phn CENTRAL AND EASTERN SYDNEY

An Australian Government Initiative

Understanding Intellectual Disability

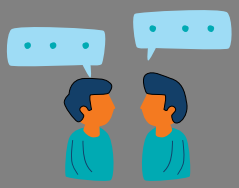
Definition

Intellectual disability is a developmental condition with onset before 18 years of age that affects a persons:

1. Intellectual Functioning

Such as planning, learning, problem solving, judgement

1.Adaptive functioning



Such as activities of daily life such as communication, social skills, independent living

Intellectual disability affects about around 1.86% population, or around 490,000 Australians in 2024. There are X number of people in the CESPHN are identified* as having intellectual disability.

Intellectual disability is diagnosed through a combination of psychometric and adaptive functioning assessments and clinical judgement.

Intellectual disability is categorised as:
IQ 50 to 70: mild (85% of cases)
IQ 35 to 50: moderate (10% of cases)
IQ 20 to 35: severe (4% of cases)
IQ below 20: complete/profound (1% of cases)

Intellectual disability can be caused by inherited or environmental factors that occur during the prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal periods, as well as in childhood.

For example, Down Syndrome, maternal rubella and HIV, premature birth, traumatic brain injury

However, the IQ score must be interpreted in the context of the persons abilities.

For instance, if an individual has an IQ below 70 but exhibits strong adaptive functioning, they may not meet diagnostic criteria.

People with intellectual disability experience significant health inequities compared to other Australians.

1.6 times the rate of emergency department use

2 times the rate of hospital admissions

Reported experience of significant barriers to care in general practice

Higher rates of mental illness, including 3-4 times the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among young people

Lower use of preventative healthcare services

Higher proportion of potentially avoidable deaths (38%)

Median age at death of 54 years

*Identified on POLAR. % of General Practices in the CESPHN region have POLAR. | References: American Psychiatric Association. (n.d.). What is intellectual disability? Retrieved from https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/intellectual-disability/what-is-intellectual-disability | Inclusion Australia. (n.d.). What is intellectual disability? Retrieved from [website URL] | Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. (n.d.). Diagnosis of intellectual disability. Retrieved from [website URL] | Florio, T., & Trollor, J. (2015). Mortality among a cohort of persons with an intellectual disability in New South Wales, Australia. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 28(5), 383-393. | Trollor, J., Srasuebkul, P., Xu, H., & Howlett, S. (2017). Cause of death and potentially avoidable deaths in Australian adults with intellectual disability using retrospective linked data. BMJ Open, 7(2), e013489. | Trollor, J., Reeve, R., & Srasuebkul, P. (2016). Utilisation and costs of hospital services for patients with intellectual disabilities. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 60, 753. | Young-Southward, G., et al. (2017). Physical and mental health of young people with and without intellectual disabilities: Cross-sectional analysis of a whole country population. Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 61(10), 984-993. | Trollor, J., & Small, J. (2016). Health inequality and people with intellectual disability—Research summary. Faculty of Medicine, the Department of Developmental Disability Neuropsychiatry, UNSW: Sydney, Australia. | Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024, June). National, state and territory population. Retrieved December 15, 2024, from [website URL]