



# FACT SHEET

## Intellectual Disability

### Definition

The term intellectual disability covers a range of conditions. People with intellectual disabilities are those who have both of the following in the developmental stage:

- ✿ Significantly below average intelligence level (an IQ below 70)
- ✿ Significant difficulties with the personal skills needed for everyday living

Intellectual disabilities vary in their severity, including mild, moderate, severe and profound, which are traditionally defined on the basis of an IQ score. The Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) however, suggests intellectual disability should be considered in terms of the 'support' a person needs and not an unchanging characteristic of the person such as IQ. The capacity of each person or the effect of their disability is influenced not only by their intellectual disability but also the environment and the support they receive. Changing the environment and the support to meet the person's needs can greatly increase the person's capacity and reduce the effect of their disability.

Although the impact of the disability on the person may range from moderate to profound it is widely recognized that other factors such as the presence of other disabilities (physical, sensory, psychiatric) and social support (family, friends, the community) play an important role in how each person with an intellectual disability functions in their daily life.

### Characteristics

Although people with an intellectual disability, like all people, have unique characteristics and personalities, there are some common characteristics experienced by people with an intellectual disability, including:

- ✿ Learning and processing information more slowly than people without an intellectual disability
- ✿ Difficulty with abstract concepts, such as money and time
- ✿ Difficulty with planning and organisational skills
- ✿ Difficulty understanding the subtleties of interpersonal interactions at times resulting in inappropriate behavior in social situations



## Causes

Some of the causes of intellectual disability include:

- ☼ Brain injury or infection before, during or after birth
- ☼ Genetic conditions/disorders (e.g. Down Syndrome and Fragile X Syndrome are the two most common genetic causes of intellectual disability)
- ☼ Premature birth (long before the expected birth date)
- ☼ Problems during pregnancy, labour and birth (e.g. lack of oxygen)
- ☼ Growth or nutrition problems
- ☼ Health problems during childhood (e.g. meningitis)
- ☼ A range of medical disorders

## Prevalence

Over half a million Australians (3% of the population) have an intellectual disability and a majority (61%) of these people have a severe or profound limitation in 'core' activities of daily living (AIHW 2007). Approximately 143,600 Victorians are affected or about 2.9% of the population (Better Health Channel).

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### Sources

- The NSW Council for Intellectual Disability - 2011
- World Health Organisation report on Disability - 2011
- The Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria (CDDHV) - Dr Jane Tracy
- The NSW Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) -2011
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare- 2007a
- Disability Services Australia
- Better Health Channel