

# About Developmental Disabilities

Although we encourage you to look into the various definitions for developmental disability, criteria generally includes the following:

- 1) Originated before the person reached 18 years of age;
- 2) Are likely to be life-long in nature; and
- 3) Affect areas of major life activity, such as personal care, language skills, learning abilities, the capacity to live independently as an adult or any other prescribed activity.

## Why is it important to know whether in fact your patient meets medical or legal criteria for a developmental disability?



It matters in terms of which services the person maybe eligible for. It could matter in terms of strategies that would be most successful.

Suspecting a disability, even without confirmation can be a flag or trigger for you to make some modifications to your standard practice. If these modifications improve the care you provide and ultimately improve the health of your patient, that is what is most important. It is often not possible to make this determination in an emergency situation.

### Key modifications when you suspect a developmental disability include:

- Providing information in clear and simple ways; ensuring their understanding of these instructions.
- Seeking input from collateral sources and not just relying on that person's ability to self-report.
- Screening for additional health issues that are common in patients with developmental disabilities.
- Linking the patient with supports to help them with follow-up.

### **Bottom Line:**

- ✓ Know your patient. Use a tool like "About Me" to elicit important information.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask if there is a developmental disability.
- ✓ If you suspect an individual has a developmental disability and may not be receiving services, you can share information about Developmental Services Ontario (DSO).
- ✓ Remember that there are many individuals who have impaired cognitive and adaptive abilities who may not meet criteria for developmental disability. This means they can't access certain services, but they can still benefit from accommodations.
- ✓ Never forget your role as advocate. If the services are not there yet to meet their needs, work with your patient and those around him or her to help make that happen.