

- x Health professionals should be asked about their confidence with communicating with those with learning disabilities, and further training in this area offered where appropriate. Training could also be offered to begin to break down some of the assumptions that health professionals may hold about this group.
- x Although there is some evidence that those with learning disabilities have lower uptake rates of preventative services, such evidence is often from small-scale studies; further research needs to be undertaken to get a better picture of service use, and experiences of service use, among this group.
- x Research should also be undertaken to explore the level of cancer sign and symptom awareness among those with learning disabilities.

Background information

There are currently three criteria used to identify if an individual has a learning disability. These are:

- x Intellectual impairment
- x Social or adaptive dysfunction (ranging from the ability to eat and drink to using learnt skills in different situations)
- x Early onset (impairments are present in the developmental stage of life).⁷

Once a learning disability has been identified the individual's disability is then categorised as mild, moderate, severe or profound (these categories sit along a spectrum and there are no clear boundaries between them). Categorisation is often achieved through the use of an IQ assessment but may also take into account the other two factors, social or adaptive dysfunction and early onset, when determining the severity of an individual's disability. There is no single definition of what constitutes a learning disability and because of this there are no exact figures for the number of people living in the UK with this type of disability. Current estimates range from just under 1 million⁸ to around 1.5 million⁹, or about 1-2 per cent of the population¹⁰. Estimates for those with a severe or profound learning disability are more accurate, because of this group's need for support services, and place the rate at around 0.35 per cent of the population (just under 211,000 individuals).¹¹

For more information contact Cancer Research UK's Public Affairs team on 020 7061 8360 or publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk

References

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- ² Howells, G. (1986) *Are the medical needs of mentally handicapped adults being met?* Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners; 36: 449-453
- ³ Wilson and Haire (1990) *Health care screening for people with mental handicap living in the community* BMJ; 301; 1379-1381
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- ⁵ Biswas et al (2005) *Women with learning disability and uptake of screening: audit of screening uptake before and after one to one counselling* Journal of Public Health 2005; 27 (4): 344-347
- ⁶ DH (2007) *Cancer Reform Strategy* London: DH

⁷ British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Factsheet – learning disabilities

⁸ Institute for Health Research, Lancaster University (2004)

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/information/learning-disabilities-statistics/#many>

⁹ <http://mencap.org.uk>

¹⁰ British Institute of Learning Disabilities, Factsheet- learning disabilities

¹¹ Ibid