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Supporting intellectual disability placement opportunities for future health professionals

Connecting with the disability sector

Intellectual Disability Health Capability Framework Resources



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Description

This disability placement information sheet is part of a suite of resources designed to support the [Intellectual Disability Health Capability Framework](#). The Framework aims to equip pre-registration students studying health, allied health, dentistry and other health-related disciplines with the required core capabilities to provide quality health care to people with intellectual disability.

This disability placement information sheet offers advice to education providers on developing links with disability organisations to facilitate placement opportunities.

Additional resources are also available for educators to support integration of the Framework into existing curricula, designed to assist students to develop their knowledge and skills in intellectual disability health. These include written case studies, role-play films, and a simulation scenario. Please see the [Intellectual Disability Health Capability Framework and education resources](#) to view all available resources.

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Background

Clinical placements or work integrated learning provides important opportunities for students to interact with people with intellectual disability. This interaction can positively impact their attitudes towards people with intellectual disability and allow students to practise adapting their communication and making reasonable adjustments. For example:

- dentistry students who gained clinical exposure during their program demonstrated a more favourable attitude to providing oral health care to people with intellectual disability [1]
- social work students who completed community placements with people with intellectual disability reported developing a strength-based perspective and recognition of the diversity of this population, which can help to address stereotypes and reduce stigma [2]
- nurses who completed a dedicated clinical placement in intellectual disability as part of their education self-reported higher levels of comfort in working with people with intellectual disability [3]
- past interactions have also prompted some social work students to consider a career working with people with intellectual disability. [4]

It is recognised that there are limited opportunities for students studying health-related disciplines to complete intellectual disability focused placements due to the lack of specialised clinical services in this area. A medium term goal of the [National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability](#) includes ‘exploring options for introducing student placements across health disciplines in disability settings’. The [Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) also recommended improving access to clinical placements in disability health services (Final recommendation 6.28). Placements within (or visits to) disability service providers and organisations can help to address the gaps in available health service placements, provide students with connections to multiple individuals with lived experience, and offer opportunities for students to engage with people with intellectual disability outside of clinical settings (providing a more holistic view of their lives, including their strengths and needs).

This information sheet provides educators with guidance around working with disability organisations and providers to develop placement opportunities. This may include disability service providers, advocacy organisations, Disability Representative Organisations, Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs; where the majority of members and the Governing body are persons with disability), government departments, or specialist schools. We consulted with disability sector representatives to inform the advice provided.

Guidance on engaging with disability organisations to facilitate placement opportunities

Finding organisations

You can contact disability services and organisations in your area for advice and to discuss the potential for placement opportunities. Disability organisations have told us that in general they prefer educators to email their organisation's generic email, and they will pass this along to a relevant contact.

There is a list of organisations and groups that are practicing in this area and may be able to provide placement opportunities on the [Framework and education resources](#) collection page. Also see the [Disability Gateway](#) website.

Considerations for placements within disability organisations

Disability sector representatives provided the following advice around what to consider if your institution would like to establish placement opportunities with a disability organisation.

- Does the work of the disability organisation align with the program/unit?
- Do students have some fundamental capabilities to begin introductory work with people with intellectual disability (and potentially other disabilities) at this stage of their program? For example, some elementary understanding of
 - communication skills,
 - different types of disability and associated health needs
 - person-centred care.
- Have students completed disability awareness training or have experience working with people with disability? While not necessarily a requirement, it can help organisations understand the student's knowledge and skill level, and if disability awareness training would be helpful to arrange. Online training options include:
 - the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission [online training modules](#).
 - the Council for Intellectual Disability's [Just Include Me](#) self-paced online training.
 - Down Syndrome Australia's [online training for health professionals](#).
- Does the disability provider have health or allied health professionals who can offer supervision? Would they have the time necessary to supervise students?
- Can funding be provided to support student placements (as disability providers have few, if any, funds available for this)?
- Contractual arrangements between the service organisation and education institution regarding client privacy and consent need to be considered, particularly if the placement is within clients' homes, workplaces, or day programs. Consent from people with

intellectual disability (and/or their families/guardians in some cases) is generally sought at the time of interacting with them.

- Could the nature of the placement cause a disruption to schedules (which can be challenging for some clients)?

If a full placement at a disability organisation is not possible, consider a one-off visit at e.g., at a day centre or arts program. While this would not fulfil the requirements of a placement, it still offers valuable opportunities for students to meet and interact with people with intellectual disability.

Disability sector representatives outlined the following information that organisations may require when considering a placement opportunity.

- The goal of the placement, curriculum details and what content needs to be covered.
- Length of the placement/number of visits; number of students; how often students would be placed.
- Students' current knowledge and skills in the area of disability.
- Supervision, feedback, and assessment requirements. While it is generally a requirement that students have both a placement setting and educational institution supervisor, some disability organisations may not have staff who meet the requirements to act as a supervisor. In this instance where possible (e.g., indirect supervision is allowed such as in later years of allied health degrees), discuss with disability organisations if any alternative arrangements could be offered (e.g., external supervision through the education institution or elsewhere). It is recognised this would not be possible for some disciplines such as nursing where direct, onsite supervision is required.
- Information around financial considerations/funding.
- How insurance arrangements work.
- Benefits of the placement for the disability organisation.

Supports that the disability organisation may require

Disability organisation representatives described the supports that they may require when providing placements. Funding to support placements was commonly mentioned. It is recognised that funding arrangements for placements differ by discipline and institution. Many required supports were similar to those offered for any placement. For example, the opportunity to meet with a student before a placement to make sure they would be a good fit. They also spoke of the importance of support for the student and organisation throughout the placement e.g., regular communication, meetings, on-site visits to monitor progress, and feedback from education providers.

References

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3. Cashin, A., Pracilio, A., Buckley, T., Kersten, M., Trollor, J., Morphet, J., & Wilson, N. J., A survey of Registered Nurses' educational experiences and self-perceived capability to care for people with intellectual disability and/or autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 2021. 47(3): p. 227–239. doi: doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2021.1967897.
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Appendix

Planning disability sector placements – checklist tool

Finding disability organisations and providers

- Search for disability service providers, advocacy organisations, Disability Representative Organisations, Disabled People’s Organisations, or specialist schools in your area through e.g., [Disability Gateway](#).
- View the list of disability organisations that are practicing in this area and may be able to provide support with placement opportunities – see the link to the list on the [Framework and education resources](#) collection page.

Considerations when planning a placement

- Does the work of the disability organisation align with the program/unit?
- Consider if students have required capabilities at this stage of their program.
- Have students completed disability awareness training or have experience working with people with disability?
- Are health/allied health professionals available to offer supervision within the organisation?
- Consider funding arrangements.
- Is consent from people with intellectual disability (and/or their families/guardians) required before/during a student placement?
- Could the nature of the placement cause a disruption to clients’ schedules?
- If a full placement is not feasible, would a day visit be possible?

Information disability organisations may require

- The goal of the placement, curriculum details and what content needs to be covered.
- Length of the placement/number of visits; number of students; how often students would be placed.
- Students’ current knowledge and skills.
- Supervision, feedback, and assessment requirements.
- Support available for students from the education provider.
- Details of funding/financial considerations.
- How insurance arrangements work.
- Benefits for the organisation.

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All information in this publication is correct as at May 2025

