

People with Intellectual Disabilities Particularly Vulnerable to Effects of Tobacco Use

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While tobacco use is an ongoing health hazard for the entire population, its consequences for people with developmental or intellectual disabilities can be especially severe. And the medical community often tends to overlook the tobacco-related burdens these people face. An extensive review of published research on this topic appears in the June edition of the journal *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

“This is too important an issue to ignore,” said Dr. Marc L. Steinberg, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the UMDNJ-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and the article’s lead author. “Health care professionals often do not ask these individuals about tobacco use or exposure.” Steinberg and his co-authors report that they were able to identify several negative implications of tobacco use that are unique to this population group:

- People with developmental or intellectual disabilities are three times more likely to live in poverty, making them more susceptible to financial distress from tobacco use.
- Tobacco use may decrease the effectiveness of some medications commonly prescribed to this population group.
- Ironically, many of these individuals became addicted to tobacco at the hands of the very institutions that are meant to help them. In the past, hospitals and facilities treating vulnerable populations have even given cigarettes as good behavior ‘rewards’ to mentally ill patients and to those

with developmental or intellectual disabilities.

- On the rare occasions when individuals in this population gain access to tobacco treatment programs, they still may “fall through the cracks” because they have difficulty understanding the health information presented to them.

“Like any other patients, this population should be offered resources for quitting if they smoke and offered protection from environmental [tobacco](#) smoke if they do not,” said Steinberg.

UMDNJ is the nation's largest free-standing public health sciences university with more than 5,700 students attending the state's three medical schools, its only dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health related professions, a school of nursing and its only school of public health, on five campuses. Annually, there are more than two million patient visits to UMDNJ facilities and faculty at campuses in Newark, New Brunswick/ Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a statewide mental health and addiction services network.

Source: UMDNJ

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