
Position Paper on Substance Use Disorder Treatment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Issue

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities may require treatment for substance use disorder at some point in their lives. This treatment, when needed, must be readily available and effective for the individuals who need it. Currently, there is no widely used protocol for the treatment of substance use disorder specific to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While this issue has been ignored for years, it is evident that this gap in services is having a significant impact on the lives of many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The current treatment models also do not appear to produce long-term positive outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Access to appropriate substance use disorder treatment for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities must become a priority for the developmental disability community as well as the larger substance use disorder treatment community if we expect to see improvement in this area. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities must have accessible, dependable and high-quality treatment when a substance use disorder manifests. Additionally, it is critically important that the treatment models used are evidence-based and have been designed to meet the unique needs of these individuals. Risk factors that are specific to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities must also be considered.

Position

The Arc of New Jersey believes that:

- All people, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve compassionate, high quality and clinically-relevant treatment for substance use disorder.
- Treatment for substance use disorder must never be denied on the basis of the existence of an intellectual or developmental disability.
- Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities should have universal access to appropriate, affordable, accessible, timely, and comprehensive substance use disorder treatment throughout their lives. Treatment should be based on a best-practice approach and should include the prevention and treatment of substance use disorder.
- Treatment models for substance use disorder must be designed with the specific risk factors and needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in mind.
- The substance use disorder treatment community must be empowered, through training and technical assistance, to address the full range of substance use disorder issues that are prevalent in the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- The rights of self-determination must be respected in this process. Substance use disorder treatment should be provided only with the informed consent of the individual, or individual's guardian where applicable, and should be tailored to the individual's unique circumstances.

Adopted by The Arc of New Jersey Board of Directors December 1, 2022
Review date: December 2025