



PROGRAM 3: PROJECT 3.015

WHAT DO HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AUTISM?

A SNAPSHOT FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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

HOW WE DID THE RESEARCH

We conducted:

5 FOCUS GROUPS & **10** QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

of **32** health professionals across Australia.

FIND OUT MORE

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

WHO WERE THE RESEARCHERS?



WHAT HEALTH PROFESSIONALS TOLD US:

WHAT MAKES A USEFUL WEBSITE FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS?

Participants told us that useful websites were ones that:

- ARE USER FRIENDLY AND ATTRACTIVE
- CONTAIN INFORMATION THAT ADDRESS THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT ANSWERED
- PRESENT A MIXTURE OF VISUAL AND WRITTEN CONTENT WITH FEW UNNECESSARY WORDS
- PROVIDE ACCURATE AND UP-TO-DATE CONTENT
- REFERENCE ALL INFORMATION SOURCES
- HAVE EASY-TO-USE LINKS (NO MORE THAN 2 OR 3 CLICKS)
- ARE EASY TO FIND
- CONTAIN PRINTABLE CONTENT (SUCH AS PDFS)
- PROVIDE CONTACT DETAILS FOR WEBSITE AUTHORS
- PROVIDE EVIDENCE-BASED TOOLS FOR ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM
- USE VIDEOS AND CHECKLISTS
- HAVE SPECIFIC INFORMATION FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS (GPS, ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM, SUPPORT PEOPLE)

WHAT HEALTH ISSUES DO ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM FREQUENTLY EXPERIENCE?

- 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

It was highlighted that adults with intellectual disability experience greater health disadvantage, related to difficulties detecting pain and health problems, particularly when communication challenges exist.

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
- Advertising through the autism community
- Upskilling medical receptionists and practice nurses
- Including information in university curriculum
- Inserting useful information in commonly accessed e-newsletters and websites
- Providing good quality, easily accessible information that helps health professionals

WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR ADULTS ON THE SPECTRUM TO KNOW ABOUT HEALTH PROFESSIONALS?

- Remember to take your health history to appointments. It could be useful to write things down
- If you can't make an earlier booking, you might like to ask if you can be told if there are cancellations for a sooner appointment
- Ask for the first appointment of the day to avoid delays and long waits in the waiting room
- Ask for a quiet space to wait
- Bring a 'this is my communication style' checklist to your appointment and show the health professional straight away
- Make notes during your appointment so you can remember what was discussed

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

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