

CONDITION GUIDE

Intellectual disability: a plain-English guide

Plain-English information for people with an intellectual disability and the families who back them. What it is, what people ask, what helps day to day, and where the NDIS and Kinship fit in.

“I want to choose what I do on Saturday.” For many people with an intellectual disability, that’s what good support is for. This guide is for the person and the family who backs them.

Inclusion Australia, the national voice of people with an intellectual disability and their families, describes intellectual disability as a lifelong condition that affects a person’s intellectual skills and their behaviour in different situations. It can show up in communication, memory, understanding, problem solving, self-care, and social and emotional skills.

A person can be born with an intellectual disability or acquire it before age 18. Common causes include Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, premature birth and childhood brain injury. Many people also live with another disability, such as autism, a hearing or physical disability, or a mental health condition.

Every person is different. Some live on their own with a bit of help from family, friends or paid supports. Others need support with many parts of life. And with the right support, Inclusion Australia says, every person with an intellectual disability can learn and develop new skills.

A note on words: Inclusion Australia says most people use “person with an intellectual disability”, and some people prefer “disabled person”. We follow the person’s lead.

Key facts

- **460,000** people in Australia have an intellectual disability
- **4.5%** of children aged 0–14 have an intellectual disability
- **2×** almost twice as common in boys as in girls
- **Lifelong** and people keep learning new skills with the right support

Figures: Inclusion Australia, citing Australian Bureau of Statistics data (page last updated December 2021).

What helps, day to day

- **Plain words, one step at a time.** Short sentences, real examples and time to answer. Easy Read documents help too: Inclusion Australia and the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability both publish Easy Read resources.
- **A yearly check with the GP.** Inclusion Australia's It's Doctor Time! campaign encourages a yearly health check, even when you feel well. Medicare helps cover the cost.
- **Their choice, with support.** Supported decision making means the person makes the call, with help to understand the options. It takes longer than deciding for them. It's worth it.
- **Help with money and forms.** Using money and dealing with government systems are common areas where people want support (Inclusion Australia). One trusted person who explains the letters makes a big difference.
- **A real job, if they want one.** Inclusion Australia's Everyone Can Work project shares employment pathways for people with an intellectual disability.

How the NDIS can help

To be eligible for the NDIS you need to be younger than 65 when your application is received, an Australian citizen or permanent resident (or Protected Special Category visa holder) living in Australia, and have an impairment that's likely to be permanent and substantially reduces your ability to do everyday things.

Intellectual impairment is one of the impairment types the NDIS lists. A diagnosis can help, and the NDIS will ask for evidence from treating professionals about how the disability affects daily life (Inclusion Australia; NDIS).

- 1 Connect with an NDIS partner (use the office finder at [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)) or call the NDIS on 1800 800 110.
- 2 Work with your treating health professional to gather evidence about your disability and how it affects daily life.
- 3 Complete your application with your NDIS partner, or by yourself using the access request form.
- 4 Submit it. Your NDIS partner can do this for you, or use the NDIS service hub, post it (NDIA, GPO Box 700, Canberra ACT 2601) or take it to a local office.
- 5 Wait for the decision. The NDIS tells you within 90 days once your application and all your evidence are in. You can ask for a review if you disagree.



The NDIS is changing. New NDIS laws passed in August 2026. From 1 October 2026, budgets for social and community participation and for daily living skills are being reduced as plans are reassessed or newly approved, and a new way of planning is due from April 2027. Check [ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au) for the latest.

How Kinship Uniting Services can help

We support people, not diagnoses. For someone with an intellectual disability, that means support that listens, explains things clearly and lets the person lead.

We understand. People with an intellectual disability want what everyone wants: friends, a job or something meaningful to do, a say in how their week runs, and to be spoken to directly, not talked about. Too often support does things for people instead of with them.

Families have usually been advocating for years, at school, at appointments and with the NDIS. Many are also quietly thinking about what happens next, as parents get older.

We're qualified. Kinship Uniting Services is a registered NDIS provider (4-GWVHCEY), operating in disability and aged care since 2017, and we've supported hundreds of clients and families. Our founder, Shazia Begum, has spent more than 15 years alongside people living with disability. Our registered high intensity supports include medication management, and dementia and behaviour support. We're registered to deliver Supported Independent Living (SIL). The same support worker comes every visit, and families get updates as standard.

Here's how we can help.

- **Daily living and personal care.** Help at home with routines, meals, personal care and the jobs that keep a week running, at the person's pace. **Daily living support**
- **Community participation.** Getting to the things that matter: the shops, the gym, a class, catching up with friends. **Community participation**
- **Life skills and group activities.** Building skills for more independence, one real task at a time. **Life skills**
- **Supported Independent Living.** For adults who want to live with housemates, with support at home. We're registered to deliver SIL; call us to talk about current availability. **Supported Independent Living**
- **Respite for the family.** A familiar support worker stays with your family member at home or takes them out, so you can rest, get to your own appointments or simply have the afternoon. **NDIS-funded or booked privately. Respite care**
- **When needs are complex.** Medication management, and dementia and behaviour support, are on our registered high intensity list. **High intensity support**



Continence support, when it's part of daily life. The National Continence Helpline (1800 33 00 66) gives free, confidential advice from nurse continence specialists, including on funding such as the NDIS and the Continence Aids Payment Scheme. Our sister business, Equipit, supplies continence products such as adult nappies, continence briefs and bed protection (equipitdsp.com). Equipit is the product-supply arm of Kinship Uniting Services, an NDIS registered and CHSP approved provider since 2017. Please note: Equipit is part of the same family of businesses as Kinship, and you're free to buy continence products from any supplier you choose. Equipit is not an NDIS registered provider, so agency-managed NDIS funds can't be spent with Equipit. If you're self-managed or plan-managed, check with your plan manager first. More at kinshipunitingservices.com/continence-products.

For families, carers and referrers

For families and carers. Families stay as involved as the person wants. We send updates as standard, and we're glad to talk about longer-term plans, including moving out of home.

For support coordinators and plan managers. If you coordinate supports or manage plans for an adult with an intellectual disability, call us about daily living, community participation, life skills and SIL. We'll be upfront about current availability. More at kinshipunitingservices.com/for-referrers.

Where to get help

- **NDIS:** 1800 800 110, or find your local NDIS partner at ndis.gov.au
- **Inclusion Australia:** inclusionaustralia.org.au (Easy Read and other-language resources)
- **NSW Council for Intellectual Disability:** cid.org.au
- **National Continence Helpline:** 1800 33 00 66 (free, nurse continence specialists)
- **Carer Gateway:** 1800 422 737
- **healthdirect:** 1800 022 222 (24/7 nurse advice)
- **Kinship Uniting Services:** 0437 733 744 or 0424 756 143, info@kinshipunitingservices.com, 39 Victory Road, Colebee NSW 2761

Your checklist

- ☐ Book a yearly health check with the GP (ask about an annual health assessment)
- ☐ Collect reports that describe how the disability affects daily life
- ☐ Write down what the person wants: goals, interests, the week they'd like
- ☐ Ask for Easy Read versions of letters and forms
- ☐ Check your NDIS eligibility: under 65 when you apply, citizen or permanent resident
- ☐ Call your NDIS partner or 1800 800 110 to start an application
- ☐ Make a list of questions for any provider you're considering

Questions people ask

Is intellectual disability a mental illness?

No. It's a lifelong condition that affects learning, thinking and everyday skills. A mental health condition is something different, although some people with an intellectual disability also live with one (Inclusion Australia).

Is intellectual disability permanent?

Inclusion Australia describes it as lifelong. That isn't the same as fixed. People keep learning and building new skills throughout life when the support fits.

How is it diagnosed?

Usually in childhood, by a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist, using an IQ test and an adaptive behaviour test. Sometimes it isn't picked up until adulthood, which can make support harder to get (Inclusion Australia).

Is intellectual disability covered by the NDIS?

It can be. Intellectual impairment is one of the impairment types the NDIS considers. Whether someone is eligible depends on age, residence and how the disability affects everyday life, not on the label alone (NDIS).

Can a person with an intellectual disability live on their own?

Many do, with help from family, friends or paid supports. Others need more support. It depends on the person and what they want for their life (Inclusion Australia).

How do I support someone with an intellectual disability?

Start with them, not the diagnosis. Ask what they want, use plain words, give them time, and let them make the decisions they can make. The ideas below are a good place to begin.



How do we get started with Kinship?

Call 0437 733 744, or send an enquiry through our website. We'll ask about the person first: what a good day looks like and what's getting harder. Then we'll tell you plainly whether and how we can help. If there's an NDIS plan, have it nearby. If there isn't one yet, we can still talk it through.

Ready to talk? We're here

If you'd like us to help with this, call 0437 733 744 and we'll talk it through. The person is welcome to call or come along to the conversation too. We'll tell you plainly whether and how we can help.

Call 0437 733 744 or 0424 756 143 · info@kinshipunitingservices.com · 39 Victory Road, Colebee NSW 2761 · kinshipunitingservices.com/get-support

Deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment? Contact us through the National Relay Service: Speak & Listen 1300 555 727, TTY 133 677, SMS relay 0423 677 767.

Sources

Inclusion Australia: What is intellectual disability? —

<https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/intellectual-disability/what-is-intellectual-disability/>

Inclusion Australia: Data and statistics (citing ABS) —

<https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/intellectual-disability/data-and-statistics/>

Inclusion Australia: It's Doctor Time! yearly health checks —

<https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/project/annual-health-assessments/>

Inclusion Australia (home page: Everyone Can Work, resources in other languages) — <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/>

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability — <https://cid.org.au/>

NDIS: What are the NDIS disability requirements —

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/eligibility-requirements/what-are-ndis-disability-requirements>

NDIS: How to check your eligibility — <https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/eligibility-requirements/how-check-your-eligibility>

NDIS: How to apply — <https://www.ndis.gov.au/applying/application-process/how-apply>

NDIS: Securing the NDIS for future generations (new NDIS laws) —

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-laws/securing-ndis-future-generations>

NDIS: New way of planning — <https://www.ndis.gov.au/changes-ndis/new-way-planning>

Continence Health Australia: National Continence Helpline —

<https://www.continence.org.au/help-and-support/national-continence-helpline/>