

Fact Sheet 14: Definition of intellectual disability⁴⁸

Intellectual disability is a disability characterised by significant limitations in both **intellectual functioning** and in **adaptive behaviour**, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18.

Intellectual Functioning

Intellectual functioning—also called intelligence—refers to general mental capacity, such as learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on.

Intellectual functioning is measured by an IQ test. An IQ test score of below 70⁴⁹ indicates significant limitations in intellectual functioning.

An assessment of IQ below 70 manifestly qualifies an individual for the Disability Support Pension in the Social Security guidelines.

Adaptive Behaviour

Adaptive behaviour is the collection of conceptual, social, and practical skills that are learned and performed by people in their everyday lives.

Standardised tests can determine limitations in adaptive behaviour.

- **Conceptual skills**—language and literacy; money, time, and number concepts; and self-direction.
- **Social skills**—interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, gullibility, naïveté (i.e., wariness), social problem solving, and the ability to follow rules/obey laws and to avoid being victimised.
- **Practical skills**—activities of daily living (personal care), occupational skills, healthcare, travel/transportation, schedules/routines, safety, use of money, use of the telephone.

Age of Onset

This condition is one of several developmental disabilities—that is, there is evidence of the disability during the developmental period, i.e. before the age of 18.

Additional Considerations

Additional factors must be taken into account, such as the community environment

⁴⁸ This fact sheet is based on the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. 2010. *Intellectual Disability. Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports*. 11th Edition. And informed by American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, 2013.

⁴⁹ IQ tests, as with all standardised tests, contain a standard error of measurement. Whereas it is accepted that intellectual function of two standard deviations below the mean is a part of a diagnosis of intellectual disability (i.e. <70 IQ) - there can be a standard of error of up 5 points with such testing. - Source: AAIDD, 2010, *Intellectual Disability: Definition, Classification and Systems of Supports* 11th Edition.

typical of the individual's peers and culture. Professionals should also consider linguistic diversity and cultural differences in the way people communicate, move, and behave.

Assessments must also assume that limitations in individuals often coexist with strengths, and that a person's level of life functioning will improve if appropriate personalised supports are provided over a sustained period.

How does the definition of intellectual disability relate to NDIS eligibility?⁵⁰

There are five separate factual matters that must be established when determining whether a person meets the disability requirements set out in s.24 of the NDIS Act.

6. *A person meets the disability requirements if:*

- a. *The person has a disability that is attributable to one or more intellectual, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairments or to one or more impairments attributable to a psychiatric condition, and*
- b. *The impairment or impairments are, or are likely to be, permanent, and*
- c. *The impairment or impairments result in substantially reduced functional capacity to undertake, or psychosocial functioning in undertaking, one or more of the following activities:*
 - i. *Communication*
 - ii. *Social interaction*
 - iii. *Learning*
 - iv. *Mobility*
 - v. *Self-care*
 - vi. *Self-management, and*
- d. *The impairment or impairments affect the person's capacity for social and economic participation, and*
- e. *The person is likely to require support under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for the person's lifetime.*

A person with a diagnosis of intellectual disability manifestly meets the first three criteria; **a**-(intellectual disability is diagnosed), **b**-(intellectual disability is permanent), and **c**-(diagnosis indicates significant limitation in academic, social and practical skills).

According to the current social security guidelines, a diagnosis of intellectual disability is the basis for manifest eligibility to the Disability Support Pension. It is also deemed that an individual with intellectual disability has - on a manifest basis - a continuing inability to work without support. This should be sufficient to meet criterion **d**.

⁵⁰ NDIS Operational Guideline - Access - Disability Requirements (v3.2) 1 September 2014

Intellectual disability is a lifelong condition and an individual will need lifelong support. This meets criterion e.

On the basis of the above, evidence of a valid diagnosis of intellectual disability should be sufficient evidence for NDIS eligibility.

Upon the basis of this evidence of eligibility - the focus of assistance should turn to a discussion of support need.

The World Health Organisation's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)

The ICF is a classification of impairment and health. Its focus is on measuring functioning of individuals in society, no matter what the reason for one's impairments.

The ICF argues that diagnosis alone does not determine or predict support needs, outcomes, work performance or social integration as the diagnosis will often lack data about levels of functioning and disability.

The ICF argues that it is neither a medical or social model of disability.⁵¹ It is a **bio-psycho-social** model. This takes into account an individual's body, thoughts, emotions and behaviours, and external social and environmental factors when assessing an individual's function.

The ICF is a model of how health conditions or impairments interact with contextual factors. In this model "disability" can involve (dys)functioning at one or more levels of:

- impairment (limitation of the body)
- activity (ability to do a task)
- participation (how society is constructed may or may not be a barrier to participation)

An example of this may be:

- a person is deaf (impairment)
- the person cannot hear the audio of the television (i.e. inability to do a task)
- TV programs may or may not have the option to turn on captioning (i.e. participation depends on availability of captioning)

The ICF notes that an impairment may or may not result in either an activity limitation or a participation barrier. In the example above, the hearing impairment can result in an activity

⁵¹ On their own, neither the medical or the social model of disability is adequate, although both are partially valid. Disability is a complex phenomena that is both a problem at the level of a person's body, and a complex social phenomena. Disability is always an interaction between features of the person and features of the overall context in which the person lives, but some aspects of disability are almost entirely internal to the person, while another aspect is almost entirely external. In other words, both medical and social responses are appropriate to the problems associated with disability; we cannot wholly reject either kind of intervention.

limitation but this may not result in a participation barrier. Facial disfigurement may not prevent an individual from performing any activity but participation in society may be difficult due to rejection and discrimination.

What does this mean for people with intellectual disability and participation in open employment?

A diagnosis of intellectual disability means that an individual has significant limitations in intellectual function and adaptive behaviours.

Without intervention this impairment and activity limitation will invariably result in a barrier to participate in the open labour market.

Research and demonstration has found that with the intervention of skilled support to find a job, get explicit instruction to learn a job, and get ongoing support for the term of the job, people with intellectual disability can work successfully in the open labour market.

Intellectual disability is not a barrier to open workforce participation when provided skilled support. Conversely, without skilled support, intellectual disability will invariably result in a lack of workforce participation.

The poor participation of people with intellectual disability in the open labour force is not due to impairment or limitation, but due to the lack of skilled support required for this group of people to participate in the open workforce.

Research, demonstration, the DES evaluation, and the ICF model strongly indicates that the most effective and efficient use of government funding is to develop a market of skilled support that more often than not helps to include people with intellectual disability in a job in the open labour market.