

Valuing People > Chapter 6 - Improving health for people with learning disabilities: NeLLD summary



Government Objective: To enable people with learning disabilities to access a health service designed around their individual needs, with fast and convenient care delivered to a consistently high standard, and with additional support where necessary.

This chapter sets out the key issues for health in people with a learning disability, and links to the commitment in the NHS plan to deliver person-centred health services:

- Most people with learning disabilities have greater health needs than the rest of the population
- They are more likely to experience mental illness and are more prone to chronic health problems, epilepsy, and physical and sensory disabilities
- As life expectancy increases age-related diseases such as stroke, heart disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer are likely to be of particular concern
- There is an above average death rate among younger people with learning disabilities
- Inconsistencies in the provision of health care in different parts of the country have also been found (see Facing the Facts), with people having trouble accessing the help they need. For example:
 - Uptake rates for breast and cervical screening by people with learning disabilities are low
 - Inadequate diagnosis and treatment of specific medical conditions, including heart disease, hypothyroidism and osteoporosis has been suggested by some studies
 - People with challenging behaviour are likely to be treated with psychotropic drugs despite the lack of a psychiatric diagnosis
- The NHS provides specialist learning disability services, and as a result the wider NHS has failed to consider the needs of people with learning disabilities

Key Actions:

- Action to reduce health inequalities: to explore the feasibility of establishing a confidential inquiry into mortality among people with learning disabilities
- Action to challenge discrimination against people with learning disabilities from minority ethnic communities
- Health facilitators to be identified for people with learning disabilities by Spring 2003

- All people with a learning disability to be registered with a GP by June 2004
- All people with a learning disability to have a Health Action Plan by June 2005
- NHS to ensure that all mainstream hospital services are accessible to people with learning disabilities
- Development of local specialist services for people with severe challenging behaviour to be a priority for the capital element of the Learning Disability Development Fund
- Mental Health National Service Framework to bring new benefits to people with learning disabilities
- New role for specialist learning disability services, making the most effective use of their expertise

Thank you to the National Electronic Library for Learning Disability (<http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/nelld/index.htm>) for this summary.