

Developmental Disabilities in Ontario's Criminal Justice and Forensic System: Using Data to Tell the Story

What is the research about?

The mandate of forensic inpatient settings is to evaluate or treat individuals who may not be capable of participating in judicial proceedings (e.g., found to be unfit for trial or not criminally responsible due to mental disorder). In general, Canadian studies show that individuals with developmental disabilities are overrepresented in forensic inpatient settings and may use these settings more intensively (e.g., longer lengths of stay) than individuals without developmental disabilities. It is important to explore whether there are reasons for this overrepresentation and more intensive use.

What did the researchers do?

We used linked administrative data from the Ontario Ministries of Health and of Children, Community, and Social Services. Individuals were identified as having intellectual and developmental disabilities using the ICD/DSM-based diagnostic information in these data. The adults we studied included anyone who had been admitted to a forensic inpatient unit between fiscal years 2006/07 and 2015/16.

The goals of this project were to:

- Describe the prevalence of developmental disabilities in forensic inpatient settings.
- Evaluate whether forensic inpatients with developmental disabilities were more likely than those without developmental disabilities to use resources more intensively as measured by repeated forensic inpatient use, longer lengths of stay, or greater levels of staff-reported frustration.
- Compare these two groups in terms of sociodemographic and clinical characteristics and healthcare use before and after forensic inpatient stay to see if there are any differences that might explain more intensive use.

What you need to know

Almost 1 in 5 adults in forensic inpatient beds have a developmental disability, a number that is nearly 17 times higher than for the general population. These adults share many characteristics with forensic inpatients who do not have a developmental disability in terms of who they are, where they live, and their physical and mental health status. However, they differ in that they tend to use more forensic inpatient services - having more frequent admissions to forensic hospital beds, longer hospital stays, and remaining in hospital even after they are ready for discharge. Further work is needed to find opportunities to build capacity in both the community and forensic inpatient settings to prevent re-admission and to help them transition successfully to living in the community after they are discharged.

What did the researchers find?

Adults with developmental disabilities are nearly 17 percent of the forensic inpatient bed population. This figure is considerably higher than the figures for the general population (nearly 1%) or other criminal justice and forensic settings (2-8%). When compared to those inpatients without developmental disabilities, forensic inpatients with developmental disabilities had few differences in sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age) and clinical characteristics (e.g., psychiatric diagnoses).

We did find differences in the intensity of service use (e.g., length of stay, number of past admissions, and greater staff frustration) and administrative barriers to discharge (e.g., having an Ontario Review Board disposition and delayed discharge).

How can you use this research?

While the desired goal is to reduce the number of adults with developmental disabilities who have criminal justice and forensic involvement in the first place, once these individuals enter the system, there are important questions about what the best settings or pathways are for them in terms of receiving the appropriate evaluation and treatment or support. Furthermore, knowing what happens to them when they leave different parts of the criminal justice and forensic system may help us understand how to prevent repeat involvement.

The results from this project provide some answers about the systemic challenges that forensic inpatients with developmental disabilities may face. When combined with the findings from the [other three projects looking at federal, provincial and community-based populations](#), these results will support more comprehensive, system-wide planning for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the criminal justice and forensic system in Ontario.

Do you want additional resources?

- Click [here](#) to see the Community Networks of Specialized Care's *Developmental Disabilities Justice Toolkit*.
- Click [here](#) to see the Human Services & Justice Coordinating Committee resource library on dual diagnosis.
- Click [here](#) to learn about the role of Dual Diagnosis Justice Case Manager (DDJCM). If you require assistance of a DDJCM, contact your local DSO for a referral.

This snapshot is based on the article "Intensive use of forensic inpatient services by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ontario, Canada: Prevalence and associated characteristics", *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14999013.2022.2027047>

About the team:

This project was led by researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, McMaster University, the MAP Centre Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital, ICES, and Brock University.

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About H-CARDD

Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) is a research program that aims 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, health care providers, people with disabilities and families working collaboratively.

For more information: www.hcardd.ca.

This study was funded by the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services under a Developmental Services Research Grant Fund.

The opinions, results and conclusions in this summary are those of the authors. No endorsement by the funders or collaborators is intended or should be inferred.

Do you want to know more?

Read an overview of the study, *Developmental Disabilities in Ontario's Criminal Justice and Forensic Mental Health Systems: Using Data to Tell the Story* on our [H-CARDD project web page](#), including the [Summary Snapshot](#) and the [Provincial Study Snapshot](#).



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