

Access to primary and community health-care services for people 16 years and over with intellectual disabilities: a mapping and targeted systematic review

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Plain English summary

Access to health care for people with intellectual disabilities

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Plain English summary

In 2015, around 2.16% of adults in England were recorded as having a learning disability. People with a learning disability can find it difficult to understand new and complicated information, learn new skills and live independently. People with a learning disability face inequalities when accessing and using health-care services, including primary care. This may shorten their life expectancy and reduce their quality of life.

We looked at studies from the UK about adults with a learning disability using primary care services, or about carers supporting them to use primary care services. Carers could include family members, friends, paid carers, staff working in day centres, personal assistants and anyone else who might provide support to access health services. Services we were interested in included general practitioners, out-of-hours care, NHS 111, mental health services, pharmacists, dentists, and eye and hearing specialists.

We looked at research studies about ways to improve access and research that described factors that might help access or make access difficult. We analysed the research using a pathway of care model with three stages: first, research findings about how to identify health needs; second, research findings about accessing services; and, third, research findings about engaging with services.

We found that most studies were carried out with only small groups of people, and the results were often not very detailed. This makes it difficult to make clear recommendations. However, the research suggested that regular health checks could help to identify the health needs of people with a learning disability, and that these were useful for improving care for people who had additional long-term conditions. Factors that helped access for people with a learning disability were consistency of care and support, staff training, good staff communication, sufficient time during appointments, joined-up working and accurate record-keeping.

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