

Health care of people with intellectual disability

Polypharmacy

What is polypharmacy?

Polypharmacy is the use of five or more medicines at the same time, including prescription, over the counter and complementary medicines.

What are the risks for people with intellectual disability?

- Polypharmacy may be necessary and appropriate for patients with complex medical needs. However, if medicines are not reviewed and monitored, polypharmacy can result in complications.
- People with intellectual disability are often at higher risk of adverse effects from medications as the information about their medicine may be difficult to understand. This includes important information such as:
 - The reason for taking the medicine
 - The name of the medicine, including the generic substitution
 - How and when to take the medicine
 - Potential side effects.

What should health services do?

- Undertake a medication review using [Best Possible Medication History \(BPMH\)](#). BPMH involves reconciling and confirming medicines with at least two sources and includes a discussion with the person, their family, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service providers and guardians.
- Ensure the person understands the medicines they are taking. Provide information in the most appropriate format, which may include pictures or diagrams, Easy Read, audio, video, or braille.
- Commence discharge planning early into an admission, particularly in relation to medicines management.
- Provide an Easy Read medication list on discharge. Explain any medication changes and the reason for the change to the person, and their family, disability support workers or guardian.

- Provide discharge information about medicines to the person's GP and/or their community pharmacist to ensure medication changes are followed up.

Relevant National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards actions

Action 4.01 Clinicians use the safety and quality systems from the Clinical Governance Standard when:

- Implementing policies and procedures for medication management
- Managing risks associated with medication management
- Identifying training requirements for medication management

Action 4.03: Clinicians use organisational processes from the Partnering with Consumers Standard in medication management to:

- Actively involve patients in their own care
- Meet the patient's information needs
- Share decision-making

Action 4.06: Clinicians review a patient's current medication orders against their best possible medication history and the documented treatment plan and reconcile any discrepancies on presentation and at transitions of care.

Where do I get more information?

- Psychotropic Medicines in Cognitive Disability or Impairment Clinical Care Standard
- The UNSW 3DN Responsible Prescribing for health professionals
- The World Health Organization report on Medication Safety in Polypharmacy
- Speech Pathology Australia Communications Hub
- Queensland Centre for Intellectual and Developmental Disability
- How to be a respectful communication partner.

For more information, please visit: safetyandquality.gov.au/intellectual-disability

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