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Access to Health Care

Outcomes of a Hospital-Based Anaesthesia Service for People with Intellectual Disability

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Government of South Australia

Health
Northern Adelaide
Local Health Network

Flinders University

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South Australian Intellectual Disability Health Service (SAIDHS)

- SAIDHS Is a place for people with intellectual disability to go for medical support in South Australia
- Referrals can come from anyone who knows the person with ID
- Our patients often see a few different clinicians
- We provide health assessment, consultation and prepare a care plan

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- SAIDHS sees adults with an intellectual or developmental disability who have **complex** needs.
- **Complex** means having a lot of different support needs.

- This can be because of:
  - Mental illness
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Communication difficulties
  - Behavioural support needs
  - Other disabilities or health needs
  - Other things that make it hard to use other health services

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Our Team

- Specialist Doctors:
  - General Practitioner
  - Rehabilitation Physician
  - Neurologist
  - Psychiatrists
  - Anaesthetist
- Nurses
- Allied Health:
  - Occupational Therapist
  - Speech Pathologist
  - Social Worker
  - Pharmacist
  - Positive Behaviour Support Practitioner
- Admin staff

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Barriers to Health Care

- People with intellectual disability face barriers to accessing basic health care.
- Some people can feel scared and worried about medical settings and procedures.
- Especially people who have had bad experiences in the past.
- As a result, some people may not want to have health tests done.

Weise, Pollack, Britt & Trollor (2016); Rava, Rosenau, Wilkie, Bernacki, Curcio & Kuo (2023)

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Barriers to Health Care

- There can also be other reasons:
  - Medical staff may not know about intellectual disability
  - Communication difficulties
  - Changes not being made to meet what a person needs (reasonable adjustments)
  - Not providing health services at all
  - Discrimination

Ali, Scior & Ratti et al (2013); Barrington, Fisher, Harris-Roxas et al (2025); Drozd, Chadwich & Jester (2020 & 2021)

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A Human Rights Approach to Health Care

- People with disability have the right to access the same range and quality of health care services as everyone else.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD), UN General Assembly (2007)

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General Anaesthesia

- General anaesthesia (GA) is when a person is given medicine so they are unconscious and don't feel any pain. The medical tests can then be done safely.

- Providing health care tests, scans and treatments under anaesthesia in hospital is one approach.

ANZCA (2023)

- This is used a lot in dental care. There are guidelines which can be helpful to provide other health services under GA for people with intellectual disability.

Geddis-Regan, Gray, Buckingham et al (2022)

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Our new 'Health Care Access Service'

- We worked with
  - Modbury Hospital
  - Special Needs Unit, SA Dental
- We asked Westmead and Monash Hospitals about their experience with doing this
- We developed a new service to provide pre-procedure sedation and general anaesthesia in hospital for people with moderate to profound intellectual disability and complex needs.
- The service was informed based on Australian and New Zealand guidelines on anaesthesia and sedation for the general population

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A coordinated team approach-

- To provide accessible, high-quality care that meets each person's unique needs.
- We have a waitlist
- Planning starts at least 1 month prior
- Must be ready to be creative and problem solve

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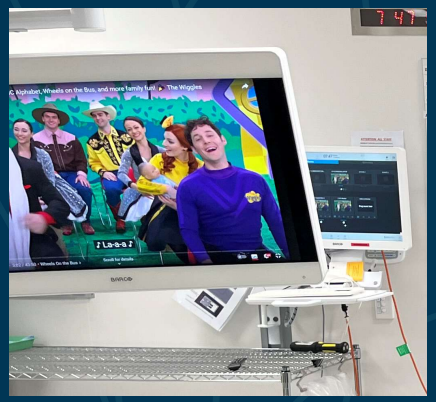
Environment

- Somethings can't be changed but we change the things that we can



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Follow-up

- Nurse checks in with the patient
- Doctors review the results
- Further follow-up care provided

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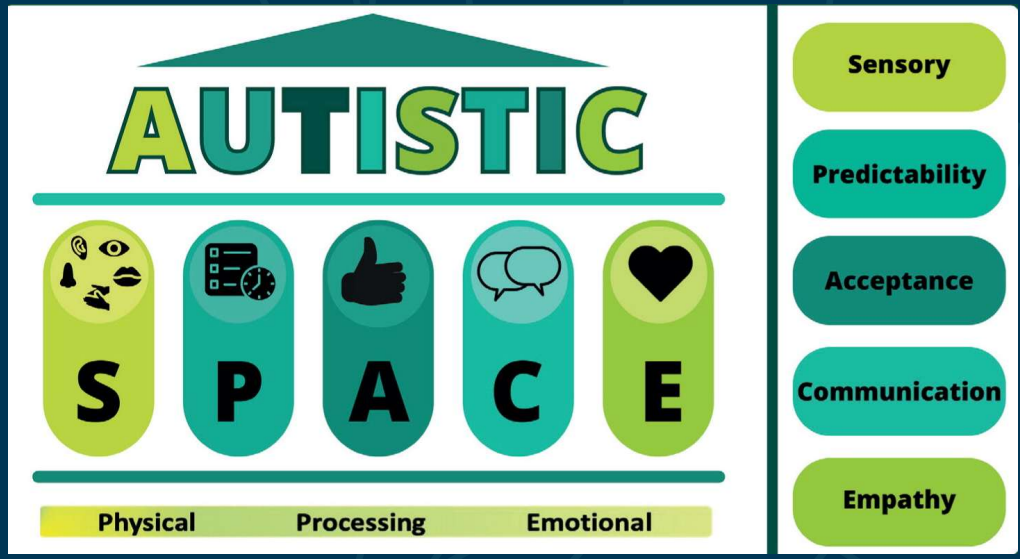
Apply the 'Autistic SPACE' framework

- Person-centred and trauma-informed approach

- Learn about the person's:
  - sensory needs
  - environmental stressors
  - communication style

- Adopt strategies to reduce anxiety:
  - Predictability
  - Known people
  - Provide information on physical environment, staff, process and procedures in advance in accessible formats



Doherty, McCowan & Shaw (2023); Shaw, Doherty, McCowan & Eccles (2022)

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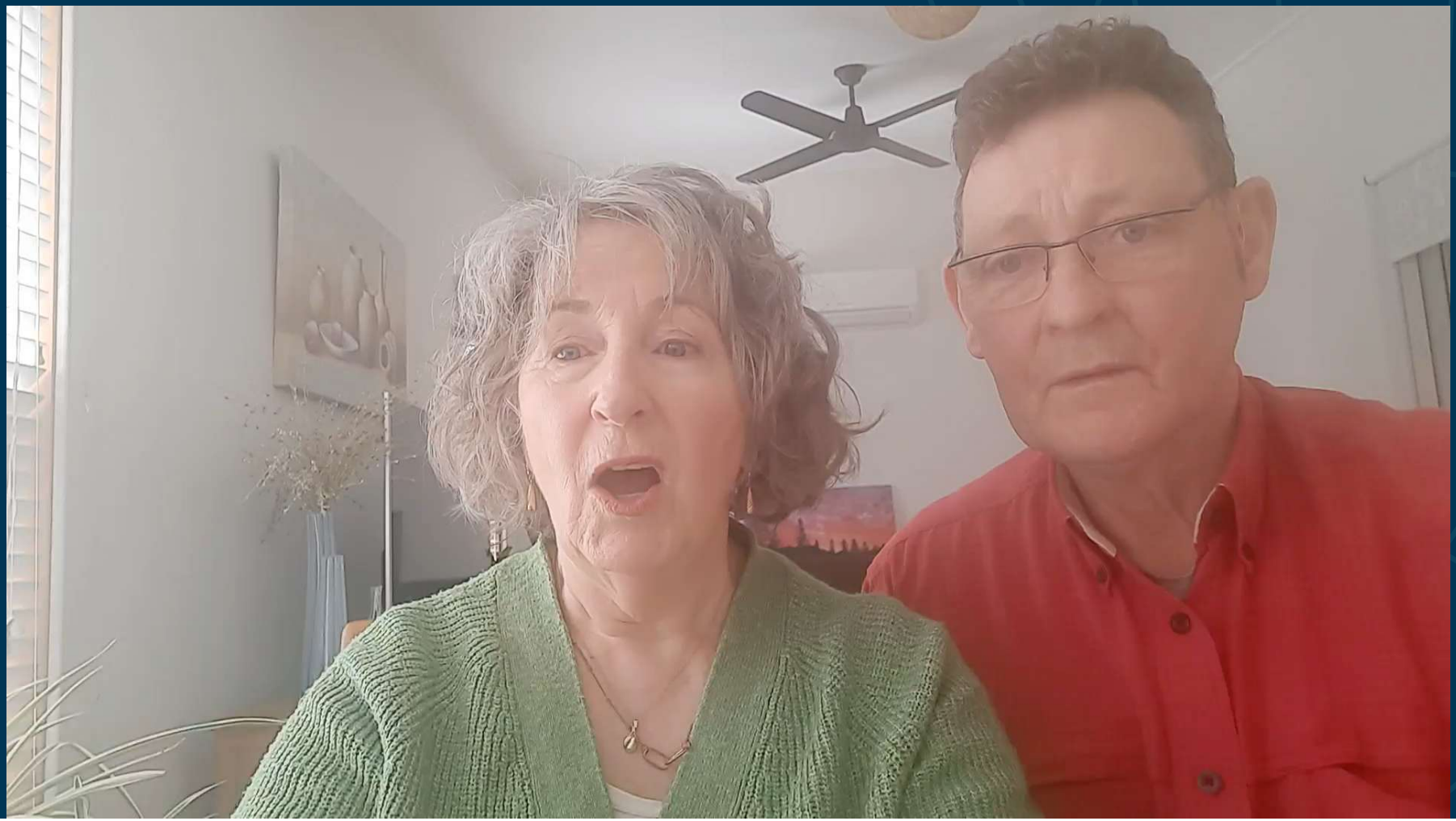
Julie's* Story

- 25yo woman who is autistic and has intellectual disability
- Julie spent time reading her social story with her parents and carers in the weeks prior
- Julie remembered and repeated words from her social story on the day *("I've had my needle now")*
- Julie's parents stayed with her and her favourite tv show was playing in the room, scary medical equipment was covered or removed from the room
- Before going home Julie said *"This is a nice hospital"*

Julie's* Parent's perspective



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Outcomes

To date (started February 2024):

- 53 remain on wait-list awaiting 1st sedation
- 33 sedation has been completed
  - 4 people have already received the service twice.
  - 2 people were deferred after inadequate sedation response to pre-medication

The Central Adelaide Local Health Network Human Research Ethics Committee have endorsed this quality assurance study for publication (Ref No 20739).

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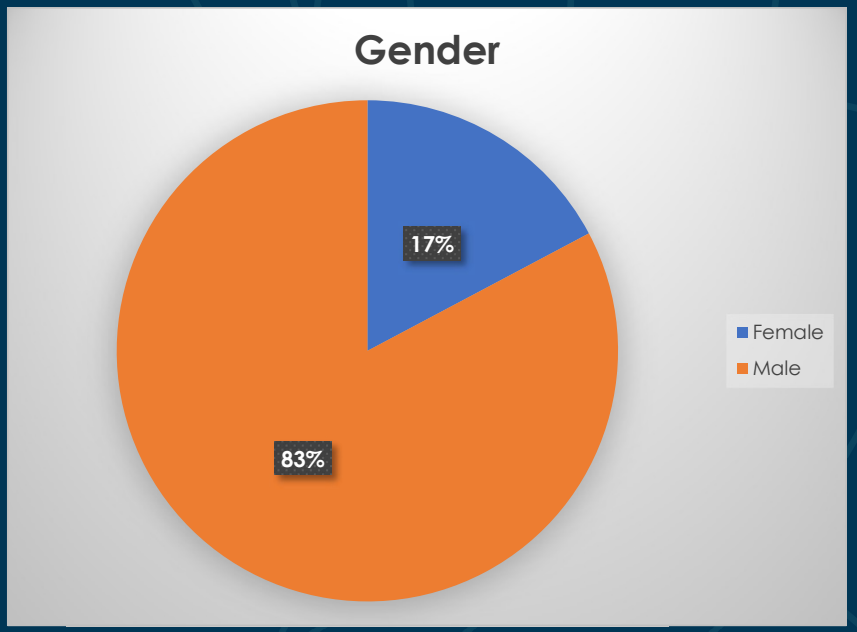
Demographics

AGE	
Median	**24 yrs (IQR 24 - 31)**
Range	**19-69 yrs**



- Over 75% are also Autistic. FF1

Slide 17

FF1 To change

Farima Forooziya, 2025-06-15T11:05:00.197

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Oral Premedication Regime

- Determined and prescribed by Anesthetist during pre anesthetic consult.
- Clonidine is most commonly prescribed.
- If required in combination with a Benzodiazepine or Promethazine.

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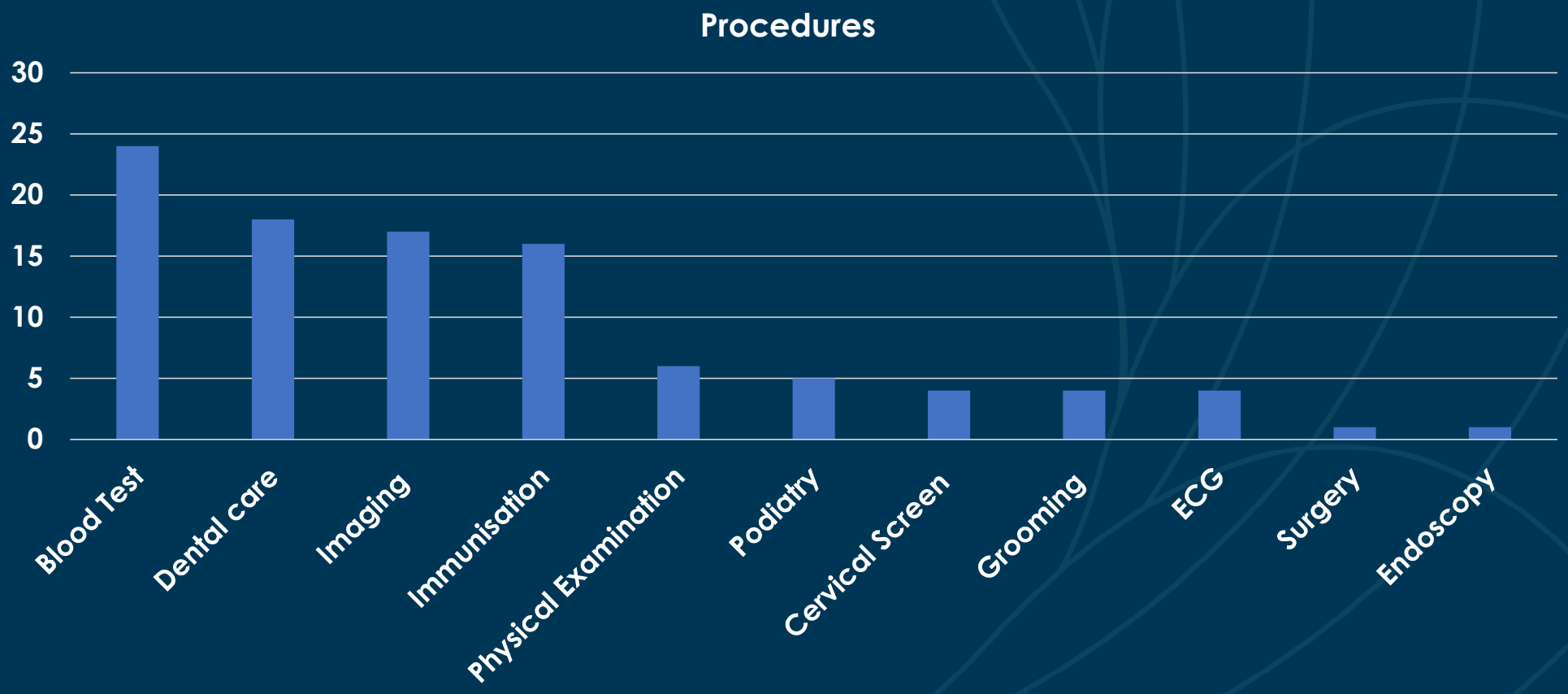
OUTCOMES



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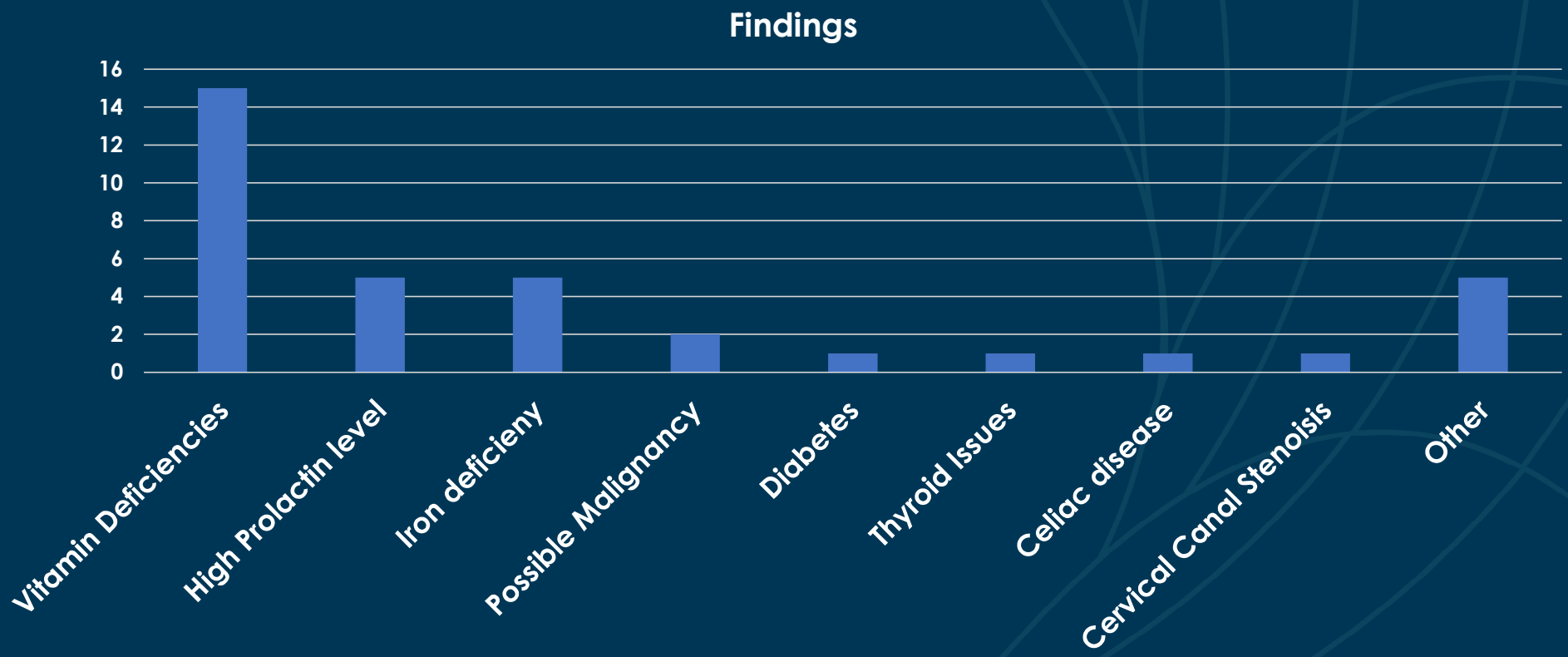
Outcomes



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Take home messages…

- Many people with intellectual disabilities cannot easily have medical check-ups in regular clinics.
- Because of this, their health problems can be missed or not treated properly.
- People need coordinated care to get the best treatment.
- The main barrier often is a rigid healthcare system that does not adapt to their needs.
- A person-centred and trauma informed approach is the key.

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Acknowledgements

- Julie and her parents for allowing us to share their story
- Colleagues and Collaborators
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Questions…

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Thank you ☺

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