Supporting people with intellectual disability and complex health care needs

A/ Professor Stella Koritsas &
Dr Caroline Hart

November 2025

Background

- People with disability have poorer health than others
- Often people with disability have more than one long-term health condition
- Helping with health needs can be hard, especially in Supported Independent Living (SIL):
  - Staff have limited clinical knowledge
  - Funding may not be enough
  - Health information is missing
  - Broken up health systems

The model of support

- Clinical practice advisors visited SIL:
  - Checked and organized client health information
  - Put together a summary of client health needs
  - Pointed out gaps in care for staff
  - Gave specific advice to staff
  - Found what training staff need

Definitions

- Complex health care needs:
  - High Intensity Daily Personal Activities
  - Disability-Related Health Supports
  - Examples:
    - Mealtime management
    - Urinary continence
    - Bowel care
    - Diabetes
    - Ventilation
    - Dysphagia

Aim

- To find out how the model of support impacts staff
- To understand what helps staff support clients with complex health care needs living in SIL

Method – what did we do?

Interviews

We conducted

7

Interviews with CPAs and others from the Project team

Focus groups (VIC and NSW)

We conducted

7 + **8**

Focus groups with 27 house supervisors / site managers

Focus groups with 47 DSWs

What is the impact of the model of support?

GREATER AWARENESS OF HEALTH ISSUES

INCREASED CONFIDENCE IN CARING FOR CLIENTS

BETTER HEALTH RECORDS

GETTING HEALTH ADVICE AND SUPPORT

GOOD RESULTS FOR CLIENTS

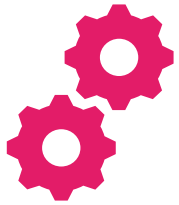
> …we've seen a very big improvement healthwise since we started following [the Clinical Practice Advisors] proposals and stuff like that… (House supervisor)

> …I think it also does give us that reassurance because we are dealing with very complex health conditions, and some pretty scary things can happen from time to time. So, it is nice to know you've got that support and feedback (Disability Support Worker)

What helps staff support clients with complex health care needs?

CONTINUOUS CLINICAL SUPPORT

MORE STAFF TRAINING



HELP FROM THE WORKPLACE, TECHNOLOGY & SYSTEMS

STAFF EXPERIENCE & UNDERSTANDING OF CLIENTS

THE STOP & WATCH TOOL

What gets in the way of supporting clients with complex health care needs?

LIMITED HEALTH KNOWLEDGE AMONG DISABILITY STAFF

CHANGING CLIENT NEEDS

BAD EXPERIENCES WITH HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE, PROCESSES & TECHNOLOGY

> …some house supervisors are amazing. Like they're super organised, they're across things…and some of them have worked in disability for a long time. They might not have degrees of whatever but they have a high level of understanding about disability and issues (Clinical Practice Advisor)

> …condensing the amount of paperwork for those annual health appointments, because there is a lot of it and that can take a long time… to make it a bit more simplified (Disability Support Worker)

Recommendations

- Model of support
- NDIS plans
- Staff training and support
- Technology and systems
- Future research
- Advocacy

Contact details

A/ Professor Stella Koritsas

skoritsas@scopeaust.org.au

Dr Caroline Hart

chart@scopeaust.org.au