

What is a speech pathologist and what they do?

What speech pathologists do

Speech pathologists help you communicate, or when you have trouble eating and drinking. They are university educated allied health professionals. Speech pathologists work with people of all ages.

They help you when you have trouble understanding and talking with other others. They help with reading, spelling and using technology or other ways to communicate.

Speech pathologists also help people who have trouble swallowing, which can make eating and drinking difficult.

Who can see a speech pathologist?

Anyone can see a speech pathologist for an assessment. The speech pathologist will work with you to find out about treatments and services that are right for you.

You don't need a referral to see a speech pathologist. However, you might need one to access Medicare funding.

Types of people who might see a speech pathologist

People who might see a speech pathologist include:

- babies born with a cleft lip and/or palate
- preschoolers who are having trouble communicating, or have speech that is difficult to understand
- people who have a developmental language disorder that affects their ability to talk and understand others
- people who have difficulties with their speech, including childhood apraxia of speech (CAS)
- neurodiverse people, such as those who are autistic
- people who are finding it hard to learn to read and spell
- people with hearing loss, and those who communicate with them
- people who stutter
- people who use their voice professionally, such as teachers, singers or call centre workers
- people with an acquired brain injury, for example due to a car accident or stroke
- people at risk of choking or who have difficulty eating or drinking safely
- people with physical, cognitive, and/or sensory disabilities
- people who find it hard, or are unable, to communicate through speech and use alternative or augmentative communication (AAC) methods instead (for example, an electronic communication device, communication board)
- people with neurological conditions that increase over time, such as motor neurone disease, Parkinson's or dementia
- people who need surgery to remove cancer of the tongue or voice box/larynx
- people with communication or swallowing difficulties related to a mental illness (or related to the medication taken to treat a mental illness)
- young people and adults in contact with the justice system who find it difficult to communicate effectively
- children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who have underlying communication needs that may be masked by concerning behaviours.

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Speech Pathology Australia (SPA) has [position statements](#) and there are [fact sheets](#) on the Communication Hub website that include information about the role of a speech pathologist and the specific communication and swallowing needs they treat.

More information for people with communication and swallowing needs, their communication partners, and the wider community can be found on the [Communication Hub](#) website.

Where speech pathologists work

Speech pathologists work in many settings, including:

- kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools
- residential aged care facilities
- hospitals
- universities
- rehabilitation services
- mental health services
- community health centres
- the justice system
- private practices/clinics
- people's homes
- services for people with complex communication needs due to conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy, and intellectual disability.

Speech pathologists also deliver services via telepractice. Visit the [SPA website](#) to find out more.

How to become a speech pathologist

Speech Pathology Australia accredits university programs that offer speech pathology training. Currently, speech pathologists can gain a recognised qualification at either an undergraduate or Master's level. Both courses are equally recognised by the Association and employers.

To learn more see SPA's Position Statement on [Dual Entry to the Speech Pathology Profession](#). To find out about how to become a speech pathologist see the [SPA website](#).

How to find a speech pathologist

Use the 'Find a speech pathologist' search on the [SPA website](#).

This is a list of members of Speech Pathology Australia who have agreed to have their contact details made available to the general public. It is not a full list of all speech pathology services throughout Australia.

For further information contact **Speech Pathology Australia**—the national peak body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability and all Australian consumers of speech pathology services.

www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au