

5 April 2022

## **Open letter to The Hon Mr Brad Hazzard MP – Minister for Health and Medical Research**

Dear Minister,

People with intellectual disability have higher rates of preventable deaths and chronic and complex health conditions than others in the community. Their health status is further complicated by communication and sensory impairments, behaviours of concern and socio-economic factors.

While general practitioners provide good primary health care, many people with intellectual disability also require specialised clinical assessment and monitoring of their complex health status. Regular comprehensive health assessments in people with intellectual disability have been shown to increase preventive health interventions and identify previously unrecognised health needs. Such assessments require clinicians to have knowledge and skills in this complex area, as well as time to conduct the assessments and make recommendations. Not all general practitioners have these skills, most have busy practices and often do not have the time to complete these complex assessments.

For the last 23 years, the NSW Developmental Disability Health Unit (DDHU), operated by the Centre for Disability Studies has provided these regular, comprehensive, specialised clinical assessments, monitoring and advice to general practitioners about ongoing health care of their patients with an intellectual disability. The DDHU has been funded by a Ministerially Approved Grant and this funding will cease at the end of June 2022.

While it is recognised that NSW Health has established 6 intellectual disability health teams and 9 intellectual disability positions across the State, these teams provide time limited assessment and intervention. They do not provide ongoing review and monitoring of the complex health conditions but refer patients back to general practitioners. This may result in delayed detection of conditions or complications and therefore delayed management. This is particularly relevant during the current COVID pandemic where NSW health services and general practitioners are under pressure with management of patients with COVID.

Minister, we therefore urge you to retain funding for a clinical service that complements the work of existing intellectual disability health teams and supports general practitioners by providing

regular monitoring and comprehensive assessment for this vulnerable population of people with intellectual disability and complex health needs.

We would welcome the chance to speak with you and your team on this matter.

This contact would be coordinated through:

A/Prof Mary-Ann O'Donovan

Executive Director, Centre for Disability Studies

Associate Professor of Disability Studies, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney  
School of Medicine

Email: mary-ann.odonovan@cds.org.au

Yours sincerely,

**Associate Professor Mary-Ann O'Donovan**

Executive Director, Centre for Disability Studies, University of Sydney

**Professor Julian Trollor**

Chair, Intellectual Disability Mental Health, University of NSW

President, Australian Association of Developmental Disability Medicine (AADDM)

**Associate Professor Nathan Wilson**

President, Professional Association of Nurses in Developmental Disability Australia Inc.  
(PANDDA)

**Professor Adam Guastella**

Michael Crouch Chair in Child and Youth Mental Health, Brain & Mind Centre, University of Sydney

**Associate Professor Jennifer Smith-Merry**

Director, Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney

**Professor Andrew Cashin**

Professor of Autism and Intellectual Disability, Southern Cross University

**Dr Margaret Spencer**

Director of Field Education/Senior Lecturer, University of Sydney

**Dr Susan Collings**

Senior Research Fellow & Program Lead, Disability & Child Protection, University of Sydney

**Professor Ian Cameron**

Professor of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Sydney

**Associate Professor Stuart Wark**

School of Rural Medicine, University of New England

**Professor Bronwyn Hemsley**

Head of Speech Pathology, University of Technology Sydney

**Karen Stace**

Senior Manager State & Territory Operations & State Manager, NSW, National Disability Services (NDS)

**Justine O'Neill**

CEO, Council for Intellectual Disability

**Julia Squire**

CEO, Ability Options

**Philip Petrie**

CEO, Allevia

**Andrew Richardson**

CEO, Aruma

**Melissa Way**

CEO, Community Connections Australia

**Jackie Romein**

CEO, Flintwood Disability Services

**Robert Tinsey**

CEO, Greystaine Disability Services

**Brett Thompson**

CEO, Interaction Disability Services

**Jessica Stevens**

Senior Policy Lead, Strategy and Engagement, Life Without Barriers

**David Kneeshaw**

CEO, Unisson Disability

**Jason Lim**

General Manager, Warrah

**Andrew Anderson**

CEO, Windgap Foundation

**Cecile Sullivan Elder**

Executive Officer, Family Advocacy

**Sherie Avalos**

CEO, Down Syndrome NSW

**Matthew Mackay**  
CEO, Royal Rehab

**Linda Ward**  
General Manager, Service Delivery Scope (Aust)