

The ASK Project

QCIDD has been funded by the Australian Government (via an NH&MRC grant) to undertake The Ask Project. This five year project aims to improve the health of young people with intellectual disability (ID) by implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of a combined education and health intervention package.

The health of young people with ID is often substandard. High levels of unrecognised (and hence untreated) disease coupled with inadequate health screening and health promotion are commonly cited as contributing to the poor health outcomes of this group relative to the general population. Research shows that barriers to good health care for people with ID include communication difficulties, impaired recall of important health information, negative social attitudes, and inadequate training in disability for health service providers.

The Ask Project intervention package aims to minimise these barriers by using evidence-based strategies for:

- Performing a comprehensive health review on the young person
- Developing a strong relationship with the young person's general practitioner
- Teaching the young person real-life communication and practical self-advocacy skills in relation to their health
- Educating parents, teachers, and general practitioners about the specific health problems and related support needs of young people with ID (e.g., how to manage the transition from paediatric to adult health services)
- Improving health information systems (e.g., methods for the young person to organise their medical records)

In particular, The Ask Project intervention package includes:

- An educational component—the Ask (Advocacy Skills Kit) Health Diary used by the young person to collect and store personal health information and to learn self-advocacy skills. This component of the intervention will be school-based and taught as part of the young person's regular education program. A curriculum support guide offering ideas for teaching the material in the Ask Diary will be provided to the young person's teachers
- A health component—a comprehensive health review (the CHAP) performed on the young person by their general practitioner.

The Ask Project aims to determine:

1. If young people with ID using this package receive better health care (e.g., health screening) and improved health outcomes
2. If using the package improves health advocacy by young people with ID and their parents, and
3. If the package is acceptable to young people with ID and their families

Materials being used in the project have been adapted from those already tested and found to be successful for adults with ID. In addition, a trial of the intervention package was conducted in 2004 at Darling Point Special Education School in order to refine the teaching materials and ensure age-appropriateness of the curriculum.

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The Passports to Health Project

Passports to advantage: Health and capacity building as a basis for social integration

Prisoners released into the community can experience a range of social, physical and emotional problems, and they have a high risk of premature death, especially in the first few weeks following release. In addition, many will return to prison within the first two years. A large percentage of the prison population is people with intellectual disability with some estimates putting the numbers at up to 17% of the total prison population in Australia. Remarkably little is known about exactly what happens to people once they leave prison. The purpose of this project is to find out more about the experiences of men and women once they are released, such as finding employment and accommodation, physical and mental health, substance use, and how they use health and community services. We are also interested in getting information about those who return to prison. In this RCT, this means that participants will receive one of two interventions, and results will be compared at the end of the study. Our findings will be used to improve services for people after their release from prison, as well as give us a unique insight into the post-release experiences of prisoners in Queensland.

Of the many problems faced by ex-prisoners, stable and affordable accommodation is a major factor in improving post-release outcomes and reducing the risk of re-offending. In our study, accommodation was seen as extremely or very important by nearly three-quarters of participants. While the majority reported having a plan in place prior to leaving prison, research shows that prisoners' expectations do not always match the reality of post-prison life, and it will be interesting to find out about their experiences during the follow-up interviews. We will be able to see how well participants were able to maintain stable and consistent living arrangements, which may be an important predictor of successful integration into the community.