Ageing with an intellectual disability: support issues in rural localities

Stuart Wark¹,², Rafat Hussain¹, Helen Edwards³

¹CRN for Mental Health and Well-Being, University of New England, ²The Ascent Group, ³School of Education, University of New England

Relevance: In the past 100 years, the life expectancy for individuals with an intellectual disability has increased dramatically. This improvement is due to an improvement in a variety of social and structural support systems; however, a major knowledge gap has emerged in how to most effectively assist this cohort of people to age successfully. In particular, there has been very limited research examining how best to support the individual and their family who may reside in rural and remote locations, and what impediments non-metropolitan support workers experience in daily service delivery.

Aims: The goal of the research was to explore the social, economic and structural impediments facing staff who support people with intellectual disabilities who are ageing in rural areas of NSW. The results of the research allow for the identification of priority areas in policy change, education, training, professional development and cross-industry collaboration.

Methods: A Delphi research model was developed, and three rounds were conducted over a period of one year. There were a total of 31 participants from across rural and remote regions of NSW, and came from 14 different disability support organisations.

Results: A thematic analysis of the results identified a series of impediments that support staff considered to be problematic in the provision of appropriate support. These areas of concern include funding, access to relevant services, time constraints and family dynamics.

Conclusion: The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice for families, aged care and disability service providers, as well as the government funding departments for both the delivery of services to individuals with intellectual disabilities who are ageing, and for the training of all people who support this cohort of people.