



INTEGRATED CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Communication skills



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Learning objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe communication, including its forms, functions and barriers
- Identify the challenges to effective communication
- Explain ways to improve effective communication
- Discuss the benefits of effective communication
- Recognize the skills and strategies needed to communicate effectively with older people



Bottom line

Avoid stereotyping



- Older age is a time of great diversity
- Keep your message positive
- Use motives specific to older people



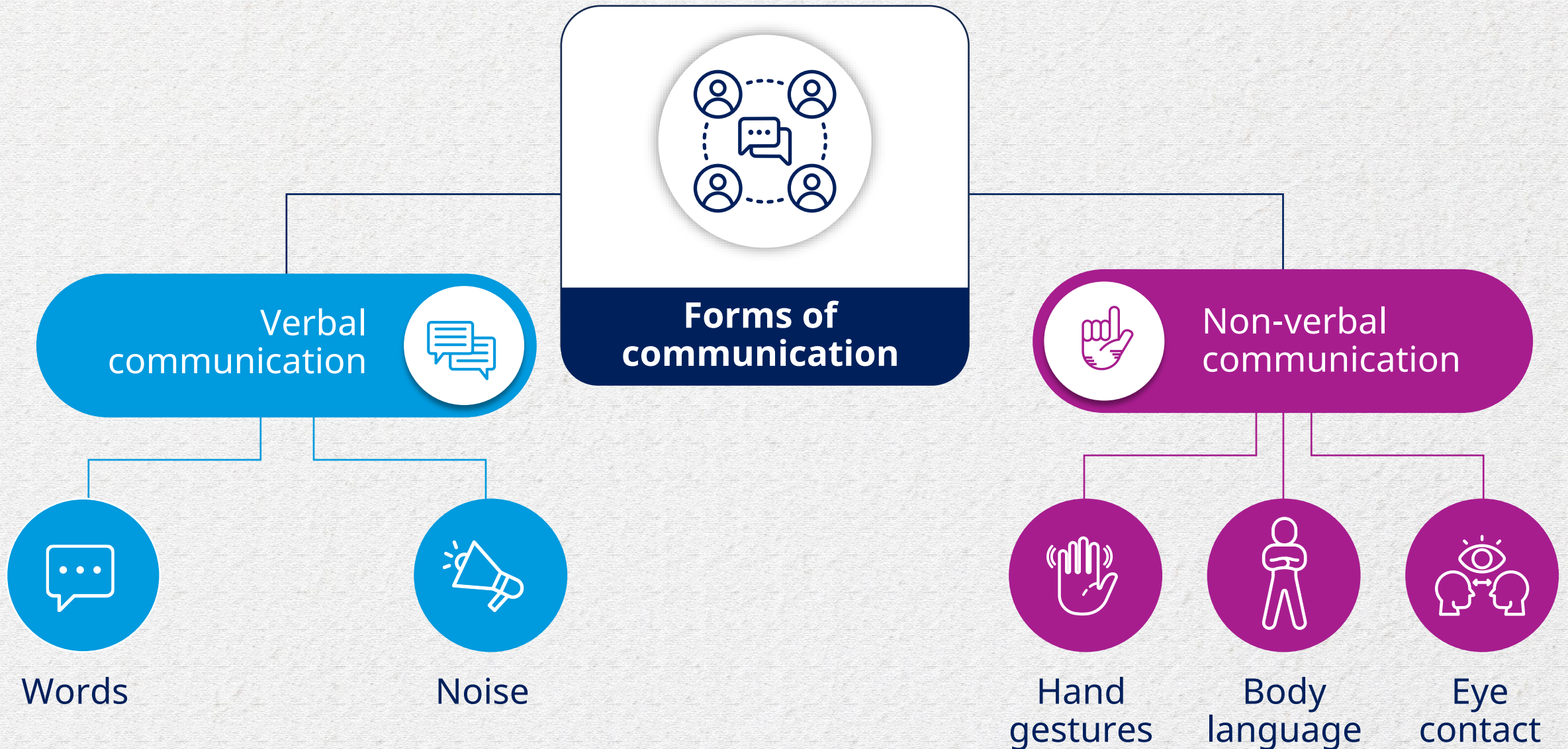
Look for the needs of older people

- Older people are generally satisfied with who they are
- Less interest in developing new traits or conforming to social norms
- Although initiating change may be harder, maintaining change may be easier
- Decision-making processes rely more on intuition than extensive weighing of merits



Communication means the transmission of information
From Latin: *communicare*, meaning “to share” or “to be in relation with”

Forms and barriers to communication



Core functions of communication



Information provision

- Older people may less actively seek and request information
- Lower ability to process information



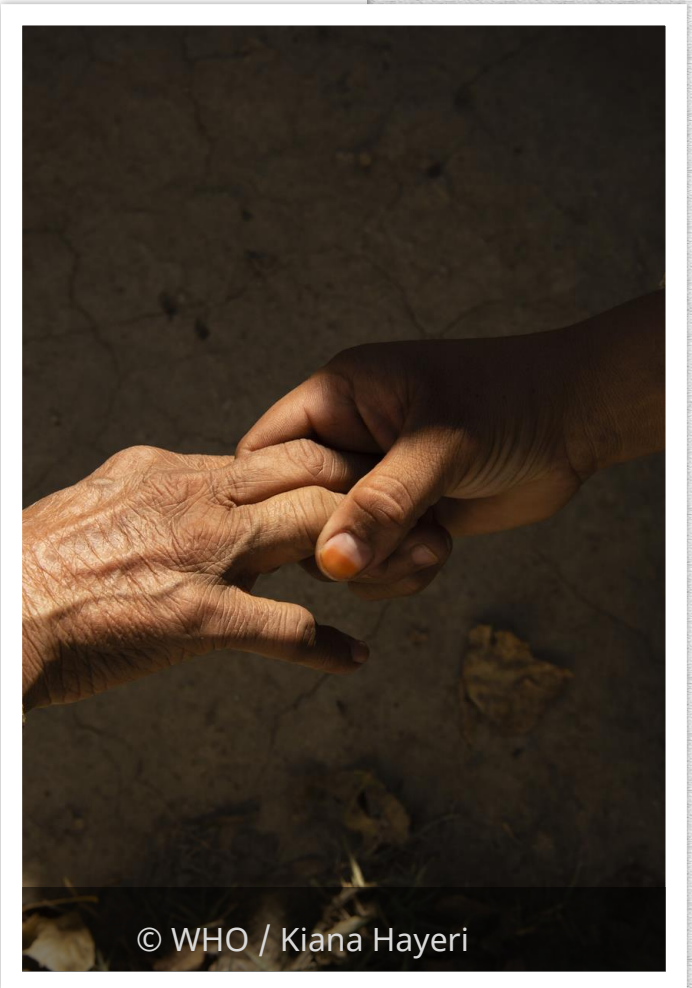
Enabling decision-making

- Involvement in decision-making
- Need to identify meaningful goals of care

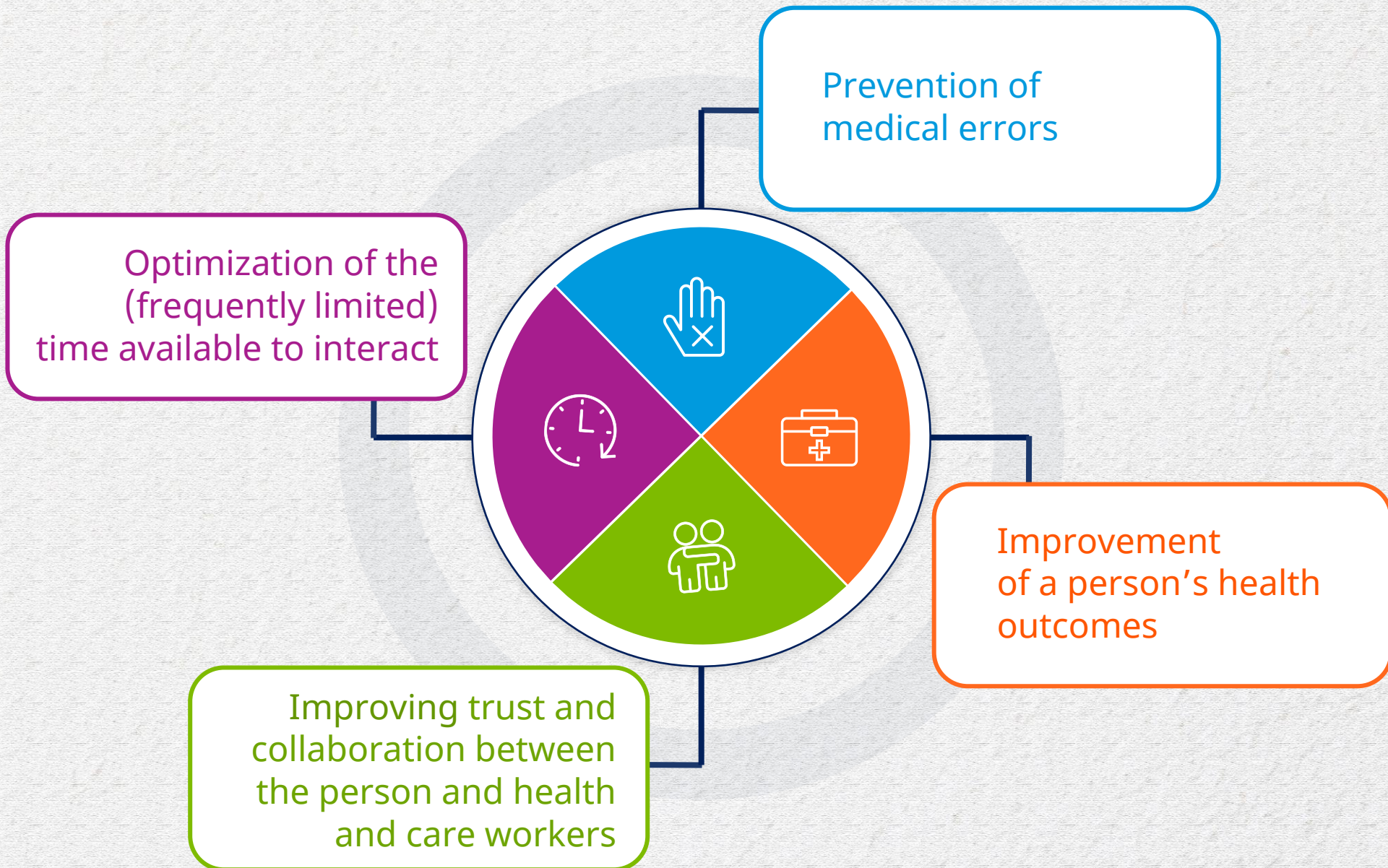


Empathic behaviour

- To build trust and relationships
- Greater satisfaction, decreased anxiety and better information recall
- Important if conditions may worsen



Benefits from effective communication



Challenges to effective communication

Perceived challenges to effective communication are related to multiple factors, including:



Older person

- Diverse needs, priorities, values and capacities (i.e., hearing loss, vision impairment, cognitive impairment, psychological disorders)
- Potential scepticism towards younger or less experienced workers



Health and care worker

- Difficulty prioritizing problems
- Difficulty establishing rapport and trust
- Insufficient knowledge and skills in geriatric care
- Unease in discussing bad news, poor prognosis or realistic care goals
- Ageism
- Time constraints



It is critical for the health and care workforce to:

- Tailor information and its delivery
- Develop communication skills

Improved communication

To improve communication, it is necessary to act at different levels:

Environment



Organization

Health and care workers



Improve communication: Environment



Promote easy accessibility

Consider the potential need to compensate:

- Mobility loss
- Cognitive impairment
- Sensory limitations (hearing loss and vision impairment)



Promote a familiar environment

- Provide seating in a quiet, comfortable area
- Reduce noise and interruptions to a minimum
- Maintain a comfortable temperature
- Ensure good lighting
- Make material easy to read



Guarantee hygienic conditions and tidiness

- Cleanliness of surfaces and objects
- Toilets should be easily accessible without environmental barriers
- Availability of material for handwashing



- Verify the access and environment, considering the specific needs the older person may have.
- Do not assume that something that works for younger individuals will also work for older people.
- Experiment and identify which solutions are most effective.

Improve communication: Organization



Scheduling of appointments

- Provide clear information
- Schedule older people earlier in the day
- Allow additional time for older people



Make older people comfortable

- Greet the older person warmly
- Ensure their privacy is guaranteed
- Be prepared to physically assist them
- Check the older person periodically
- Help the older person stay relaxed and focused
- Say “Goodbye”



- Older people expect staff to be friendly, considerate, humorous and to take sufficient time with them.
- Improving communication from the first contact can help the individual feel at ease and comfortable.

Improve communication: Health and care workers



Use the proper form of address

- Use formal language
- Avoid using familiar terms (e.g., “dear”)
- Eventually, inquire about preferred forms of address



Sit face-to-face

- Consider the distance (do not invade the personal space)



Establish a rapport

- Avoid ageist attitudes



- Introduce yourself.
- Clearly state your name and role within the organization.
- Explain that you are here to listen to a person’s concerns.
- Show respect.
- Avoid taking anything for granted.
- Do not assume a person’s capacity without assessing them.

Improve communication: Health and care workers



Communicating effectively with older persons

- Take time — avoid rushing, interrupting, or distractions.
- Maintain eye contact and show empathy.
- Listen actively: **clarify, summarize, paraphrase.**
- Observe tone, pace, gestures, and body language.
- Allow time for the person to process questions and responses.
- If time is limited, ask them to prepare a list of concerns.
- In difficult moments, apply **SARAH**:

Stop talking ∴ *Actively listen* ∴ *Reflect* ∴ *Act with empathy* ∴ *Handle objections*

Improve communication: Health and care workers



Ensuring understanding and closure

- Speak slowly and clearly; use short, simple words.
- Focus on one topic at a time and avoid jargon.
- Summarize key points; encourage questions.
- Use visuals or written notes to reinforce key messages.
- Confirm understanding — ask them to repeat main points.
- Tailor advice to the person's living environment.
- Provide clear, written follow-up information (e.g., prescriptions, next steps).

Improve communication: Health and care workers



Hearing loss

- Ensure that the person can see your face while you are speaking.
- Make sure there is good lighting on your face.
- Keep your hands away from your face while talking.
- Get the person's attention before you start speaking.
- Try to minimize distractions, such as noise.
- Speak clearly and at a slow pace; do not shout.
- Do not stop trying to communicate with people who have difficulty hearing.
- Keep a notepad handy for notes.
- Indicate when changing the subject using pauses, questions and gestures.

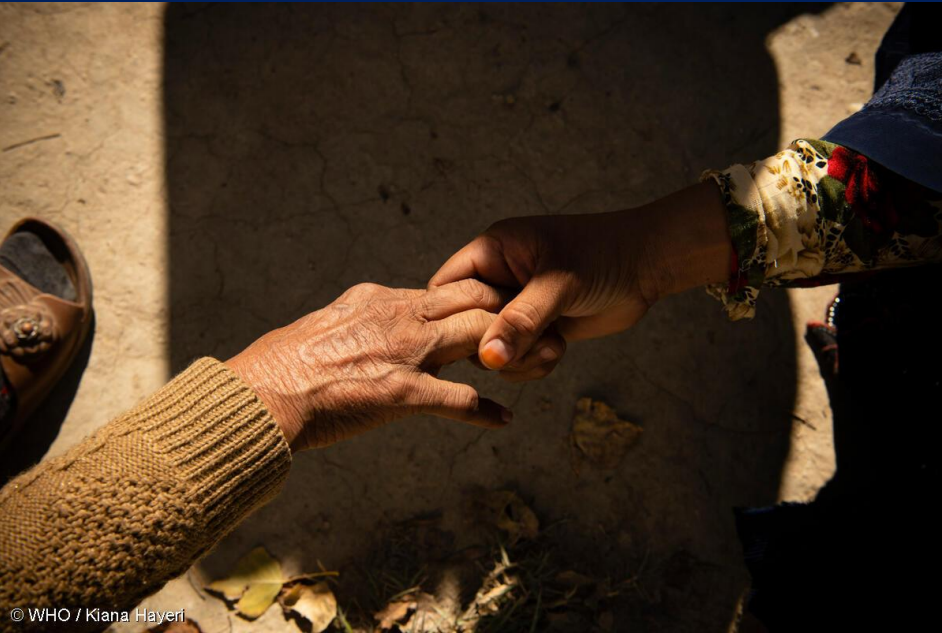
Improve communication: Health and care workers



Vision impairment

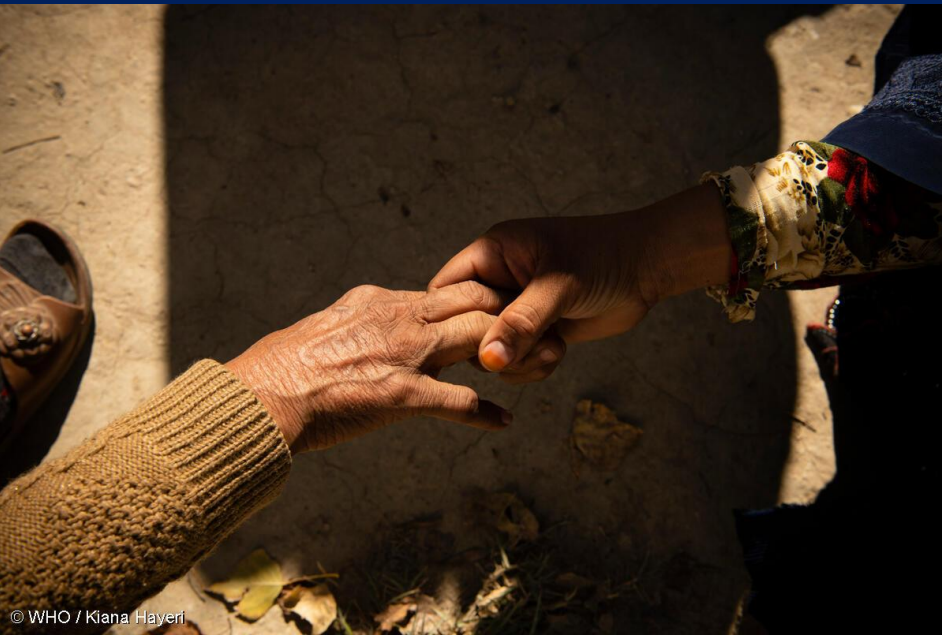
- Ensure there is adequate lighting, especially on your face.
- Check whether the person uses eyeglasses.
- Make sure all instructions (both written and unwritten) and materials are clear.
- If there are issues with reading, consider alternative options (e.g., recording instructions, diagrams, using aids or devices).

Summary



- Communication can take various forms, including both verbal and non-verbal methods.
- The main functions of communication include providing information, facilitating decision-making and promoting empathic behaviour.
- Challenges to effective communication can be related to factors associated with:
 - the older person, and
 - health and care workers.

Summary



- To enhance communication, it is necessary to address various levels: environment, organization and workers.
- Guidance for difficult situations – SARA H
 - S – Stop talking
 - A – Actively listen
 - R – Reflect content
 - A – Act with empathy
 - H – Handle objections

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