

Supporting Health Professionals

Who is this information for?

Health care providers – including medical, nursing, mental health and allied health

People with intellectual and/or developmental disability and their health needs

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have higher levels of health needs compared to the general population. Furthermore, people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, are more likely to experience avoidable death, have higher readmission rates in hospital and longer length of stays. Healthcare supports required are likely to include: prevention, testing, management and treatment of multiple health conditions.

Why are people with intellectual and/or developmental disability more at risk

- People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities may have difficulties in understanding their health condition and what they need to do to ensure they get better.
- Likely to present with multiple health conditions.
- Health professionals may have a lack of awareness of the health needs that present with certain aetiologies e.g. Down syndrome, and how to support these.
- Experience difficulties with accessing appropriate care that may have led to inappropriate treatment and management in the past.
- May live in shared communal houses – this may cause further concerns with transmittable diseases/conditions.
- There may be multiple people involved in care and care coordination.

What to consider when managing a person with intellectual and/or developmental disability

- Whenever possible, engage in person-centred care regardless of their disability
- Making adjustments to your communication, time and length of the appointment (if required) and the environment to suit the person's needs. There are specific Medicare items that can be accessed for this purpose.
- Understand that some symptoms/presentations may be misinterpreted (for example; behavioural changes) and to be aware of diagnostic overshadowing.
- Conduct a detailed assessment and ask the person and their supports (including family and paid support workers) of any known health conditions and their health history.
- A knowledge of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan and how this can support the individual's disability and health needs.
- Ensure that you understand the Disability Act and the human rights of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. These include; Vic Disability Act 2006, Vic Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and Fed Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Access to services

Providing health care to people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities is a holistic approach, often involving multidisciplinary care. Telehealth can be a useful tool to enable those providing health care and support to engage in collaborative care.

The primary source of funding to enable access to services and support for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities is through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS assists people with a disability to access mainstream services and supports, their local community and to maintain informal supports. Awareness of how the NDIS can support health needs relating to the person's disability is important so that supports such as equipment and therapies can be planned for in a timely manner.

At a state level the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) provides people with a disability a range of community and specialist disability services, and details on who to contact if a person needs disability support. There is also support for carers and families.

Mainstream local community health centres provide allied health services such as podiatry, dietetics and psychology, that people with intellectual and developmental disability can access.

Consulting relevant specialists is important when managing and treating a person with intellectual and/or developmental disability.

The Centre for Developmental Disability Health (CCDH) is a multidisciplinary team that works across a range of education, clinical, research and advocacy activities, to improve the health of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

The importance of COVID-19 and people with intellectual/or developmental disabilities

Many disability services and supporting agencies provide up to date information and resources regarding the current COVID-19 pandemic, so refer to their websites for the latest details.

The DHHS website provides current information on services and support for health professionals. This includes fact sheets, guides and preparedness planning, hospital companion information and guidance on providing health care.

The NDIS recently made changes to funding of support for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities due to COVID-19. It is important to check for regular updates, as changes may not be long term.

The COVID-19 Health Professionals Disability Advisory Service provides specialised advice for health professionals, involved in the care of people with disability diagnosed with COVID-19 or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. This service is operated by health professionals with qualifications in disability and are experienced in working with people with a disability.

Where can I find out more?

[National Disability Insurance Scheme](#)

[Department of Health](#)

[Department of Health and Human Services](#)

[Department of Social Services](#)

Disability Information Helpline on 1800 643 787

COVID-19 Health Professionals Disability Advisory Service 1800 131 330

Centre for Development Disability Health 03 9792 8042

Note: Due to the potential for health needs to deteriorate, it is encouraged that patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, continue to receive health care and support during COVID-19.