



Adult Learning Disabilities

1. Introduction

Learning disabilities (LDs) affect a person's ability to learn, communicate and carry out 'everyday' tasks. LDs are defined as an onset of disability which began before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development. LDs are also defined as a combination of a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information; to learn new skills along with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning).

People with a learning disability usually experience a greater range and complexity of health problems than the general population. They are known to have additional mental health needs; around 22% of those with a learning disability have dementia (compared with 6% of the general population) and rates of schizophrenia are around three times higher. They also experience higher rates of epilepsy (22% compared with 1% in the general population), cerebral palsy and hypothyroidism. Those with LDs have a higher prevalence of coronary heart disease, and respiratory, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal problems, including osteoporosis. People with LDs also have higher levels of impaired vision (around 25%) and hearing problems (40%) than the non-learning disabled population. They are more likely to have poor dental hygiene and dental care. People with a LD are more likely than the general population to be either over- or underweight.

People with learning disabilities experience difficulties in accessing mainstream services, including health, leisure and employment. They are known to have low reporting rates of illnesses and symptoms and they receive less regular health checks. Health screening of adults with a learning disability registered with GPs has revealed high levels of unmet physical and mental health needs¹. Additionally, some people with learning disabilities exhibit challenging behaviours, including self-injury and self-neglect and as a consequence, require a higher degree of tailored support and healthcare.

Assessments of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and a person's living skills and social functioning are often used to measure intellectual abilities to determine whether a person has a learning disability. These assessments are also used to establish eligibility for a specialist learning disability service.

2. The Local Picture

2.1 Characteristics of people with learning difficulties²

Data collected during October 2010 from 48 of Hounslow's 55 GP practices identified 714 patients as having learning disabilities. The majority of these patients were male (58%) while the average age was 36 years old, although the age profile differs across different categories of learning difficulties. ([Figure 1](#)) The average age these patients were identified

¹ Michael, Sir J. (2008) Healthcare for all.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_106126.pdf

² Note that these figures differ from those within the London Borough of Hounslow's '[Joint Commissioning Strategy for People with Learning Disabilities and Autistic Spectrum Conditions 2011-2016](#)'.

by the NHS as having an LD was 17.7 years. The standardised rate of learning disabilities in Hounslow is 339 per 100,000 men and 259 per 100,000 women. ([Table 1](#))

There are 714 individuals with LD recorded by GP practices³ in Hounslow; however, only 251(35%) are registered with the London Borough of Hounslow (LBH) as being domicile and receive funding for support. There are 147 individuals who are in receipt of Continuing Health Care packages for an underlying LD, but only 38 (26%) are registered with a GP. The LD records of GPs in Hounslow do not match the LBH records; there are 463 individuals on the GP records who do not appear in LBH register. This could be due to several reasons, including: a) some individuals being registered with a GP in Hounslow but not residents of the Borough, therefore not registered with the LBH; or b) registered with a GP as having a LD because they are recipients of disability allowance (e.g. Mobility Allowance) but not eligible for LBH learning disability support. ([Figure 2](#))

The Government White Paper [Valuing People](#) noted an imbalance in the under-representation of people from South Asian communities using learning disability services with an estimated prevalence rate of three times that of the general population. In terms of ethnic monitoring in Hounslow, people who describe themselves as 'White' make up the largest proportion of people with a learning disability, followed by South Asians (particularly Indian and Pakistani). ([Table 27](#))

2.2 Health status of people with learning disabilities

Records from GP practices show around 61% of adult patients with learning difficulties are classified as overweight or obese (through BMI recording); a further 11% were underweight. ([Table 4](#)) Of those patients with their blood pressure recorded, 6% were identified as being at risk of hypertension. ([Table 5](#))

GP practices records also highlight high rates of poor health among Hounslow patients with learning difficulties. Approximately 18% were recorded as having asthma, 16% with diabetes, 10% with heart disease, and 9% with renal disease. One in three LD patients were diagnosed with a chronic neurological disease. ([Table 8](#))

3. Strategic Leadership and Collaboration

In line with national trends, the prevalence of people with a learning disability in Hounslow is expected to rise with increasing life expectancy, growing numbers of children and young people with complex and multiple disabilities who survive into adulthood and the rise in the numbers of school-aged children with autistic spectrum disorders, some of whom will have learning disabilities.

NHS Hounslow and the London Borough of Hounslow recognise the health and life inequalities experienced by people with learning disabilities and aim to build upon the existing work in this area by improving the equity and equality of healthcare provision and mainstream facilities. The following services are currently offered to people with learning disabilities:

- A Direct Enhanced Service offers annual health checks to people with learning disabilities who are registered with both their GP and the LBH.

³ This includes 44 GP practices out of the 55 in Hounslow



- NHS Hounslow works closely with Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare Trust and West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust to address the wider needs of people with learning disabilities. Initiatives include providing staff training on learning difficulties awareness, 'flagging and tracking' patients with learning disabilities and 'get to know your hospital' events provide confidence to people with learning disabilities and improve access to information.
- The 'Green Light' clinical advisory group provides a toolkit to support better provision of mental health services for people with learning disabilities. Work in this area is ongoing, including developing an inpatient protocol for those with learning difficulties.

To participate in mainstream services (including housing, employment, leisure and relationships), people with a learning disability may require additional support. This is often provided by local and national third sector organisations, usually commissioned by the NHS or Local Authority. These organisations can provide valuable advocacy services to help adults with a learning disability access and have involvement in improving services.

4. Managing Transition

4.1 Children's transition

It is also anticipated that higher numbers of young people with learning disabilities will be transferring to adult social services over the coming years as they turn 18 years old. Estimates indicate that around 35 children will transfer to adult social services in 2011, 63 children in 2012, 91 children in 2013 and 77 in 2014.

Budget pressures have affected both Adult and Children's Teams for disabilities in the LBH, resulting in a need to review how these services will be provided in the future. In light of this, Hounslow Adults and Children's Services are planning to undertake a review of Transition, 'Moving On in Hounslow', during 2011. This review will include talking with young people, parents/carers and professionals across Children and Adult services about their views and experiences of Transition Services in Hounslow. The review is intended to help shape the development of a Strategic Plan for Learning Difficulties and inform the development of a Transition Strategy by October 2011.

There are also a number of younger adults with learning disabilities who have experienced early onset dementia who will require equal access to mental health services via the new Cognitive Impairment pathway.

4.2 Older people's transition

For adults approaching later life, there is no definitive pathway for the transfer of people with learning disabilities to move into older people's services. Many people remain under the care of the Community Learning Disability Team (CLDT). In Hounslow, there are currently 63 older people with learning disabilities known to the Community Learning Disability Team.

This may be an appropriate model of care where a person is already known to the CLDT and their primary need is their learning disability, however, where a person is not known to the CLDT, and/or their primary needs become more age-related (e.g. complex bereavement issues; dementia; age-related physical decline; deterioration in functioning; social isolation/lack of support, etc.), the older people's service may be better placed to support these individuals. It is expected that learning disability services would work jointly with and support older people's services in this situation.



5. Priorities

In 2011/12 the priorities in this area are to:

- Ensure that people with learning disabilities have access to mainstream healthcare services; and
- Ensure that people with learning disabilities are supported in finding suitable and affordable local housing.

6. Summary of Need

The table summarising the needs in this area has not been completed as it is not considered appropriate for Adult Learning Disabilities.