

POSITION STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO COVID-19 PREVENTION, SCREENING AND TREATMENT OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY^{a,b}

We call for concerted action to ensure the right to access to screening, effective prevention and necessary health care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in relation to COVID-19. We make this call to the Australian, and State and Territory Governments, and to all health and disability services and professionals.

Endorsing this statement

You can endorse this statement electronically as an individual or organisation by visiting this link: https://unsw.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a3LKixK0A19N045

Background

There are up to 1,000,000 people with intellectual disability or developmental disability in Australia.

Extensive peer reviewed research consistently demonstrates stark health inequalities for these populations. Including higher rates of co-morbidity, early onset of frailty, and dying prematurely, often from potentially avoidable causes.

These groups experience very poor health outcomes and major barriers to healthcare. At present health professionals are not trained in healthcare for these groups and as such often have limited awareness of best principles of practice, lack content specific knowledge, and are often not abreast of contemporary thinking about valuing people with disability.

In relation to COVID-19

People with intellectual or developmental disability are particularly vulnerable to adverse outcomes associated with COVID-19. Many individuals are within a high-risk category because of poor health status, low levels of health literacy, reliance on third parties to support access to care, and health and disability sectors that are not yet adequately equipped to meet their health needs.

These groups, as people living with disability, are at further risk of prejudice and attitudinal biases that devalue their lives and deprioritise their access to preventative, screening and treatment measures for COVID-19.

Governments and leading health and disability organisations need to take urgent action to prepare and equip:

1. all levels of our health care sector to be able to work with these groups, and their support networks to prevent, screen, and treat COVID-19.
2. the disability sector to be able to support the health care needs of these groups during this pandemic.

Inaction will result in the unnecessary loss of valuable lives.

Important Notes

^aThis position statement is focused on people with intellectual or developmental disability because of their particular health inequalities as highlighted in the February 2020 hearing of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

^bThis statement seeks to complement the important statements issued by academics <https://credh.org.au/news-events/covid-19-and-people-with-disabilities/> and peak advocacy groups <https://pwd.org.au/covid-19-crisis-mr/> on COVID-19 responses needed for all people with disability.

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