

# Access to Health Promotion Programs For Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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## Background

Nationally, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are reported to have higher rates of chronic illness - including diabetes when compared to their peers without disabilities (Shogren et al., 2006; Reichard and Stolze, 2011; Sundblom et al., 2015; Comer-HaGans et al., 2016). In addition, individuals with I/DD live shorter lives and are four times more likely to report their health to be fair or poor when compared to individuals who do not have a disability (Krahn et al., 2015; Hithersay et al., 2014).

In Michigan, the trends are similar. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) reported that individuals with disabilities have significantly poorer physical and mental health status (2015). Individuals with disabilities also had substantially higher rates of chronic conditions compared to persons without disabilities (MDHHS, 2015).

Research suggests that when individuals with I/DD are enrolled in health education and promotion programs designed for individuals without I/DD they do not receive the same benefits as their counterparts (Scott and Havercamp, 2016; Heller et al., 2011). Although few programs have been adapted for people with I/DD, initial results suggest interventions that address health behaviors in the I/DD population produce health benefits for individuals enrolled in these programs (Heller et al., 2011; Sundblom et al., 2015; Krahn et al., 2015).

## Challenges to Accessibility

Accessible and appropriate health education and health promotion programs and equal access to information and health programs are integral to closing the disparities gap.

Challenges to accessibility include:

- Limited accessible health education and promotion programs
- Limited access to healthy foods
- Limited control over food choices
- Access to transportation
- Costs

## Strategies to Improve Accessibility

The Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute conducted a literature review to identify best practices and evidence-based adaptations that may improve the accessibility of health education and promotion programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### Methods:

Databases searched: PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google. The search was expanded to include all health promotion and health education programs that have been adapted to or developed for individuals with I/DD. References of retained articles were reviewed to identify additional articles.

Articles retained were then searched on Scopus to catch any relevant articles that cited retained articles.

### Peer Mentors

In the Healthy Lifestyle Change Program, the authors mention the integral role peer mentors had in supporting individuals with developmental disabilities in making behavioral changes to improve health (Bazzano et al., 2009).

The authors argue that peers are better equipped than professionals to support others who face similar life experiences and barriers to health.

### Supplement Curriculum

Increase accessibility of education materials by integrating visual and auditory supplements to the curriculum.

- Present materials using plain language
- Supplement curriculum with visual aids such as pictures and videos
- Include participatory activities

## References

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## Tracking Tools

Use alternative methods to track diet and exercise. Some examples include:

- Stoplight guide
- Photo assisted recall
- Smartphone applications
- Wearable devices

## Buddy System

Engage service providers and individuals' natural supports to participate in health education programs with individuals with I/DD. Caregivers often have significant influence over the day-to-day implementation of concepts learned throughout the health promotion program.

## Incentives

Saunders et al. (2011) had program participants compete for the most amount of steps to reach the 1,000,000 step mark on a game board.

Individuals received incentives for every 100,000 steps (reported by pedometer) and marked their progress on a game board for physical activity. Competition between participants could be an incentive for individuals to engage in activities.

## Contact

### Michigan Developmental Disabilities Institute

The Institute's mission is to contribute to the development of inclusive communities and quality of life for people with disabilities and their families through a culturally-sensitive statewide program of interdisciplinary education, community support and services, research and dissemination of information.

For more information visit our website: <https://ddi.wayne.edu/>

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