



What we know about Adults with Developmental Disabilities and HIV

What is the research about?

Due to the common misconception that individuals with developmental disabilities have a low risk of HIV infection, there has been very little research on individuals with developmental disabilities with HIV. This project compared the prevalence of HIV infection in individuals with developmental disabilities to individuals without developmental disabilities. The project also examined whether the health needs and service use patterns of individuals with developmental disabilities and HIV differ from individuals that have developmental disabilities but do not have HIV.

What did the researchers do?

Scientists from the Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) program and the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences reviewed the literature on HIV as it relates to developmental disabilities and looked, using Ontario data, at how many adults with developmental disabilities have HIV. They also compared the health and health care use of 3 groups: those with HIV and developmental disabilities, those with only developmental disabilities and those with only HIV.

What did the researchers find?

Contrary to the belief that individuals with developmental disabilities have lower rates of HIV

What you need to know

The prevalence of HIV infection in individuals with developmental disabilities is comparable to the rates of infection in individuals without developmental disabilities. This highlights the need for HIV prevention strategies targeted towards this population.

infection, in a sample of 64,008 adults with developmental disabilities, the researchers found that the prevalence of HIV was similar to the prevalence in the general population.

Compared to individuals that have HIV but no developmental disabilities, individuals with HIV and a developmental disability were more likely to be female, live in a rural area and be from a low income neighborhood. They were also more likely to have chronic physical and mental health disorders and to use more hospital and community health services.

When the researchers compared individuals with developmental disabilities that have HIV to other adults with developmental disabilities they found that individuals with HIV were more likely to have mental health disorders (both psychotic and non-psychotic) and substance abuse disorders. They were also more likely to visit the hospital emergency department and be admitted to the hospital for any reason.

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

HIV, developmental disabilities, health care

How can you use this research?

Given that the rate of HIV infection in individuals with developmental disabilities is similar to rate of infection in the general population, HIV prevention strategies and initiatives should be developed to target this population. This research suggests that individuals with HIV and developmental disabilities tend to have more complex health needs and greater health service use than individuals with only one of these conditions. This population may benefit from greater integration of programs developed by both HIV and disability sectors.

About the researchers

Anna Durbin from the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's Hospital and **Yona Lunsky** from the Adult Neurodevelopmental Services at CAMH, both adjunct scientists at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, led this project with the support of collaborators, **Hilary Brown, Symron Bansal, Marina Heifetz, Tony Antoniou and James Jung.**

Do you want to know more/additional resources?

You can find more information about this research at www.hcardd.ca

[Click here](#) to read our newsletter for caregivers and support staff about HIV and developmental disabilities.

[Click here](#) to see our literature review on HIV and developmental disabilities.

[Click here](#) for more information about HIV and for [practical guides](#) on HIV.

If you would like to read more about Toronto-based resources please visit the Act website: <http://www.actoronto.org/>

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