

Eye health of Victorians with an intellectual disability

Fact sheet issued October 2011

Eye damage is reduced by wearing a hat and sunglasses when in the sun

Damage to the eye can occur from exposure to high levels of ultra violet (UV) radiation. The risk of eye damage can be reduced by wearing a hat and sunglasses when in the sun to protect eyes .

People with an intellectual disability are more likely to wear a hat

According to the *Victorian Population Health Survey of People with an Intellectual Disability 2009* (VPHS-ID 2009), more than three quarters (77.7 per cent) of people with an intellectual disability were reported to usually wear a hat in the sun, higher than the general Victorian population (52.6 per cent).

People with an intellectual disability are less likely to wear sunglasses

According to the VPHS-ID 2009, almost four in ten (40.3 per cent) people with an intellectual disability were reported to usually wear sunglasses in the sun, lower than the general Victorian population (74.0 per cent).

Ask or observe if a person with an intellectual disability has experienced a change in vision

According to the VPHS-ID 2009, 13 per cent of people with an intellectual disability were reported to have noticed a change in their vision in the past 12 months, much lower than the general Victorian population (41.0 per cent).

Assessing vision and visual correction (usually glasses) is important for people with an intellectual disability. The provision of glasses can improve the quality of life for people with an intellectual disability. Good vision is important for simple practical things that provide enjoyment such as walking, eating and drinking, dressing, looking at the newspaper and photographs, signing birthday cards, seeing the dog and admiring views. Seeing people's faces and being able to recognise people across a room can boost confidence in social situations and contribute to greater social inclusion.

Many people with an intellectual disability will notice a change in their vision and organise to see an eye care specialist, as required. Other people with an intellectual disability may rely on the observations of their support network to identify changes in vision and assistance from their support network to see an eye care specialist.

The following signs may indicate that a person has a change in vision. Does the person:

- get close to objects
- get close to people when speaking to them
- bump into things
- appear to have changed their reading habits
- sit close to the television.

For people who need to wear glasses, does the person:

- actually wear their glasses
- complain about headaches when wearing their glasses
- complain that their glasses are blurry (even when they are clean).

Figure: Sun protective behaviours



The black bars in the graph indicate 95% confidence interval

For further information

The VPHS-ID 2009 is a statewide survey the Department of Health undertook to collect information on the health and wellbeing of people with an intellectual disability in Victoria. This is the first time the survey has been carried out in Victoria.

The full report of the VPHS-ID 2009 is available at:
<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/>

The Better Health Channel includes information about eye care at:
http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Eye_care_orthoptists

The Australian College of Optometry (ACO) provides eye care services for people on low incomes including people with a disability in metropolitan and rural areas. For further information contact: 03 9349 7472 or visit:
<http://aco.org.au/eye-care-services/eye-care-on-low-incomes>

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