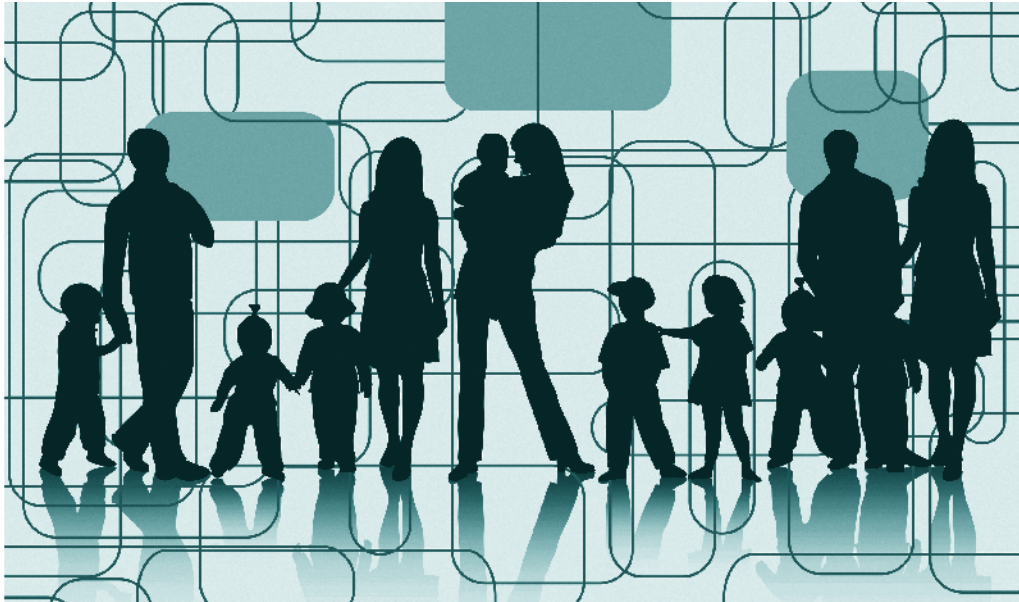


# What is a Speech Pathologist?



**Speech pathologists** study, diagnose and treat communication disorders, including difficulties with speech, language, fluency and voice.

They work with people who have difficulty communicating because of developmental delays, stroke, brain injuries, learning disability, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, dementia and hearing loss, as well as other problems that can affect speech and language.

People who experience difficulties swallowing food and drink safely can also be helped by a speech pathologist.

Using assessment tools, speech pathologists are able to diagnose each person's specific problem and devise a treatment plan that best suits their needs.

Speech pathologists are university trained Allied Health professionals who work with people across their entire lifespan. An adult might visit a speech pathologist to help them understand and find the right words to use after a stroke, while a child might need treatment

to help their expressive language (putting words together and being understood) or receptive language (understanding instructions and meanings). Speech pathologists also work with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), devices that help people who find it difficult to speak or write to communicate more easily. This can include 'unaided systems' like signing and gestures or 'aided systems' like picture charts, books

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and special computers or devices. Speech pathology is practised in a wide variety of settings – schools, hospitals, aged care homes, universities, kindergartens, rehabilitation centres, community health centres, private practice and mental health services. Some speech pathologists specialise in areas of ‘complex need’, such

as autism or cerebral palsy and may work in specialist intervention services for people with these disabilities.

Speech pathology is studied at undergraduate or masters degree level and is offered at many major Australian universities.

## How do I become a speech pathologist?

Speech pathology is an accredited undergraduate or entry level masters degree. To find out more go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses)

## How do I find a speech pathologist in my area?

Go to [www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au) and click on “Find a Speech Pathologist”.

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.

## Speech pathologists work with many different people with lots of different communication challenges.

### They could include:

- giving feeding advice to a mother whose baby has a cleft palate
- working with children who are difficult to understand in a child care centre
- helping a primary school student understand what their teacher is telling them
- working with a high school student with a stutter to speak more fluently and with confidence
- training a teacher who constantly loses their voice to use it more effectively
- working with a young man with severe brain injury due to a motorcycle accident to speak clearly again
- helping an elderly man with dementia to communicate with his family and carers
- working with a woman post-stroke to regain her communication skills
- providing education about different ways to communicate for teachers, doctors, the police and parents
- providing communication strategies and assistive devices for a person with cerebral palsy who cannot communicate verbally
- teaching a person to swallow safely and without choking following a stroke
- assisting children and adults who have difficulties learning to read