

Addressing the needs of Australians with intellectual disability

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People with intellectual disability experience some of the greatest health disparities in Australia due to mainstream health services being ill-equipped to meet their needs. The poor health profile and health

disparities experienced by this vulnerable population mean that they have a life expectancy of 27 years less than people without intellectual disability.

Much of this significant health gap is preventable, and a [new overview article](#) published in the *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* outlines how [health services](#) can be transformed to improve health outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

The paper, which was authored by Mater Researchers Dr. Cathy Franklin, Dr. Katie Brooker and Ruby De Greef, along with experts from the University of New South Wales' 3DN, addresses the progress that has been made in intellectual disability health, the challenges that are currently faced, and provides recommendations for future developments in this space.

Queensland Centre for Intellectual and Developmental Disability Director Dr. Franklin said that intellectual disability health care is at a dynamic point in Australia.

"With so much currently happening in intellectual disability health, including the new National Roadmap, hearing from people with lived experience at the Disability Royal Commission, the new National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health and the creation of an Intellectual Disability Health Capability Framework, now is the perfect time to take stock and plan for a better future," Dr. Franklin said.

"Individuals with intellectual disability often encounter barriers accessing services due to a lack of awareness and accommodation from health care services. This, along with lengthy waitlists and geographical barriers, means that people with intellectual disability face challenges in accessing services."

These barriers are even more significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with intellectual disability.

Research Officer Dr. Katie Brooker said that Aboriginal community-controlled health organizations play an important role in delivering holistic, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate health care to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who control it.

"These services are designed to be flexible and responsive to community need. However, our study highlights the need for greater recognition of the unique health care and cultural needs of individuals with [intellectual disabilities](#) within these organizations," Dr. Brooker said.

The review article provides three key focus areas for future developments: improved implementation of health assessments, capacity building of the health workforce, and development of improved evidence-based models of care to create better health care outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

"It is imperative that advocates with intellectual disability, support people, researchers, and clinicians continue to work together to ensure this momentum from policy to practice continues and makes a real difference to the health experiences and [health outcomes](#) of Australians with intellectual disability," Dr. Franklin said.

More information: K. S. Brooker et al, Intellectual disability healthcare in Australia: Progress, challenges, and future directions, *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/jppi.12497](https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12497)

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