



National and NSW Councils for Intellectual Disability

&

Australian Association of Developmental Disability Medicine

## POSITION STATEMENT ON THE HEALTH OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

**We call for concerted action to redress the poor health status experienced by people with intellectual disabilities.** We make this call to the Australian, and State and Territory, Governments.

There are over 300,000 people with intellectual disabilities in Australia. They have very high rates of health problems and these problems are often not diagnosed or appropriately treated. Life expectancy is reduced by up to 20 years.

There are many causes of this situation, ranging across communication barriers between patients and health professionals, complexity of diagnosis, lack of general and specialised skills in the health workforce, and health promotion campaigns and research not focusing on people with intellectual disabilities.

As well as the **human and financial cost** of poor health for people with intellectual disabilities and their families, there is considerable financial cost to the health, social security and disability service systems.

Governments need to take action to provide equity in health care for people with intellectual disabilities. **All health care planning should include specific consideration of how it will meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.**

There also needs to be a national network of health services specialising in the health care of people with intellectual disabilities. These services would be a consultancy and training

resource to the mainstream health system so as to enhance its capacity to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. The specialised services would facilitate collaboration between local health and disability services and undertake research.

We call on the Australian, and State and Territory, Governments to each and together work to redress the inequity in health care experienced by people with intellectual disabilities. **In particular, we call on the Governments to establish a national network of intellectual disability health services.**

February 2009

### Endorsements

Michael Kidd  
Dean of Health Sciences, Flinders University  
Former President, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

Richard Larkins AO  
Vice-Chancellor, Monash University  
Former President, Royal Australasian College of Physicians

Fiona Stanley AC  
Director, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research;  
Australian of the Year 2003

Stephen Leeder AO  
Director, Australian Health Policy Institute

Kevin Cocks  
Director, Queensland Advocacy Inc  
Human Rights Medallist

Jeanette Moss AM  
Parent advocate

Bill Carter QC  
Retired Supreme Court Judge & Royal Commissioner

John Dwyer AO  
Professor of Medicine & Founding Chair,  
Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

Errol Cocks  
Professor, School of Occupational Therapy & Social  
Work, Curtin University of Technology

Julian Gardner  
Former Public Advocate, Victoria

Peter Brooks  
Executive Dean of Health Sciences, University of  
Queensland

Bruce Robinson  
Dean of Medicine, University of Sydney

Gwynnyth Llewellyn  
Dean of Health Sciences, University of Sydney

Malcolm Schyvens  
Past President, Law Society of Tasmania

Robert Strike  
President, Self Advocacy Sydney &  
Chair, NSW Council for Intellectual Disability

Ron Mulock AO  
Former Health Minister & Deputy Premier, NSW

Trevor Parmenter AM  
Professor of Developmental Disability Studies & past  
President, International Association for the Scientific  
Study of Intellectual Disabilities

Kevin Stone  
Parent advocate & Executive Officer, Victorian  
Advocacy League for Individuals with Disability

Kim Oates AM  
Professor of Paediatrics & former chief executive, the  
Children's Hospital at Westmead

Guy Hamilton AM  
Former head of intellectual disability services, Western  
Australia

John Taplin  
Professor of Psychology, University of Adelaide

Leon Piterman AM  
Professor of General Practice  
& Deputy Dean of Medicine, Nursing and Health  
Sciences, Monash University

David Richmond AO  
Former chief executive of agencies including NSW  
Health & the Olympic Coordination Authority

John Entwistle  
Parent advocate, GP and former member, National  
Disability Advisory Council

**National Health and Hospitals Reform  
Commission Interim report 2009**

People with intellectual disabilities "face stark  
health inequalities". (p 55)

Primary health care centres need "robust links to  
specialist multidisciplinary health teams who are  
skilled in the management of people with  
intellectual disabilities". (p 96)

**Pre-election promise**

"Labor does recognise that people with intellectual  
disabilities are disadvantaged in the health  
system. ....In many situations, GPs and other  
health professionals require access to specialist  
advice to provide the health services people with  
intellectual disabilities require. ....The health of  
people with disabilities needs to be part of [our]  
reform plans." (Shadow Ministers Roxon and  
McLucas, November 2007)

The **NSW Government** has recently spelt out the  
need for a multi tiered framework of action on the  
health of people with intellectual disabilities  
including the establishment of a statewide network  
of specialised intellectual disability health services  
to back up mainstream services. (NSW Health  
(2007), *Development of a service framework to improve  
health care of people with intellectual disabilities*)

The **NSW Ombudsman**, who review deaths of  
people with disabilities, has said that the proposed  
NSW framework "is critical to improve the health  
outcomes for this vulnerable community".

(NSW Ombudsman, *Report of Reviewable Deaths in  
2007*, Vol. 1, p.ix)

Michelle Howard  
Public Advocate – Queensland

Eileen Baldry  
Associate Dean, School of Social Sciences and  
International Studies, University of NSW

Philip Montgomery  
Executive Director, Royal Perth Hospital & former  
Director of Medical & Health Services, Disability  
Services Commission, WA

Helen Beange AM  
Clinical Professor of Medicine

Roger West  
Former President, Guardianship Tribunal, and  
Community Services Commissioner NSW

*Endorsements as at 16 March 2009*



