

ASID Position Statement

Intellectual Disability and Complex Support Needs*

Individuals with intellectual disability and complex support needs are currently not adequately recognised in policy or supported across multiple service sectors. To address this situation, ASID supports the need for:

- Development of a consistent definition of ‘complex support needs’ and improved identification of those with intellectual disability who have complex support needs;
- Collection of data on the prevalence and diversity of complex support needs among people with intellectual disability;
- Cross sector, broad policy commitment to recognising and addressing complex support needs for individuals with intellectual disability;
- Development of effective cross sector service responses to supporting people with intellectual disability and complex support needs that address: eligibility criteria; access barriers; effective planning responses; and high-quality service provision based on a skilled workforce.
- Applied research-based evaluation of intensive case management to establish its effectiveness as a model of support for people with intellectual disability and complex support needs.
- Commitment to appropriate and targeted early and ongoing intervention to increase quality outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability and complex support needs across their life course to reduce the current disproportionate high economic, social and human costs incurred in responding to crises and trauma.

Background

When intellectual disability co-occurs with other issues such as mental illness, complex health conditions, complex communication needs, behaviours that may be a harm to self or others, substance misuse, homelessness, trauma, violence and victimisation, intergenerational or circumstantial disadvantage, or involvement with the child protection or criminal justice systems, individuals are said to have complex support needs. Complexity is also shaped by gender, ethnicity and being an Aboriginal Australian or a New Zealand Maori. Complex support needs are characterised by a combination of some or all of the following:

- Breadth and depth of needs
- Multiple service involvement
- Challenges in holistic and effective service response
- Changing needs over time, more likely in times stress or crisis.

Evidence suggests that significant numbers of people with intellectual disability will experience complex support needs at some time in their lives. Across the board research shows that effective systemic responses to this group are hampered by a range of issues which exclude them, including narrow eligibility criteria for services, difficulties accessing those services that may be available, inadequate planning for their complex support service needs, thin markets of providers willing to provide support services and an under-skilled workforce, particularly in rural and regional areas of Australia and New Zealand.

* Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability. (2019). *Background paper for ASID position statement on intellectual disability and complex support needs* Available at: <https://www.asid.asn.au/publications/position-statements>