

# A helping hand for highest attainable health

*Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities acknowledges that people with disabilities have the right to the “highest attainable standard of health” and that health services are accessible responsive to issues of gender, community based and free (UN General Assembly, 2009).*

## Has a high standard of health been reached for disabled people?

There are one million disabled people in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Disabled people often have poorer health compared to non-disabled people.

For example, research<sup>2</sup> shows:

- people with intellectual disabilities have a lower life expectancy, have an increased risk of a range of chronic health conditions,<sup>3</sup> and have higher hospitalisation rates
- people with physical disabilities are more likely to have chronic health conditions, and commonly experience predictable and preventable secondary health conditions (such as pressure sores and mental health conditions)
- some chronic health conditions more common among people with physical and intellectual impairments include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, arthritis, asthma, high blood pressure and cholesterol
- some health risk factors are more common among disabled people, such as obesity among intellectually disabled people
- participation in health screening programmes tends to be lower, for example breast cancer screening among physically and intellectually disabled women
- Māori and Pacific peoples have worse health on average compared with non-Māori and non-Pacific peoples, and have greater unmet needs for primary health care.

<sup>1</sup> See Statistics New Zealand, 2014

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Mirfin-Veitch and Paris (2013), Ministry of Health (2002, 2011, 2013ab) and Richard et al. (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Adults with intellectual disabilities also have an increased risk of mental health problems (not a health condition), dementia, epilepsy, skin diseases, sensory loss, oral health issues, obesity and fractures.



The poorer health status of some disabled people may be due in part to health conditions associated with specific impairments (WHO, 2013). A lack of accessible information and access to services also contributes to the poorer health outcomes of disabled people. Disabled people need access to appropriate health information and quality services like everyone else (WHO, 2013). Better access to information will mean disabled people can take greater control of their own health. Improved access to quality primary health care services is also crucial to achieving better health outcomes for disabled people in New Zealand.

## How can disability support and primary health care services improve disabled peoples' health?

The following table summarises key findings from recent projects<sup>4</sup> focused on the health of disabled people in New Zealand, specifically barriers to primary care for disabled people with physical, sensory and intellectual impairments. It also suggests ways to improve access to primary health care services including: by providing the information, education and support necessary for disabled people, their family/whānau and support workers, to take greater control of their own health; increasing the disability knowledge and responsiveness of primary health care providers; reducing communication barriers; and providing annual health checks for people with intellectual disabilities.<sup>5</sup> Suggested actions highlight the need for strong relationships and greater collaboration between disability support and primary health services. Primary health organisations will be better able to maintain, protect and improve the health of disabled people by working with local communities, addressing access barriers and improving the quality of services.

## Workforce development funding

The Ministry of Health has recognised the key role it plays in ensuring that health services, disability support workers, disabled people and family/whanau have the right knowledge and skills needed to effectively respond to the needs of disabled people.

Funding may be available from Te Pou to support you to access training and strengthen your ability to provide more responsive services for disabled people. Visit our website and contact us for more information.

[www.tepou.co.nz/training/disability-grant-funding/workforce-development-grants](http://www.tepou.co.nz/training/disability-grant-funding/workforce-development-grants)

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4 See Mirfin-Veitch, Paris & Milner (2013) and Ministry of Health (2013ac).

5 This is a strategy which is recommended for intellectually disabled people in particular based on national and international evidence.

## Barriers and potential ways to improve access to primary health care for disabled people

Issues	Suggested solutions	What we are doing in New Zealand	Ways you can help
<p>Need for more information and promotion of healthy behaviours among disabled people (e.g., exercise and diet)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health promotion and screening programmes targeting disabled people</li> <li>• More information available for disabled people about health promotion and screening initiatives</li> <li>• Include disabled people in the development and delivery of health promotion initiatives</li> <li>• Increase funding for disability support services to implement primary health initiatives, and cover the medical costs and prescription charges of disabled people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff employed in health promotion roles within disability support services</li> <li>• Health promotion initiatives developed within disability support services</li> <li>• The partnering of disability support and primary care services to deliver health initiatives</li> <li>• Health promotion material developed targeting people with intellectual disabilities</li> <li>• Research into key strategies for promoting healthy behaviours among disabled people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the accessibility of health promotion materials, and the distribution and delivery methods (e.g., face-to-face, online, graphically enriched information)</li> <li>• Contact organisations such as People First NZ who may be able to assist in the development of Easy Read material. See <a href="http://www.peoplefirst.org.nz">www.peoplefirst.org.nz</a></li> <li>• Utilise guides and resources on accessible communication, on the Office for Disability Issues website see <a href="http://www.odi.govt.nz">www.odi.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Consider involving disabled people in the development and delivery of health promotion information</li> <li>• Review how disabled people will be reached through health promotion campaigns.</li> </ul>
<p>Need for more opportunities that support disabled people and their family/whānau to take responsibility for their own health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for disabled people and family/whānau to increase their health knowledge and skills to manage their own health and health needs</li> <li>• Health information and resources available for disabled people to self-manage health conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IDEA services has introduced the ‘My Health, My Choice, My Responsibility’ programme to enhance clients’ health self-management</li> <li>• Grant funding for disabled people and their family/whānau to develop leadership skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check whether a Consumer Leadership Development grant could assist you with developing leaders in this field with the cost of such learning initiatives. Information on Consumer leadership development grant funding administered by Te Pou is available at <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> </ul>

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Issues	Suggested solutions	What we are doing in New Zealand	Ways you can help
<p>Need for higher health literacy amongst disability support workers to help bring unwell disabled people to the attention of health care professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build disability support workers' knowledge on the health status and needs of disabled people</li> <li>• Increase support workers' knowledge of primary health care services in the community</li> <li>• Equip workers with skills to effectively advocate for disabled people with regards to their health</li> <li>• Support disabled people to speak up when they are not happy with the healthcare they receive</li> <li>• Support disabled people to be more involved in decisions about their health care needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant funding to support the training and development of frontline workers in disability support services to develop specialist knowledge and skills</li> <li>• IHC has promoted use of the Living Well resource to assist with planning for good health in ageing, and as an advanced care planning tool for people with life-limiting conditions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access training to increase health knowledge and literacy for disability support workers. This topic aligns with priorities of the Workforce Development Grant. Information on this and other grants administered by Te Pou is available at <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> <li>• Check out a UK guide to help people with a learning disability prepare for health appointments at <a href="http://www.mencap.org.uk">www.mencap.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Review guidelines if you're not happy with healthcare services at <a href="http://www.nzma.org.nz">www.nzma.org.nz</a></li> <li>• See a UK easy read guide on how to make complaints <a href="http://www.ombudsman.org.uk">www.ombudsman.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Utilise the Living Well resource available at <a href="http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk">www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk</a></li> </ul>

## Barriers and potential ways to improve access to primary health care for disabled people

Issues	Suggested solutions	What we are doing in New Zealand	Ways you can help
Increase knowledge of primary health care providers			
<p>Limited or inadequate training about disabilities for many health care professionals who are ready to receive further education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build health care workers' knowledge of the New Zealand Disability Act and United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Disabled People</li> <li>• Greater disability content in undergraduate medical training on the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to work effectively with disabled people</li> <li>• Increase contact with disabled people during training</li> <li>• Continue medical education courses for GPs on working with disabled people</li> <li>• Access to specialists with expertise in disabilities, either by phone or email</li> <li>• Provide short training sessions for practice nurses</li> <li>• Increase awareness of disability policy and legislation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of health indicators for New Zealanders with an intellectual disability</li> <li>• Specialist nursing roles that provide education to health professionals and involve being a key liaison between people with intellectual disabilities, their families, support workers and hospital staff</li> <li>• Grant funding available through Te Pou to support increased disability awareness among health workers.</li> </ul>	<p>Review these sample training resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lancet article by Shakespeare, Iezzoni &amp; Groce (2009) on disability and the training of health professionals, see <a href="http://www.download.thelancet.com">www.download.thelancet.com</a></li> <li>• Link with Disabled People's Organisations that may be able to assist you with disability responsiveness training for example Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA), People First, and BE Accessible</li> <li>• Review the Disability Training Directory, for further information on disability responsiveness training see <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> <li>• Check the Te Pou website to see if you are eligible for Workforce Development Grant funding for this and other priority training areas, see <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> <li>• See also <i>Let's get real</i> Disability a competency framework of Skills Knowledge Values and Attitudes for working in disability <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> </ul>

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<p>Limited or inadequate training about disabilities for many health care professionals who are ready to receive further education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide synopses of current literature</li> <li>• Involve disabled people in the development and delivery of training.</li> </ul>		<p>Information resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarise yourself with health indicators for New Zealanders with intellectual disabilities at <a href="http://www.health.govt.nz">www.health.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Refresh your knowledge of the Health and Disability Code of Rights at <a href="http://www.hdc.org.nz">www.hdc.org.nz</a></li> <li>• Familiarise yourself with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, see <a href="http://www.odi.govt.nz">www.odi.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Utilise Kia Rangatu (Moving Forward) resource kit which helps explain the New Zealand Disability Strategy <a href="http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/library">www.eeotrust.org.nz/library</a></li> <li>• See the 2014 New Zealand Disability Survey for information on the number of people with disabilities, see <a href="http://www.stats.govt.nz/">www.stats.govt.nz/</a></li> <li>• Read the Feeling Down: Improving the Mental Health of People with Learning Disabilities report at <a href="http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk">www.learningdisabilities.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Review the BMA report on achieving health parity for people with intellectual disabilities and mental illness at <a href="http://www.bma.org.uk">www.bma.org.uk</a></li> <li>• Check out the Equally Well report for information on the physical health of people with mental health and addiction issues, see <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> </ul> <p>Link with Disability support services that can advise you, see <a href="http://www.health.govt.nz">www.health.govt.nz</a></p>

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Reduce communication barriers between disabled people and health care providers			
<p>Need for improved communication between disabled people and primary health care professionals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase consultation time, particularly for disabled people with complex health care and/or communication needs</li> <li>• Use tools (such as a Health Passport and screening tools) which enable disabled people to share essential information they feel is important to facilitate better communication</li> <li>• Build primary health care professionals' communication skills</li> <li>• Develop a greater understanding of disabled peoples' abilities and preferred communication methods</li> <li>• Make greater use of experienced sign language interpreters and technology for Deaf persons</li> <li>• Make better use of practice nurses in the provision of primary health care services to disabled people</li> <li>• Implement alert systems to identify disabled people and relevant accessibility needs</li> <li>• Funders and DHBs develop accessible health information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Health Passport has been implemented in some DHBs and community organisations</li> <li>• Remote video interpreting is being rolled out around NZ for Deaf people to access NZSL interpreters for communication with government organisations when a face-to-face interpreter is not available, including health professionals, ACC, Work and Income, CYFS, Senior Services and educational settings.</li> </ul>	<p>Accessible communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check whether your DHB provides any guidance about accessible information, such as Easy Read</li> <li>• Link with Disabled People's Organisations that may be able to assist with the development of accessible communication (e.g., Easy Read), such as the Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA), People First, and BE Accessible</li> <li>• Check out guides and resources on making communication more accessible <a href="http://www.odi.govt.nz">www.odi.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Review the New Zealand government web toolkit to guide the design and development of quality accessible websites, see <a href="http://www.webtoolkit.govt.nz">www.webtoolkit.govt.nz</a></li> </ul> <p>Check out MENCAP resources for people with a learning disability, see <a href="http://www.mencap.org.uk">www.mencap.org.uk</a></p> <p>Familiarise yourself with resources for Deaf people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A guide on effective communication with Deaf people <a href="http://www.odi.govt.nz">www.odi.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Deaf Aotearoa NZSL Taster classes for the health sector <a href="http://www.rnzcgp.org.nz/">www.rnzcgp.org.nz/</a></li> <li>• Information on video remote interpreting <a href="http://www.vri.govt.nz/">www.vri.govt.nz/</a></li> <li>• Video on top five tips for communicating with Deaf young people <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvutvFjROZc">www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvutvFjROZc</a></li> <li>• UK information on dealing with hearing impaired patients available at <a href="http://www.patient.co.uk">www.patient.co.uk</a></li> </ul> <p>Other tips and tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include fax and email numbers on letters, and use of text communications</li> <li>• Use resources, such as simple illustrated cards to facilitate better communication with people with an intellectual disability</li> <li>• Invite feedback from patients and family/whānau.</li> </ul>

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Annual health checks			
<p>Lack of regular health monitoring for people with intellectual disabilities to help address high levels of unmet health need</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement annual health checks (such as the Cardiff Health Check, CHAP and inter-RAI-Intellectual disability) for people with intellectual disabilities (usually administered by GPs) to help develop a medical history, checklist of preventive and diagnostic checks, and health management plan</li> <li>• More intensive screening for people with high health needs</li> <li>• Disease specific screening for people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., gastrointestinal disorders and epilepsy)</li> <li>• Increase funding for health checks and subsequent prescriptions to improve access to adequate health care</li> <li>• Develop agreed plans to support the widespread implementation of annual health checks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of disability services are using annual health checks for people with intellectual disabilities</li> <li>• The most commonly used tool is the Cardiff Health Check (used by IHC since 1998 and adapted by IDEA services)</li> <li>• The CHAP test has been used by Spectrum Care and a number of doctors in Counties Manukau and Waikato DHBs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement prompts for GPs to undertake general health screening for disabled people</li> <li>• See Providing Health Services for People with Intellectual Disability in New Zealand for case studies of programmes and tools used in intellectual disability services and primary care services, see <a href="http://www.health.govt.nz">www.health.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• See the Royal College of General Practitioners, UK guide on administering health checks for people with a learning disability which is available at <a href="http://www.rcgp.org.uk">www.rcgp.org.uk</a></li> </ul>

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Other			
Need to reduce environmental barriers in primary health care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make clinics more accommodating for people with physical disabilities, such as ramps, accessible doorways and toilets</li> <li>• Ensure primary health practice spaces are accessible for people with visual impairments (such as high contrast large font directions and signage)</li> <li>• Clearly written directions and signage</li> <li>• Fund strategies and policy tools that support primary health care services in building physically accessible environments and enable access to specialist equipment (such as weight scales and adjustable examination tables)</li> <li>• Consider home visits where specialist equipment and resources may be more readily available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment is leading a review into building access for disabled people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise toolkits for improving access and information on relevant building standards on the Office for Disability Issues website, see <a href="http://www.odi.govt.nz">www.odi.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• Link with organisations such as BE Accessible that may be able to assist with ideas for improving access for disabled people, see <a href="http://www.beaccessible.org.nz">www.beaccessible.org.nz</a></li> </ul>

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Transport barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make disabled parking available</li> <li>• Provide alternative transport options for some disabled people (e.g., physical and sensory disabilities)</li> <li>• Facilitate support persons being able to travel with disabled people to health care appointments</li> <li>• Consider home visits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total mobility scheme offering half price subsidised taxis for disabled people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarise yourself with information on the total mobility scheme, see <a href="http://www.nzta.govt.nz">www.nzta.govt.nz</a>, phone 0800 699 000 or email <a href="mailto:totalmobility@nzta.govt.nz">totalmobility@nzta.govt.nz</a></li> </ul>
Need to improve the responsiveness of services for Māori	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase cultural awareness and responsiveness</li> <li>• Ensure commitment to supporting Treaty of Waitangi principles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services to Improve Access (SIA) funding is available for all PHOs to reduce inequalities among those populations that are known to have the worst health status: Māori, Pacific people and those living in lower socioeconomic areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See the Disability Training Directory for some training options, <a href="http://www.tepou.co.nz">www.tepou.co.nz</a></li> <li>• Review information on SIA funding at <a href="http://www.health.govt.nz">www.health.govt.nz</a></li> <li>• See Ministry of Health website for information on disability support services for Māori <a href="http://www.health.govt.nz">www.health.govt.nz</a></li> </ul>
<p>Source: Ministry of Health (2013ac), Mirfin-Veitch &amp; Paris (2013), Mirfin-Veitch, Paris &amp; Milner (2013), Webb &amp; Rogers (2002).</p>			

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