AUSTRALIAN
DENTAL COUNCIL

Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner

Resources:

Intellectual Disability

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Health outcomes for people with intellectual disability

The Australian Government released the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability to address serious health inequities faced by people with intellectual disability. The Intellectual Disability Health Capability Framework (Framework) has been developed as part of this project, and was published in April 2024. The Framework sets out clear capabilities and learning outcomes and aims to ensure oral health students and practitioners have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to care for people with intellectual disability.

Health outcomes for people with intellectual disability are significantly worse than those for the general population. Of note, oral health conditions are common in people with intellectual disability, with this population experiencing increased prevalence and greater severity of periodontal disease and lower levels of oral hygiene than others in the general population.[1] In addition to cognitive difficulties, people with intellectual disability may experience other challenges such as communication difficulties, physical disabilities and anxiety, which can hinder access to dental care. Provision of required adjustments and accessible education about dental hygiene can help to facilitate good dental health for people with intellectual disability.

Relevant professional competencies

The ADC's *Professional competencies of the newly qualified dental practitioner* definition for 'At-risk groups or populations' states:

> 'the demonstration of all professional competencies must take account of people who are at an increased risk of developing poor oral health and face greater challenges in accessing oral health care. These population groups include people with sensory, psycho-social, progressive, physical, and intellectual disability, and people with acquired brain injury (ABI)'.

The definition of 'patient' has been updated to 'person' to recognise the shift within the broader health system to support individuals to make decisions about their own care.

The ADC Competencies, which now include domains such as *Communication and leadership* (Domain 2) and *Person-centred care* (Domain 6), were mapped to the Capabilities in the Intellectual Disability Framework. A high degree of conceptual overlap exists between the ADC's Competencies and the Framework's Capabilities, with 39 of 46 (85%) Capabilities mapping to content in the Competencies in the following areas:

- determinants of health
- barriers and enablers to health care access
- appropriate assessment
- best practice approaches to management
- intersectionality of care
- person-centred care
- preventative health care and promotion.

Why is it important for dental practitioners to care for people with intellectual disability?

People with intellectual disability can face barriers to dental services due to the cost of private dental services and waiting times for public dental services.[2] Other barriers to quality health care also include:

- communication difficulties between the person and the health professional[3–5]
- a lack of reasonable adjustments being made to communication or practice[6,7]
- health professionals' insufficient skills and knowledge about the health needs of people with intellectual disability[3,6–8]
- stigmatising attitudes.[9]

The need for the Framework was reinforced by findings from the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability*, which found people with cognitive disability (including people with intellectual disability) are subject to systemic neglect in the Australian Health System. The Commission identified education and training for health professionals and the review and amendment of accreditation standards to ensure that cognitive disability health is sufficiently covered to address these barriers.[10]

Implementation of the Framework aims to ensure oral health graduates have the required capabilities to provide the highest quality care throughout their future health professional careers to people with intellectual disability.

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