

H-CARDD snapshot



Adults with developmental disabilities use emergency rooms more than other groups

What is this research about?

Adults with developmental disabilities are highly vulnerable to complex health problems. These problems require better coordination among primary care, specialist, and hospital services. But there's not a lot of information on how adults with developmental disabilities use health services. It's hard, then, for policymakers, managers, and service providers to make well-informed decisions when planning for this vulnerable group.

What did the researchers do?

The Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) Program compared how adults with and without developmental disabilities use health care services in Ontario. In particular, H-CARDD looked at the use of family physicians, specialists, and hospitals, between April 2009 and March 2010.

In addition, the researchers examined the continuity of care that individuals with developmental disabilities receive from family physicians. Different models of family practice were also explored.

What you need to know

Similar to the general population, about three quarters of adults with developmental disabilities see family physicians. They are, however, more likely to visit emergency departments and be hospitalized. Primary care providers and specialists need to be aware of the vulnerability of this population.

What did the researchers find?

The proportion of people with and without developmental disabilities who use family physicians is similar. There are also similarities in continuity of care between the two groups. However, those with disabilities are more likely to visit emergency departments and be hospitalized. Being older or having health problems increases the risk of visiting the hospital to a greater extent for people with developmental disabilities compared to those without. Although it's recommended that these adults get inter-professional care, only 20% receive their care from inter-professional Family Health Teams.

How can you use this research?

Health care services need to be better coordinated when it comes to the care of persons with complex needs, including those with developmental disabilities. Planners of programs such as Ontario's Community Health Links need to recognize that many individuals with developmental disabilities use the health system quite often – or are at risk of doing so. Their care needs to be more coordinated. Establishing minimum competencies for all primary care providers would also address this issue and help better meet the needs of adults with developmental disabilities.

About the researchers

This Research Snapshot is based on the third chapter of H-CARDD's resource, *The Atlas on the Primary Care of Adults with Developmental Disabilities in Ontario*. The chapter was led by Dr. Barry J. Isaacs, Director of Research, Evaluation and Education at Surrey Place Centre (Toronto).

H-CARDD's partners in the creation of *The Atlas* include the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Surrey Place Centre, the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, the University of Ottawa and Queen's University, as well as the Institute of Clinical Evaluative Sciences and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

barry.isaacs@surreyplace.on.ca

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About H-CARDD

Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) is a research program whose primary goal is to enhance the overall health and well-being of people with developmental disabilities through improved health care policy and services. H-CARDD research is conducted by dedicated teams of scientists, policymakers, and health care providers. H-CARDD is funded by the Partnerships for Health System Improvement Program of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Health Systems Research Fund of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

The H-CARDD Snapshot is a modified version of the Research Snapshot template, developed by the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University.



Health Care Access Research
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