



PROGRAM 3: PROJECT 3.015

WHAT DO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AUTISM?

A SNAPSHOT FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS

AIM



The aim of this study was to find out what the Autism CRC can do to assist health professionals to better understand how to provide high quality care to adults on the autism spectrum.

WHO TOOK PART?

Health professionals who worked in the following fields:

- PSYCHOLOGY
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
- GENERAL PRACTICE AND OTHER MEDICAL SETTINGS
- COUNSELLING
- PSYCHIATRY
- SOCIAL WORK
- NURSING

HOW WE DID THE RESEARCH

We conducted:

5 FOCUS GROUPS & **10** QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

of 32 health professionals across Australia.

WHAT HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TOLD US:

WHAT ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT TO TELL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ABOUT?

- ORAL HEALTH
- WOMEN'S HEALTH
- MEN'S HEALTH
- FATIGUE
- ANXIETY
- ABUSE
- EPILEPSY
- GENDER IDENTITY
- CONSTIPATION
- SLEEP
- STRESS-RELATED ILLNESS
- GASTROINTESTINAL CONCERNS
- VULNERABILITY DUE TO AGEING
- NUTRITION AND EATING ISSUES
- SELF-MEDICATION OR OVER-MEDICATION BY OTHERS

Adults with comorbid intellectual disability experience greater health disadvantage. Communication challenges exist particularly related to difficulties detecting and communicating pain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Autism CRC would like to thank the participants of this study for sharing their time and expertise with us. Without their contributions, important insights would not have been gained.



HOW SHOULD HEALTH PROFESSIONALS COMMUNICATE WITH ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM?

- Show empathy and understanding of sensory, communication and processing differences
- Provide visual information
- Give plenty of time for individuals to process verbal information and to respond
- Make sure you provide a quiet environment
- Understand the communication preferences and needs of the individual and ask yourself: how can I convey this information differently?
- Check for understanding by the individual
- Be respectful and offer choices
- Invite individuals to write down their concerns before and to take notes home with them after the appointment
- Be very clear about the benefits of health actions, such as physical activity
- Be aware that previous interactions with health professionals may have been poor and you may need to put a lot of work into gaining the trust of the individual with whom you are working.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TO BECOME INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT AUTISM?

- Targeting information to peak bodies, such as the Australian Medical Association
- Upskilling medical receptionists and practice nurses
- Advertising through the autism community
- Providing good quality, easily accessible information that helps health professionals
- Inserting useful information in commonly accessed e-newsletters and websites
- Including information in university curriculum

WHAT ABOUT INDIVIDUALS WHO DO NOT COMMUNICATE VERBALLY?

- Remember, even if the individual doesn't use words they are highly likely to understand what you are saying
- Talk to the person directly
- Watch the person for cues or reactions
- Check in for understanding
- Check with the person who has accompanied them to the appointment, regarding their communication style
- Check: who is the substitute decision maker, if anyone?

HOW CAN THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT BE ADAPTED TO BETTER SUIT THE NEEDS OF ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM?

- Have a 'spill out area' outside the waiting room, where someone can wait in a quiet room
- Avoid overhead florescent lights – use lamps
- Ask if anything in the room is causing distress including smells, sounds or visuals

FIND OUT MORE

Visit autismcrc.com.au for more information or email autism.adulthealth@uq.edu.au