



Communication Tools: A Guide



**A user-friendly guide
of tools in Winnipeg that can
help people communicate
with First Responders
in emergencies**



Project Contributors

Janet Forbes

Inclusion Winnipeg, Executive Director

Dr. Susan L. Hardie

Eviance, Executive Director

Dr. Alexis Buettgen

Eviance, Senior Research Officer

Dr. Cameron Crawford

Eviance, Senior Research Officer

Evan Wicklund

Eviance, Research Officer

Kate Grisim

Eviance, Research Officer

ninesixteen Creative Inc.

Document branding and design

ninesixteen.ca

Suggested Citation

Hardie, S., Buettgen, A., Crawford, C., Wicklund, E., & Grisim, K. (2020). *Communication Tools: A Guide A user-friendly guide of tools in Winnipeg that can help people communicate with First Responders*

*in emergencies.*The Winnipeg Foundation, Thomas Sill Foundation, and Inclusion Winnipeg. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Incorporated operating as Eviance.

Acknowledgments

Eviance and Inclusion Winnipeg thank the project funders, members of the Advisory Committee, our project partners, branding company, research

participants, external consultants, and everyone else who contributed to this project.

Funding

Funding for this guide and for this project was granted by The Winnipeg Foundation, Thomas Sill Foundation and Inclusion Winnipeg.



The following trademarks are properties of their respective owners as listed below. The use of these names, logos, and brands does not imply endorsement and is for identification purposes only.

- E.R.I.K. T.I.S.U. Logo is trademark of Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service.
- IN CASE OF EMERGENCY ICE is trademark of Bob Brothie.
- MedicAlert & Design® is the registered trademark of Medic Alert Foundation United States, Inc.

Should any trademark attribution be missing, mistaken or erroneous, please contact us as soon as possible for rectification.

- VITAL ID & Design® is the registered trademark of Vital ID Ltd.
- MagnusCards® is the registered trademark of Magnusmode Limited.
- All other trademarks cited herein are the property of their respective owners.

Welcome!

On behalf of Inclusion Winnipeg and Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Inc. (CCDS) operating as Eviance, we would like to thank you for taking the time to review this guide. We hope it provides you with information on available tools in Winnipeg that can help people communicate with First Responders during emergencies.

This guide provides you with general information about communication challenges and offers a few tips to various stakeholders who may be involved in emergencies. Our hope is that, after reviewing the information in this guide, you will not only be more aware of the communication tools available in Winnipeg, but that you will also feel a bit more comfortable interacting with others during emergencies. We feel that increasing awareness and knowledge about communication challenges will ultimately improve interactions between people with communication challenges and First Responders and therefore make Winnipeg a safer, more welcoming, and more inclusive place to live.

This guide was designed for:

- People who have disabilities and/or communication challenges
- People who are part of a support network supporting a person with communication challenges. This may include Direct Support Professionals or family members
- First Responders who interact with people with communication challenges during emergencies.

We define “communication challenges” as any difficulties a person may have in communicating with others. Such difficulties may be in hearing or understanding what others are saying, or in making oneself understood by others.

This user-friendly guide is divided into two sections. In Section 01 we provide information about five communication tools we reviewed which address many communication-related needs and that are available to people in Winnipeg.

For each tool, we provide information that a tool user might want to know before deciding which tool would best suit their needs. We discuss some basic details about each tool, like how to access them and how much they cost. In addition, we have included a summary chart which includes these five tools and a longer list of tools that we also reviewed and which are available in Winnipeg. It is our hope that this wider range of information will make tool users more comfortable making a decision about which tool would work best for them and would be most in keeping with their own safety, health and well-being.

Section 02 is divided into two separate documents. In the first we offer tips for communication tool users and their support networks on how to use a communication tool. We also include tips for how communication tool users can practice communicating with First Responders by acting out an emergency situation.



**Janet Forbes, Executive Director
Inclusion Winnipeg**

This second document is intended for First Responders such as police officers, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service personnel, medical professionals, security guards, cadets, or members of the Downtown Watch, West End Watch or Bear Clan Patrol.

We hope that after reviewing this guide you will know more about communication challenges and will have found useful information about resources that are available in Winnipeg. We also hope you will have discovered some new ideas for making interactions between people with communication challenges and First Responders go smoothly. By providing you with a little bit of information on what communication tools are available and making some recommendations about how to communicate more effectively, we hope everyone will feel more supported, comfortable and confident communicating in emergencies.



**Dr. Susan L. Hardie, Executive Director
Canadian Centre on Disability Studies
operating as Eviance**

Contents

Section 01: Emergency Communication Tools

E.R.I.K.	<u>6</u>
MedicAlert	<u>8</u>
MagnusMode	<u>10</u>
Vital ID	<u>12</u>
In Case of Emergency (ICE).....	<u>14</u>
Quick-Look Summary Chart	<u>16</u>
Other Tools to Consider	<u>17</u>

Section 02: Communication Tips

Communication Tool Users and their Support Networks.....	<u>19</u>
Tips for First Responders	<u>23</u>

01





Section 01: Emergency Communication Tools



Emergency Response Information Kit

What is it?

The Emergency Response Information Kit (E.R.I.K.) is a paper-based, plastic-covered form made for seniors, people with chronic illnesses, people who live alone, and those who have caregivers. It can also be used by people who have speech difficulties or communication barriers including people who find it difficult to explain their health conditions in English or French.

What does it cost?

Some agencies do charge a nominal fee for E.R.I.K. in order to cover their costs. To avoid these nominal costs, contact the City of Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service directly (Option 1).

How do I use it?

E.R.I.K. is filled out by the user or with the help of their support network when it is ordered by them. It is posted inside the users' home (on the fridge, for example) so that First Responders can look at a person's health information during an emergency. Users are urged to place a red sticker on the outside of their home to indicate they have E.R.I.K. so First Responders know to look for it.

Positives

- Created in Winnipeg and used widely in Manitoba
- Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service personnel provide and receive training about E.R.I.K.
- Available in English and French
- User can add a sticker to the tool to indicate if they are Deaf or hard of hearing, if they speak French, or if they are non-verbal
- User can add or subtract anything they would like from the tool
- Made to help with the communication of health information during emergency situations

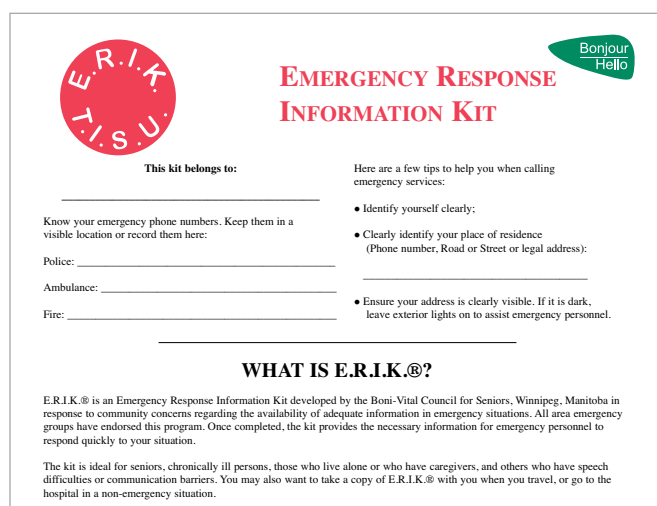
Things to consider

- Only available in the large package
- E.R.I.K. is paper based only and not available in digital form
- Some users worry that the E.R.I.K. window sticker indicates "someone vulnerable lives here"
- Focuses on medical needs and health information only

How do I access the tool?

- **Option 1** – Contact the City of **Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service** in person at 185 King Street on the 2nd floor.
- **Option 2** – Go to organizations that provide E.R.I.K. such as **Broadway Seniors Resource Council** at 319-691 Wolseley Avenue (phone: 204-772-3533) or **Continuity Care Inc.** at 2-120 Maryland Street (phone: 204-779-1679). You can also access a list of phone numbers to call in Winnipeg here to check where you can pick up an E.R.I.K. in your area.
- **Option 3** – Download the PDF version on the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service website.

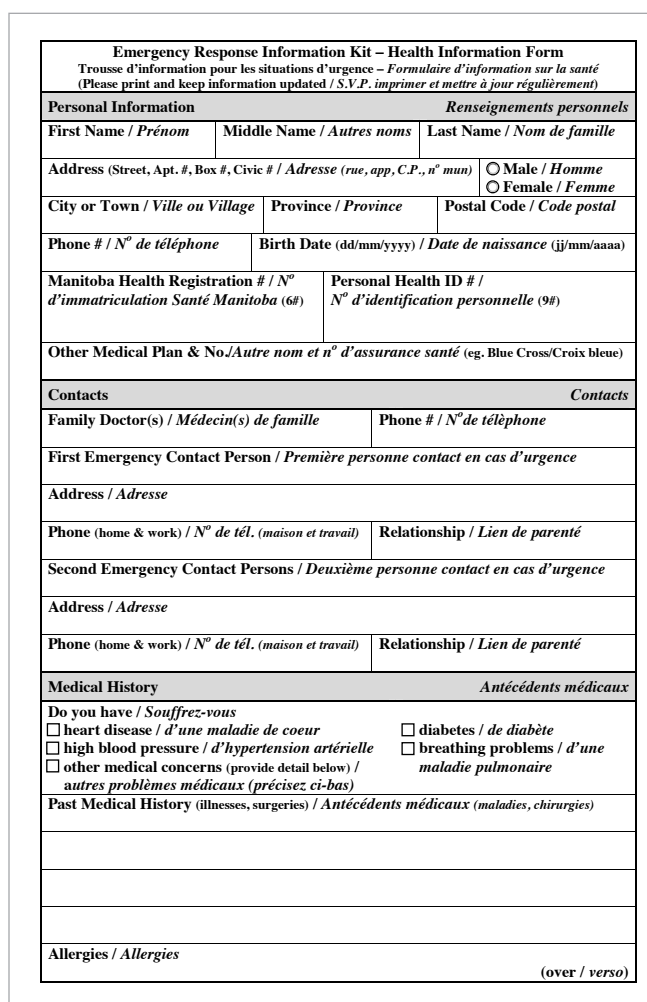
What does it look like?



The image shows the front of the E.R.I.K. Emergency Response Information Kit. It features a red circular logo with 'E.R.I.K.' and 'T.S.U.' around it. To the right, it says 'EMERGENCY RESPONSE INFORMATION KIT' in red. Below the logo, there are sections for 'This kit belongs to:' and 'Here are a few tips to help you when calling emergency services:'. The tips include identifying yourself clearly, clearly identifying your place of residence, and ensuring your address is clearly visible. At the bottom, there is a section titled 'WHAT IS E.R.I.K.®?' explaining the kit's purpose.

Above: The E.R.I.K. stays on your fridge so it is recognizable to First Responders. Stickers that are placed on the outside tell First Responders if the person speaks French or is Deaf or hard of hearing.

Right: Copy of the E.R.I.K. Health Information Form. Users are required to fill out the form and keep it updated.



The image shows the back of the E.R.I.K. Emergency Response Information Kit, which is a Health Information Form. It is titled 'Emergency Response Information Kit – Health Information Form' and 'Trousse d'information pour les situations d'urgence – Formulaire d'information sur la santé'. The form is divided into several sections: Personal Information, Contacts, Medical History, and Allergies. The Personal Information section includes fields for First Name, Middle Name, Last Name, Address, City or Town, Province, Postal Code, Phone, Birth Date, Manitoba Health Registration #, and Personal Health ID #. The Contacts section includes fields for Family Doctor(s), First Emergency Contact Person, Address, Phone, and Relationship. The Medical History section includes fields for Do you have (heart disease, high blood pressure, other medical concerns, diabetes, breathing problems), Past Medical History (illnesses, surgeries), and Allergies. The form is bilingual, with English and French text.



MedicAlert[®]
FOUNDATION CANADA

What is it?

MedicAlert has a variety of identification devices that users wear (mainly jewelry such as bracelets, necklaces, watches, activity tracker bands, shoe tags, dog tags, etc.). Users wear MedicAlert products to communicate their medical conditions and/or diagnosis of disability to First Responders during emergencies. When First Responders see the MedicAlert device they can call the MedicAlert 24/7 Emergency Hotline to access personal information about the person. To go along with the physical tools, there is also a “My MedicAlert” mobile app, which can be downloaded and used to update and access your profile, track symptoms, set medication reminders, track weight, etc. MedicAlert operates many programs including for children with mental health issues, people with dementia, indigenous peoples, and people labeled as being on the autism spectrum.

What does it cost?

\$60.00 for new subscribers (includes one year of MedicAlert protection, an ID and shoe tag, plus shipping and registration). Partial or full financial discounts for MedicAlert IDs and service plans are available for those who are eligible.

How do I use it?

People who use MedicAlert are encouraged to wear their MedicAlert ID at all times. They must also provide MedicAlert with their contact information and personal and medical profiles. This information is stored by MedicAlert and provided to First Responders when they call the Emergency Hotline.

Positives

- Supported and used by Winnipeg Police who also receive training about MedicAlert
- Widely known to both First Responders and the general public
- 24/7 Emergency Hotline means help can be sought at any time
- Family notification service tells caregivers and family members about the emergency situation and the whereabouts of the person wearing the device

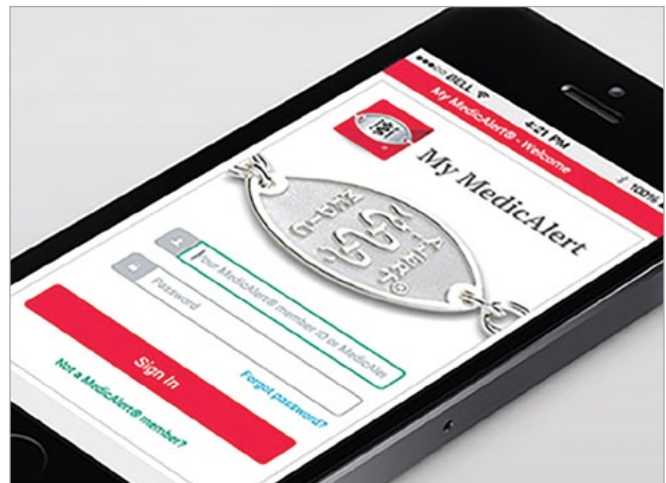
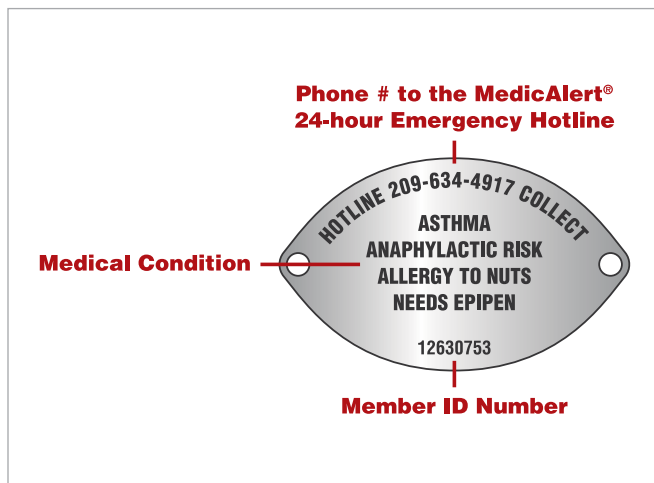
Things to consider

- Some people may be worried that MedicAlert requires subscribers to share personal information that is stored on an external database
- An application process with MedicAlert is required for a discounted subscription, which might be a barrier for some
- Requires identification of medical condition and/or diagnosis of disability
- Cost may be a barrier to some users

How do I access the tool?

- **Option 1** – Follow the three-step process by phone at **1-800-668-1507**.
- **Option 2** – Fill out the form online at medicalert.ca @.

What does it look like?



Pictured: The various components of the MedicAlert program



MagnusCards[®]

What is it?

MagnusMode is a mobile application designed for people labelled with cognitive disabilities and/or on the autism spectrum to learn to do things like personal care, banking, travel and other community activities. MagnusMode is a preventative tool, meant for users to become more comfortable completing daily activities. It is also meant to make the person with a communication challenge feel more confident living in their community.

What does it cost?

There is no cost for MagnusMode.

How do I use it?

People who use MagnusMode need to have a smartphone or tablet to download and use the application. There are some “card decks” already saved in the app itself, such as “Visiting the Emergency Department”. MagnusMode users can also create their own “card decks”.

A MagnusMode user could, for example, make a “card deck” about how to communicate with First Responders in an emergency and then let MagnusMode know that the deck can be made public so others have access to it, too.

Positives

- User-friendly graphics and audio make app easy to use
- Builds skills and confidence
- Supported by the Winnipeg International Airport and other organizations such as CIBC, WestJet, Tim Hortons, and A & W
- Available in English, French, and Spanish
- MagnusMode does not collect much personal information
- Promotes safety and preventing emergency situations
- Helps users avoid miscommunication during emergencies
- User may personalize it according to their interests and support needs
- Promotes social and community inclusion

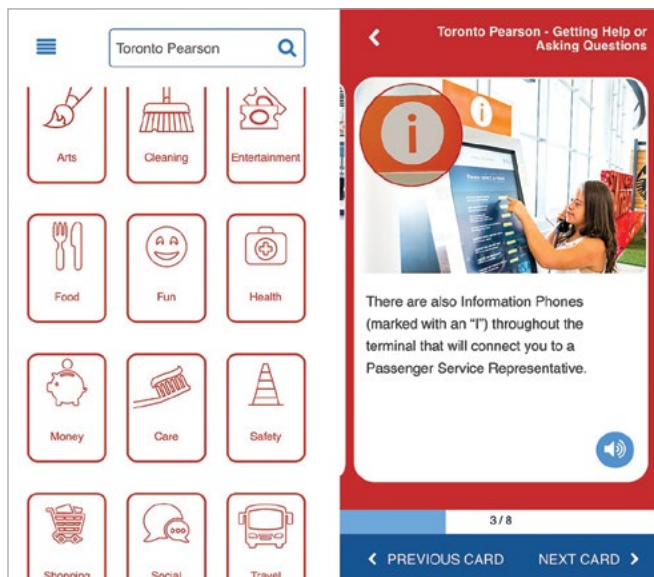
Things to consider

- Not well-known by First Responders in Winnipeg
- Little involvement of individuals labelled with cognitive disabilities and autism in developing the tool
- Cartoon image of MagnusMode may be seen as childish to some users
- A fee is charged for customizability of the tool, but this is negotiable
- Requires smartphone to use

How do I access the tool?

- **Option 1**
 - **Step 1:** Search for **MagnusMode** in your smartphone's **App Store** or **Google Play**.
 - **Step 2:** Download the free **MagnusCards** app.
 - **Step 3:** **Create an account** with a username and password.
- **Option 2**
 - **Step 1:** If you want help to create your own "card decks", go to magnusmode.com and click the button for "Book a Demo or a Call".
 - **Step 2:** If you do this, Magnusmode will make and send you your own personalized app or "card decks". Cost will vary depending on how much work you would like MagnusMode to do for you.
 - **Step 3:** People who have personal "card decks" made can speak with MagnusMode and ask them to make their deck public so others can benefit.

What does it look like?



Right: The three ways to use MagnusCards: use existing cards, make your own, or use branded cards for help accessing popular places such as Tim Hortons or CIBC bank centres.

Left: The 12 categories of MagnusMode (from left to right, top to bottom: Arts, Cleaning, Entertainment, Food, Fun, Health, Money, Care, Safety, Shopping, Social, and Travel). In this "card deck", users learn how to use Information booths in the Toronto Pearson airport.

3 Ways to Use MagnusCards

1. Use one of 350 existing Card Decks



2. Create your own Card Decks



3. Use our Branded Card Decks





What is it?

Vital ID wearable identification devices include bracelets and tags that can be fitted to hard hats, shoes, belts, harnesses, back packs, etc. Vital ID also offers wallet cards and a stand-alone mobile app for personal use. Vital ID products are generally sold to construction workers, children, people who play sports, and people who have medical conditions.

What does it cost?

Prices vary: wallet cards are \$2.95; motorcycle/cycle “Rider ID” is \$12.95; Vital ID bracelet is \$22.95. Tags for hard hats, shoes, belts, harnesses, back packs, etc. range from \$67.50 to \$105.00 for a package of 10 or 25 tags. You can apply to be part of a wholesale program to buy products in bulk at discounted prices.

How do I use it?

Users are required to fill out the information cards that come with the physical devices themselves or with help. The cards are intended to include basic information such as your name, medical information, and contact information. Access to a smartphone or tablet is required to download and use the app.

Positives

- Physical tools (e.g., bracelets) are marketed as stylish, durable, adjustable, and lightweight
- Personal information is very customizable
- Mobile app is user-friendly
- Wide range of products apply to diverse population
- Information is not stored on database and is only for personal use

Things to consider

- Uptake in Winnipeg not known
- Not specifically designed for people with disabilities
- Not widely recognized by First Responders in Winnipeg
- Commercially and bulk order focused
- Cost may be a concern for some people
- Some people may find Velcro bracelets itchy and uncomfortable

How do I access the tool?

- **Option 1** – Phone **1-250-586-7060** for more information or for help with ordering.
 - **Option 2** – Order directly from website at **vitalid.com** .
 - **Option 3** – Download the app from the **App Store** or **Google Play**.
-

What does it look like?



Above: Vital ID Emergency ID wallet card (front and back). There is plenty of space on the back for customized personal information.



Above: Vital ID medical bracelets come in various sizes and colours. A three-fold design is available where more information can be recorded.



What is it?

In Case of Emergency (ICE) is a mobile application that is used to store users' information and communicate it to First Responders in an emergency situation. As a unique feature, ICE also displays emergency contact information on users' 'Lock Screen' so First Responders have quick access to information. ICE4Autism is a related program that focuses on meeting the needs of people labeled as being on the autism spectrum. In both the traditional ICE and ICE4Autism apps, stored information includes details such as the user's emergency and healthcare professional contacts, a photo, name, date of birth, blood type, allergies, medications, and health conditions. Messages can also be pre-recorded so First Responders can receive specific information.

What does it cost?

\$3.00 to download the app.

How do I use it?

All that is required is access to a smartphone or tablet so the user can download and use the app.

Positives

- The app is user-friendly, straightforward and simple
- It is easy to find important information quickly in the app
- Rated positively (4.6 out of 5) by users on the App Store
- Very customizable as users can store information they choose
- Designed by a former paramedic in the United Kingdom
- Recognized by some First Responders in Winnipeg
- ICE4Autism claims to include perspectives of people labelled with autism in design
- ICE4Autism has unique features such as the ability to pre-record messages and an area where users can record special instructions for First Responders. ICE4Autism also includes categories "How you communicate", "Your unique behaviors and triggers", and "Important treatment information"
- Has the unique option of creating a "Lock Screen" where important information may be viewed by First Responders without unlocking phone
- As there are no further user charges beyond the modest download fee for the app, ICE is affordable for most users

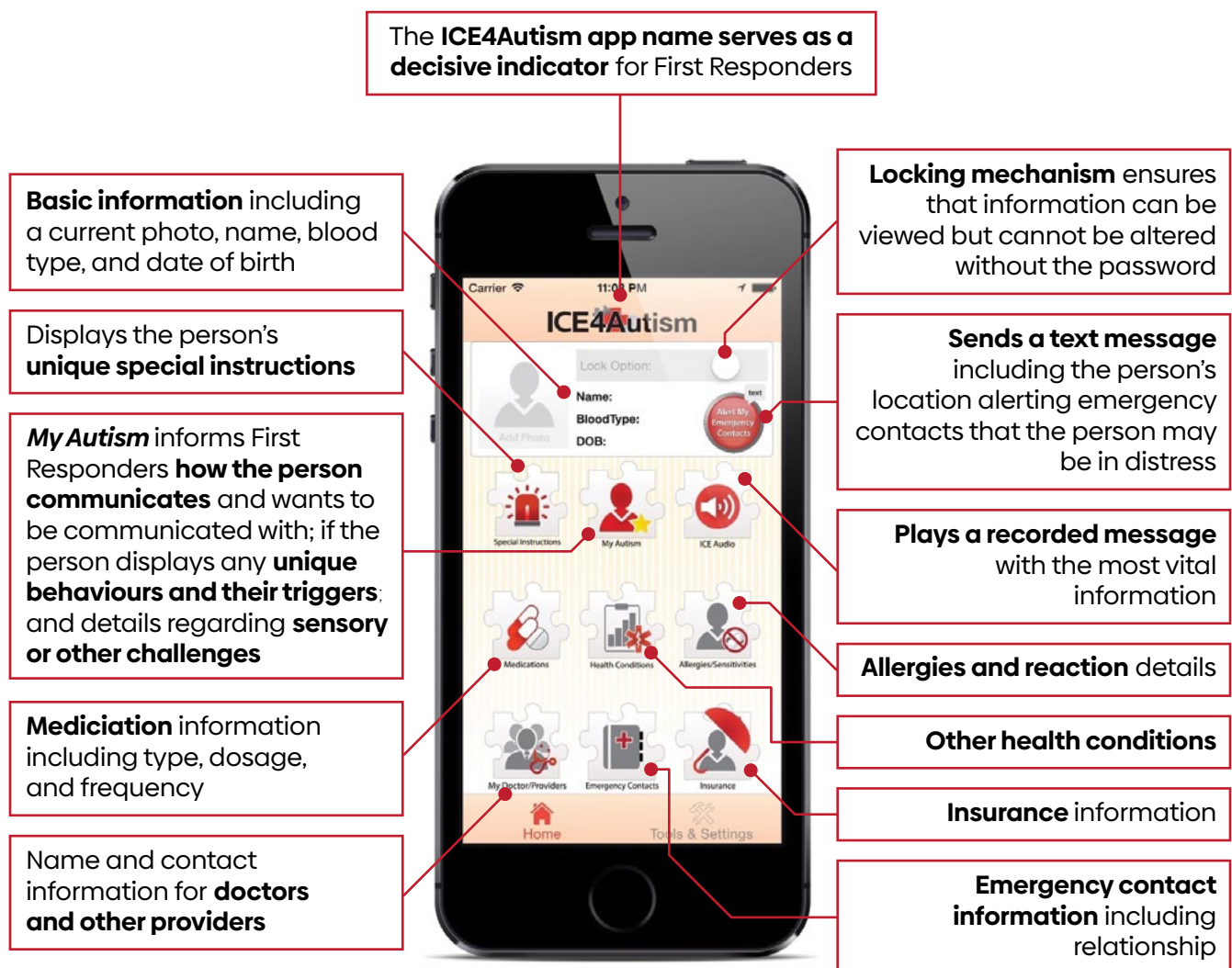
Things to consider

- Unknown uptake in Winnipeg
- May be confused with other tools and programs called “In Case of Emergency”
- First Responders may need to be prompted to look for message on phone
- Lack of clarity about if and how ICE will use the personal information it collects

How do I access the tool?

- **Option 1** — Download the ICE and/or ICE4Autism app on the **App Store** or **Google Play**.
- **Option 2** — Find out more information at [@](http://incaseofemergency.org).

What does it look like?



Quick Look Summary Chart

When deciding which tools to include in the Communication Tool Guide, we came up with a list of guidelines to help with our decisions. We wanted to put together a list of the tools that we felt were of good quality and would meet the needs of many people in Winnipeg. Here are a few things that we took into consideration.

We thought a tool would be useful if it:

- Has low financial costs
- Is used by people in Winnipeg and is recognized by First Responders
- Can be used by many people in many different situations
- Allows users of the tool to “make it their own” and make choices about the design and content
- Is available in different formats so tool can be accessed with or without a smartphone

Name of Tool	Type of Tool (physical/app)	Approx. Cost	Target Audience	Uptake in Winnipeg
E.R.I.K. 	Physical	Free	People with medical conditions	Made in Winnipeg; used by Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service personnel
MedicAlert 	Physical and app	\$60 per year	People with medical conditions	Used by Winnipeg Police
MagnusMode 	App	Free	People labeled with autism	Supported by Winnipeg Richardson International Airport
Vital ID 	Physical and app	\$3.00 per wallet card \$23.00 per bracelet	People with medical conditions/children/construction workers	Unknown
ICE 	App	\$3.00 per download	People labeled with autism	Unknown

Other Tools to Consider

If you are still unsure about what emergency communication tool you would like to use, we have listed more options below. We also urge you to keep in mind that new tools are frequently coming out and being made available. Even a quick internet search for communication tools will bring up many tools. You can sign up for these online, print and fill them out, or download their apps to your phone. If you have not found a tool that suits you, we encourage you to work with someone in your support network to figure out what your communication needs and preferences are so you can narrow down your choices.

1. Free emergency cards (can be printed from website)
 - **Free Emergency Card** 
 - **FAC First Aid** 
2. Free smartphone apps
 - **Emergency Chat** 
 - **If This Then That** 
3. Subscription-based tools for fall prevention and other medical emergencies
 - **Victoria Lifeline** 
 - **CareTrak – Mobile Personal Emergency Response** 
4. Other resources
 - **Communication Disabilities Access Canada** 
 - **Canadian Hard of Hearing Manitoba – Hard of Hearing Hospital Kits** 
 - **Language Access Centre – Winnipeg Regional Health Authority** 

02





Section 02: Communication Tips

Tips for Communication Tool Users and their Support Networks

The tips on this page are designed to help you make an informed decision about choosing and using a communication tool. They are also meant to help you make sure the communication tool you choose best suits your needs and preferences. Please keep in mind that whether you are choosing a communication tool yourself or choosing one with the help of someone from your support network, the goal is to make you feel safer and more included in your community. There is no “right way” to communicate during an emergency. The important thing to remember is to choose a communication tool that is the right fit for you, even if it may not be the right fit for someone else.

When choosing the communication tool you want to use, consider:

Do you want a physical tool such as a wallet-card, bracelet, or piece of jewelry or would you rather have a tool that can be used on your smartphone or tablet?

- Physical tools take wear and tear over time, while apps most often require that you are connected to the internet. You may also forget to put on a physical tool such as a bracelet. It is important to choose a tool that works best for you and your lifestyle so that you can take the tool with you and use it when you are out in the community.

Do you want a tool that you can “make your own” by choosing what information is included or would you rather have a tool that is “ready-to-use” when you get it?

- The more you use the communication tool the more comfortable you and your support network will be with knowing how to use the tool quickly and effectively. Some tools are ready to use quickly (Vital ID), while others require you to put in more time before it is ready to use (MagnusMode).

Is the cost of a tool an issue for you?

- Consider the cost of the communication tool you are interested in because tools range in price. Some are free while others are quite expensive. Some have monthly costs and other fees, too. You will have to decide if the tool you are interested in fits your budget. If you are interested in an app, consider whether you have enough mobile data or if you need to add more to your phone plan. If cost is a concern for you, there are tools that you can either download or print that are free and have no on-going costs.

What kind of information are you comfortable sharing?

- Some tools require you to provide the organization with personal medical and contact information so First Responders can act quickly to help you. If you are comfortable sharing this information, great, but if not, there are many tools that only ask you to share the information you choose.

Do you have allergies or are taking medication that First Responders should know about?

- One of the most common reasons people use communication tools is that they have medical conditions and communicating these details to First Responders in a timely manner is important. If this is true for you, there are certain tools such as E.R.I.K or MedicAlert that do a good job of highlighting your medical needs such

as whether you have allergies, are taking medication, or have a medical condition that First Responders need to know about right away. If communicating medical needs is not a concern, there are tools available that focus more on building independence and confidence, such as MagnusMode.

I found a communication tool that me and my support network are comfortable working with. What now?

Always keep it on you

- We recommend having the tool ready-to-go in your wallet, backpack, or purse just in case you need it. If your tool is an app, keep your phone or tablet charged and turn your mobile data on so you always have access to the app.

Keep your information up to date

- If the contact numbers recorded in your communication tool are out of service or the medications you have listed are from an old prescription, the information is not useful to First Responders. We recommend keeping your records up-to-date and revisiting the content every couple of months. It might be a good idea to ask someone to remind you to do this every couple of months or schedule a regular time to do this with them.

Try out different tools

- It is important to remember that, just as there is no “perfect” tool, you can also use different tools at different times depending on your communication needs. We recommend using and practicing a few different tools with your support network in order to see what feels right or what isn’t working. You can use this guide for a reference and turn to it when you need to.

Always have a plan

- A communication tool can be one resource to help you in an emergency, but it is important to have a bigger plan, too. Work with your support network to make sure you are prepared for an emergency (i.e. having a place to go and evacuation plan if there should be a natural disaster or fire).

Practice

- Ask someone from your support network to act out an emergency situation with you where you need to communicate with a First Responder. Have the person from your support network note what works well and what may need some further practicing. Here are a few things to remember which are also important to remember during a real-life scenario:



When interacting with a First Responder, try to stay as calm as possible. Let the First Responder know you are listening to them by nodding when you understand or shaking your head when you don't. Take deep breaths when you can and try to make eye contact.



Remember, First Responders are there to help you. Be honest with them, listen to their words carefully, and try to work through the problem with them. If you are confused or worried about what they are doing, ask them to explain why they are doing something and how it will help you.



Calmly tell the First Responder that you use a communication tool, or if you are unable to speak, point to the tool. If you can, tell them what it is (if it is a phone app or physical tool), what it is used for and explain why you are showing it to them.

Practice reciting a short sentence to help you get your message across. If you are unable to speak, either write down or ask someone to record a message for you explaining your communication needs. Here are some examples:



"Hello, my name is Adam and I have autism. I use an app on my phone to help me in emergencies."



"Hi, my name is Trish and I have a physical disability. I'm going to open my wallet to get out my contact information."



"Hi, my name is Drew and I am diabetic. I have a bracelet that says all the medications I take."



"Hi, I'm Amanda and I'm allergic to lots of things. I have them all written down on my fridge."

Tips for First Responders

We hope that this guide is a helpful resource to you as a First Responder whether you are a police officer, Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service personnel, medical professional, security guard, cadet, or part of the Downtown Watch, West End Watch or Bear Clan Patrol.

After reviewing the tools in this guide, we hope you will have a good understanding of the available tools in Winnipeg and feel a little bit more comfortable assisting people during emergencies who have communication challenges. Please keep in mind that these tips are general and are in no way meant to be comprehensive. Each situation will be different depending on the needs of the person you are interacting with.

Also keep in mind that, according to the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, people with disabilities have the right to privacy of their personal and health information, the freedom to express their message to others in the method that they choose, and the right to have equal access to public services and communication intervention technologies. As a First Responder and a helping professional during emergencies, you can be an advocate for people with disabilities and set a positive example for others.

When approaching someone with a communication challenge during an emergency, you may notice that they are:

- Not responding to directions
- Are hesitant or slow to answer your questions
- Trying to communicate with you but seem to be having trouble
- Demonstrating signs of being confused, overwhelmed, frustrated, panicked, or restless
- Pointing to a communication tool such as a wallet card, smartphone, or piece of paper

When interacting someone with a communication challenge during an emergency, the following tips may help:

1. Use a calm and steady approach

Research has shown that when First Responders use a calm and measured approach when interacting with people who have communication challenges, it increases the chances of a positive outcome. Approaching people with communication challenges in a calm manner and maintaining their personal space, making eye contact, and using body language to make the person feel safe suggests that you can be trusted and are there to help.

2. Use straightforward and clear communication

Communicating clearly, speaking slowly, using short sentences, and explaining your actions before you complete them are a few ways that will greatly improve an interaction with someone with communication challenges. If people with communication challenges are asked too many questions, they may also feel a little like they are being interrogated or spoken down to. Speaking too rapidly or using large words may also cause confusion and frustration. Re-phrasing a question in simpler, straightforward language will make the person with a communication challenge more comfortable and allow them time to reply. Using a visual cue to get your message across (such as taking out something from your pocket) can also be helpful.

3. Take the time to learn about the individual's communication style and tool

Emergencies can be stressful, especially when it is difficult to understand the needs of the person you are interacting with. It is important to remember, however, that different people use different forms of communication and you will only know how to communicate with them once you are face-to-face with them. During these times, it is important not to make assumptions about the people you are interacting with.

For example, just because you recognize someone is Deaf does not automatically mean they use ASL or other sign languages to communicate. If someone requests ASL-English interpreters, First Responders should have ECCOE's emergency contact readily available to be in touch with an interpreter.

Conversely, if you are interacting with someone who has been labeled as having an intellectual disability, do not assume that they cannot understand you or cannot communicate with you. Each situation will be different, so taking the time to understand how the person you are interacting with communicates is important. There are many ways of communicating and many communication tools that people use depending on the situation. With ever-changing technology, it is not possible to learn about them all. It is important, rather, to be open to learning about different communication styles and to the possibility that someone may be using a tool that you are not familiar with.

4. Different situations call for different approaches

Just as there is no "one communication tool" or style of communication that will broadly appeal to every person with a communication challenge, every situation you have with a person with communication challenges will vary and can have different outcomes. Even people with a similar difficulty in communicating can use different tools and strategies to deal with those challenges. Each situation will be new. So, it is important to try to avoid making assumptions and for First Responders to work with people who may be having difficulty communicating, aiming to solve problems together and learn from one another in the process.

Emergency Numbers in Winnipeg

- **Police** (non-emergency) **204-986-6222**
- **Ambulance stable patient transfer line** (non-emergency, 24 hours/day) **204-986-6336**
- **Fire** (non-emergency, Monday to Friday 8:30-4:30) **204-986-6380**
- **Suicide Prevention and Support** (24 hours/day) **1-877-435-7170**
- **Klinic Crisis Line** (24 hours/day) **204-786-8686** or **1-888-322-3019**
- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** (24 hours/day) **204-786-8631** or **1-888-292-7565**
- **Seniors Abuse Support** (9:00–5:00) **1-888-896-7183**
- **Youth and Families Crisis Line** (24 hours/day) **204-949-4777** or **1-888-383-2776**
- **Mobile Crisis Service** (24 hours/day) **204-786-1781**
- **Addictions Helpline** **1-855-662-6605**

If you or someone you know is in an emergency, phone 911 immediately.



Communication Tools: A Guide

