



Annual Health Checks can Improve Health Care for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

What is the research about?

Adults with developmental disabilities have more health problems than other adults and more difficulties accessing health care. The 2011 Canadian Consensus Guidelines for the Primary Care of Adults with Developmental Disabilities, supported by international research, recommend that adults with developmental disabilities have annual comprehensive preventive health reviews to identify and manage health concerns. The “Health Check” has been described as the most important investment in the primary health care of people with developmental disabilities in the 21st century. Yet, in Ontario, only one in five adults with developmental disabilities receives a “Health Check.”

What did the researchers do?

The Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) program offered support to three Family Health Teams in different regions of Ontario to implement “Health Checks”, and evaluated factors needed for successful implementation. The intervention includes: 1) identifying patients with developmental disabilities in the practice; 2) inviting them in for a Health Check, and; 3) enabling the health review to be more consistent with guidelines.

What did the researchers find?

Two of the three practice sites successfully implemented the intervention. Key factors in obtaining buy-in were a pre-existing interest in the care of patients with developmental disabilities or vulnerable populations combined with the work of on-site champions.

What you need to know

“Health Checks” in primary care can have significant positive impacts for individuals with developmental disabilities. With planning and support, primary care practices can implement changes so that patients with developmental disabilities are more likely to receive a Health Check.

Also important were designing an implementation strategy that fit with current work processes and providing accessible supports for staff to do the work, including an onsite implementation facilitator with protected time.

Each team developed a process for identifying patients to invite to the Health Check and dedicated some clerical time to making the invitation phone calls. To help modify their standard approach to care, staff were provided with education about developmental disabilities along with clinical support tools, such as local resource lists and reminders about common medical issues. When possible, these tools were embedded in the electronic medical record system.

Patients who received an invitation were more likely to come in for a Health Check and patients who came in for the Health Check received more preventive tests than those who did not. Most of the staff who performed the Health Check felt that it benefited the patients and fit in their setting. However, staff comfort in caring for patients with developmental disabilities still varied and many staff indicated a need for more preparation.

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

Implementation, developmental disabilities, primary care, health check

Sustaining a Health Check program can be promoted by:

- A routine process for identifying patients with DD
- Documentation of DD in the patient's electronic medical record
- A process for patients to receive invitation phone calls
- Tools and resources to make care more efficient and effective
- Including Health Checks in ongoing Quality Improvement programs

How can you use this research?

Provincial bodies can play a leadership role in supporting Health Check implementation. Family Health Teams and other primary care providers interested in improving their practices with patients with developmental disabilities can access clinical resources and read about implementation strategies in the Developmental Disabilities Primary Care toolkit . Teaching videos and presentations are available in the toolkit, along with several clinical tools and implementation guides. It is important that local communities work together with provincial bodies to encourage regular Health Checks. Individuals with developmental disabilities and their caregivers can prepare for Health Checks and take an active role in promoting their health and using resources developed for them.

About the researchers

Ian Casson, from the Department of Family Medicine at Queen's University worked together with **Laurie Green** and **Andrea Perry** from St Michael's Hospital and **Yona Lunsky**, from CAMH to develop this intervention. **Janet Durbin**, from CAMH led the evaluation of this project with the support of **Avra Selick**, **Natasha Spassiani** and **Megan Abou Chacra**.

Do you want to know more/additional resources?

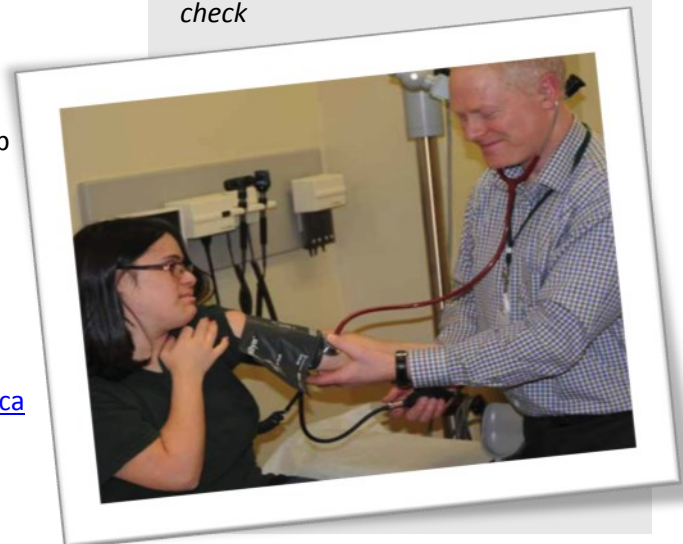
You can find more information about this research at www.hcardd.ca or on the Family Health Team project [page](#)

Watch a [video](#) for patients and caregivers on health of people with developmental disabilities

Watch a [video](#) for clinicians on improving primary care for patients with developmental disabilities

Our website also has [patient](#) and [caregiver](#) tools to help prepare for a primary care visit

View the [Primary Care Guidelines](#) on the Surrey Place [website](#).



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