://accessibility.day/
- Access Easy English: https://accesseasyenglish.com.au/
- ReadEE: Access Easy English's new website for users with low literacy: https://www.readee.com.au/
- The WebAIM Million 2024 report: https://webaim.org/projects/million/
- Digital literacy and low literacy: a blog post from Access Easy English: https://medium.com/@accesseasyenglish/digital-literacy-for-people-with-low-literacy-b7d6f3f7e0fd
- Digital literacy and life: a blog post from Access Easy English: https://medium.com/@accesseasyenglish/the-intersection-of-digital-literacy-with-financial-literacy-2a2b24523575

Recent Easy English resources from Access Easy English:

- Heatwave safety: https://accesseasyenglish.com.au/knox-council-heat-related-illness-and-food/
- Annual health checks for people with disability: https://accesseasyenglish.com.au/central-and-eastern-sydney-primary-health-network-see-your-doctor-each-year/
- 2024 Covid information: https://accesseasyenglish.com.au/2024-covid19-information/

Ideas for audience engagement:
- What's the worst website you've seen?
- What's your "didn't read the fine print" horror story?
- Share your language pet peeves
- Could you get through a day without reading? (Including street signs, food packaging and price tags - no cheating!)

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