



## Study examines health and health service use of young adults with Autism and Developmental Disabilities

### What is the research about?

The transition from child to adult health care services is difficult, particularly for young adults with developmental disabilities because of their complex health needs and because of the challenges they face in accessing services. More research is needed to understand the kinds of health issues faced by this population, how they use health care services, and where health care policy and planning can be improved.

This research sought to answer those questions for Ontario's young adults with developmental disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

### What did the researchers do?

The Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) program studied the population of approximately 16,000 adults 18 to 24 years of age with developmental disabilities in Ontario to explore three areas, using administrative data held at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES). First, the researchers compared the demographics and health problems of young adults with developmental disabilities to young adults without such disabilities. Next, they looked back at health service use (primary care visits, psychiatrist visits, emergency department visits, and hospitalizations) of these young adults from age 14 to age 24. Finally, they compared the health problems and health service use found in young adults with ASD to those with other developmental disabilities and to young adults without developmental disabilities.

### What you need to know

Young adults with developmental disabilities are more likely to have poorer overall health, have at least one psychiatric diagnosis and have higher health service use than young adults without developmental disabilities.

### What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that young adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario have different rates of health problems and health care use compared to other young adults, especially for psychiatric reasons. For example, compared to young adults without developmental disabilities, those with developmental disabilities are more likely to have poorer overall health, and have at least one psychiatric diagnosis. Throughout adolescence and young adulthood, their health service use was higher than what was observed for those without developmental disabilities.

The researchers also found that while young adults with ASD have similar overall health to those with other developmental disabilities, they are more likely to receive a psychiatric diagnosis. Those with ASD are also more likely to visit a psychiatrist, but less likely to visit the emergency department compared to young adults with other developmental disabilities. Their rates of emergency department use and hospitalizations specifically for psychiatric reasons are similar to those with other developmental disabilities.

## 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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## How can you use this research?

This research supports a case for health care planning and policy development for young adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario. This is particularly true with regard to mental health care planning for those with ASD. Increased training and education of health professionals in identifying and treating mental health issues in this population can lead to prevention and early intervention. Transition plans and related supports, in particular, should be implemented to improve health outcomes for young adults with developmental disabilities.

## About the researchers

**Dr. Jonathan Weiss**, Associate Professor from the Department of Psychology at York University and **Dr. Barry Isaacs**, Director of Research, Evaluation and Education from Surrey Place Centre, co-lead this work with the support of **Dr. Heidi Diepstra**, **Ms. Alison Chiu**, and **Mr. Drew Wilton**.

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## Keywords

*Developmental disabilities, transition age youth, Autism Spectrum Disorder*

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

You can find more information about this research and see other Transition Age Youth information at [www.hcardd.ca](http://www.hcardd.ca) on the Transition Age Youth project [page](#).

Read a [summary](#) of the Transition Age Youth virtual Town Hall. View the virtual Town Hall [here](#).

View the [Transitions Toolkit](#) developed by the Developmental Disabilities Primary Care Initiative.

Read the [“Dual Diagnosis: An Information Guide”](#).

Read the [ASD Mental Health Blog](#).



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