



## High health care costs among adults with developmental disabilities

### What is the research about?

Adults with developmental disabilities experience more health issues than adults without developmental disabilities so it is not surprising that they use more health care. We know very little about the actual cost of this care. In addition to providing an estimate of the cost of health care, it is also important to understand why some people have greater health care costs than others. It has been suggested that focusing in on the small group of people whose health care costs the most can improve health care for them and reduce overall health care costs. This project looked at how many adults with developmental disabilities have very high health care costs and studied what was unique about this group.

### What did the researchers do?

The Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) program with scientists from ICES estimated the health care costs of a cohort of 66,484 adults with developmental disabilities living in Ontario in 2009. Using health care cost estimates from the general population, researchers classified individuals into two groups: those with and without high health care costs. The researchers then compared these two groups in terms of their patient profiles and the health services they used.

### What you need to know

Adults with developmental disabilities are nearly 4 times as likely to incur high annual health care costs than those without developmental disabilities. High-cost users were more likely to be female, older, live in group homes, and to be receiving disability income support compared to non-high cost users.

### What did the researchers find?

Among adults with developmental disabilities, 36% had annual health care expenditures greater than \$2,610 CAD and were classified as “high-cost” users (top 10%). Compared to their peers, these individuals were more likely to be female, to be older, to live in group homes, and to be receiving disability income support.

As expected, individuals with high health care costs also had higher rates of all of the physical and psychiatric conditions studied (such as diabetes, hypertension and congestive heart failure). People who had both physical and psychiatric problems had higher health care costs than those with just one type of problem.

Overall, the greatest health care expenses were due to hospitalizations, especially psychiatric hospitalizations, continuing care (i.e., long term care and rehabilitation centres), and medications.

## About H-CARDD

Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) is a research program with the primary goal of enhancing 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, and health care providers.

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## Keywords

*Health care costs, developmental disabilities, hospitalizations*

Health care costs seemed to be relatively stable in this cohort. The majority of individuals whose health care costs placed them in the high cost category in 2009 remained in that category one year later.

## How can you use this research?

Adults with developmental disabilities are more likely to experience health issues and to use health services compared to adults without developmental disabilities. As a result, adults with developmental disabilities are nearly 4 times as likely to incur high annual health care costs as has been found in the general population. General strategies to support people with high health care costs may need to be modified to address the needs of this group. Given that the demographic and clinical characteristics of high-cost users differed from non-high cost users, we may be able to reduce health care costs by attending to the unique needs of this population earlier on in their health care trajectory.

## About the researchers

This project was a collaboration between [the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#), [H-CARDD](#), the [Health System Performance Research Network \(HSPRN\)](#), and [ICES](#) and was led by [Yona.lunsky@camh.ca](mailto:Yona.lunsky@camh.ca)

## Do you want to know more/additional resources?

You can find more information about this research at [www.hcardd.ca](http://www.hcardd.ca).

[Click here](#) to see the H-CARDD atlas on the health and health care of adults with developmental disabilities living in Ontario.

**Resources for healthcare providers:** H-CARDD has developed an [Emergency Care Toolkit](#) and a [Primary Care Toolkits](#) to improve the care of patients with developmental disabilities.

**Resources for patients and families:** [Click here](#) for resources to help you and your family prepare for health care visits.

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