

Finding the right doctor

People with intellectual disability should be involved in all decisions about their health and wellbeing.

Some people can make decisions alone and some people will need support. It is critical that supporters know the person's will and preferences to make sure the right support is provided and the right decision is made.

We all need a good GP who we feel comfortable with. This is even more important for a person with intellectual disability who may not be able to explain symptoms and may feel anxious about visits to the doctor.

Some doctors are really good at communicating with a person with intellectual disability, taking extra time in getting the person relaxed. But, how do you find the right doctor?

Once you have found a doctor that suits the person, you should try to see that doctor every time. They will get to know the person's health, and the person will feel more comfortable with someone they know.

Tips for finding the right GP

- Talk to the person with intellectual disability or think about what will suit them. Is the person more comfortable with women or men? With older people or younger?
- Talk to other families and disability workers. Is there a doctor they can recommend?
- Phone a specialised health service for people with intellectual disability and see if they have any suggestions.

- Phone the local Primary Health Network, and ask if they have contact details of doctors who have an interest in people with an intellectual disability.
- Check if the doctor bulk bills. Is the doctor happy to do an annual Medicare health assessment? And then to coordinate any follow up with allied health professionals and specialist doctors.
- Ask the doctor if they have experience with people with intellectual disability. If not, is the doctor keen to know more? Would they like you to provide some written information?
- Is the doctor happy to talk with disability professionals, for example about a coordinated response to challenging behaviour or a weight problem?
- If the person has limited mobility, does the doctor have a height adjustable examination bed (as required by the Standards of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 5th Ed).
- Establish a relationship with the doctor by arranging the first visit when the person is well. The doctor can see what the person is like when they are not sick.

Finding other health professionals

Sometimes the person with intellectual disability will need to see a specialist doctor or an allied health professional like a physiotherapist. The GP may have someone to refer you to. However, it is often a good idea to look around for someone who will suit the person, just like finding a GP.

You might also be able to find allied health professionals through:

- Your local disability services.
- The local community health centre of NSW Health.
- Professional associations, for example the Dietitians Association of Australia.
- Primary Health Networks.

If a person has complex health problems, sometimes they may need to see a health service that specialises in health care of people with intellectual disability.

Some of the other fact sheets have information about how to find particular kinds of health professionals.

For more information

Choosing a GP, CHOICE Australia fact sheet

www.choice.com.au

Contact details for Primary Health Networks

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/PHN-Home

Allied Health Professions Australia

www.ahpa.com.au

Hospitals/Health Services

www.health.nsw.gov.au/hospitals/pages/default.aspx

Find a Health Service

www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services

1800 022 222 – for 24 hour health advice and information

You might be interested in these fact sheets

- **Alcohol and other drugs**
- **Annual health assessments**
- **Going to the doctor - tips and tricks**
- **Helping the doctor understand the person**
- **Mental health**
- **Specialised intellectual disability health services**

This fact sheet was updated in **2019**.

The fact sheet contains general information only and does not take into account individual circumstances. It should not be relied on for medical advice. We encourage you to look at the information in this fact sheet carefully with your health professional to decide whether the information is right for you.