



Finding the Right Doctor

Key facts

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 and 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 GP network, and ask if they have contact details of doctors who have an interest in people with an intellectual disability. (The role of GP networks will soon be taken over by new Medicare Locals.)
- 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, eg 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 now required by the Standards of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners)?
- 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 or speech pathologist. 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:

- The local disability services community support team.
- The local community health centre of NSW Health.
- Professional associations, eg the Dietitians Association of Australia.
- Medicare Locals as they get established around Australia.

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/reviews-and-tests/food-and-health/general-health/health-practitioners/choosing-a-gp.aspx

Contact details for local general practice networks

www.agpn.com.au/divisions-directory/nsw2

Links to allied health professional associations

www.ahpa.com.au/links.htm

Community health centres and public hospitals

www.health.nsw.gov.au/services/index.asp

or phone (02) 9391 9000 or TTY (02) 9391 9900

Community support teams, NSW government disability services (ADHC)

www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/contact_us

Phone (02) 8270 2000 or TTY (02) 8270 2167

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 **May 2011**.*

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.