

# Adults – what kinds of health services are there?

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.

The health system is complex, and it can be hard to find the help a person with intellectual disability needs. This fact sheet tries to help you through this maze by explaining what health services there are.

## Who provides health care?

A GP is the starting point for health care. If the problem is complicated, GPs can refer you to:

- specialist doctors like psychiatrists, rehabilitation physicians and neurologists.
- allied health care providers, for example physiotherapists and speech pathologists.

Specialist doctors and allied health care providers work in government services and their own practices.

## What will it cost?

Some health services are provided free by government agencies including public hospitals and community health centres. Other health care providers charge for their services.

Medicare provides a payment for visits to the doctor and some other health services. However, this will only cover the full price if the health professional bulk bills.

If a person has private health insurance, this also helps with some health costs, for example private hospital admissions. But the insurance may not cover the full charge.

It is very important to talk to the health professional about costs before treatment starts, so that you know how much it will be and can talk about options. For hospital treatment, there is often a choice of waiting a long time for free treatment in a public hospital or paying for a private hospital.

## Allied health services

Some allied health services are available for free in community health centres, hospitals and in some disability services. Other allied health professionals work privately and charge a fee. Sometimes Medicare can help with this where a GP makes the referral. A person's NDIS plan may provide funding.

Allied health services include:

- **Dieticians** – advise about diet including healthy food choices. This is important if the person has a weight or swallowing problem, or has diabetes.
- **Occupational therapists** – advise on equipment like wheel chairs and rails in bathrooms.
- **Exercise physiologists** – advise about exercise and sport.
- **Podiatrists** – treat foot and toenail problems, and can recommend footwear.
- **Speech pathologists** – help with communication and swallowing problems.
- **Optometrists** – check vision and provide glasses. Eye examinations by optometrists are covered by Medicare.
- **Audiologists** – test hearing and provide hearing aids. Australian Hearing provides free hearing assessments for pensioners.
- **Drug and alcohol services**
- **Aboriginal health services**
- **Multicultural health services** – these help people from non-English speaking backgrounds. They provide some health services and help people to use ordinary health services.
- **Women's health services** – for women's health issues eg menstruation problems.
- **Screening services** – check people for some health risks, eg breast cancer and bowel cancer.
- **Alternative treatment providers such as osteopaths, naturopaths and chiropractors.** If the person uses these treatments, you should let the GP know to check they will not conflict with the doctor's treatment.

## Chronic disease management

Chronic diseases are medical conditions that tend to be long lasting and persistent in their symptoms or development. For example, chronic heart and respiratory diseases and diabetes.

NSW Health has some chronic disease programs:

- Chronic Disease Management Program – This program provides coordinated health care and self-management support to help people manage their condition, access services, prevent complications and reduce the need for hospitalisation.
- Hospital in the Home – This program provides clinical care that reduces the length of stay in hospital or in some instances can avoid an admission altogether.

The NSW Ombudsman has seen many examples of these programs not being provided to people with disabilities. So, ask the doctor or hospital about these programs if you think they might be relevant to a person's needs.

## Pharmacies

It is a good idea to have a regular chemist. They can recommend basic treatment for common illnesses and package prescription medications in blister packs to make sure the correct daily medication dose is given.

## Dental services

Most dentists work privately but some work in Public Oral Health Services provided by the NSW Government.

## Specialised health services for people with intellectual disability

Some health services specialise in complex health problems of people with intellectual disability. These exist to backup and advise GPs and hospitals, not to take over medical care from mainstream health services.

## 24 hour phone advice line

You can phone healthdirect Australia at any time and obtain free health information and advice from a nurse. Phone **1800 022 222**

## Ambulance service

The Ambulance Service provides emergency treatment and takes injured people to a nearby hospital. Call **000** and ask the operator for an ambulance. If you are not sure how serious the situation is, it is okay to call anyway. In some cases, the ambulance service will transport people to medical appointments. There may be a cost for some services.

## For more information

Aboriginal health services  
[www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)  
(08) 9370 6336

Ambulance Service NSW  
[www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au)

Australian Hearing  
[www.hearing.com.au/home](http://www.hearing.com.au/home)  
Phone **1300 412 512** or **(02) 9412 6800** or TTY **(02) 9412 6802**

Community health centres and public hospitals  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)

healthdirect Australia  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)  
Phone **1800 022 222** or

If you have a speech or hearing impairment, call the [National Relay Service](#) on **1800 555 677** and ask to be transferred to healthdirect.

If you require phone interpreting, call [TIS National](#) on 131 450 and ask to be transferred to healthdirect.

## You might be interested in these fact sheets

- **Adults - signs of illness**
- **Alcohol and other drugs**
- **Finding the right doctor**
- **Getting the most out of Medicare**
- **Going to the dentist**
- **Mental health**
- **Specialised intellectual disability health services**

This fact sheet was updated in **2018**.

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.