

# media release

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Attn: Newsdesks  
Health Correspondents

## **“Time to improve access to healthcare for people with learning disabilities” says new report**

NHS Boards in Scotland need to get better at understanding the needs of people with learning disabilities to make sure that they get the healthcare they need. This is the key finding from ‘Tackling Indifference’, a new report by NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (NHS QIS).

The report was written after NHS QIS reviewed general healthcare services in Scotland during 2008–2009 to find out what was working well and what could be improved. The review found that healthcare services for people with learning disabilities are getting better, but there are also areas where NHS Boards need to make improvements.

The report says that NHS Boards must make it easier for people with learning disabilities to get access to general health services. It should be easier for everyone to have planned visits to hospitals and health centres, and it is important that people with learning disabilities can get general health screening, hearing and sight tests and also out-of-hours services. Immediate changes could be made by giving people more accessible information and improving signage.

The report makes three key recommendations:

1. NHS Boards must make sure they comply with the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, especially Part 5. The Act protects the welfare of people with learning disabilities who cannot make some or all decisions for themselves. Part 5 of the Act is about how medical and other healthcare staff can legally make decisions about treatment on behalf of someone who cannot decide for themselves.
2. In line with the Disability Equality Duty, NHS Boards must make sure adults and children with learning disabilities can use health services. Extra help is often needed for people with learning disabilities to make sure they can get access to healthcare. The report found that while some help is being given, more needs to be done.
3. NHS Boards must improve the way they identify the particular health needs of people with learning disabilities if they are to fully meet these.

Speaking about the report, Dr Keith Bowden, NHS QIS Clinical Advisor and Consultant Clinical Psychologist, NHS Forth Valley, said, “We have seen examples of how NHS Boards are making some good progress in improving access to health services for people with learning

disabilities. However there is more to be done – particularly in making sure that information and services are targeted to meet needs.”

Norman Dunning, Chief Executive of ENABLE Scotland, said: “This is more than just another set of statistics – it exists so that we never again see the neglect and institutional discrimination that led to the unnecessary deaths of two people with learning disabilities in Scottish hospitals. These results compliment ENABLE Scotland’s work following Fatal Accident Inquiries into the deaths of Roddy Donnet, Jimmy Mauchland and Tracy Robertson.

“It is reassuring to see that progress has been made, but we are disappointed that, in many areas, there is still insufficient attention given to making sure people with learning disabilities get equal treatment. We expect that those areas that have performed well will share their learning with others and that NHS QIS will continue to hold health boards to account for their performance.”

### **Editors Note:**

- There are more than 120,000 people with learning disabilities in Scotland. Many people with learning disabilities have complex needs. Everyone should be able to get the right health and social care services when they need them. People with learning disabilities often have more health difficulties and can find it hard to get some health services.
- Tackling Indifference is being published in an easy-read format, which gives messages in a way that is clear and easy to understand. This means the report can be read by everyone, including people with learning disabilities. This is the first time that NHS QIS has published a National Overview in an easy-read format.
- NHS QIS reviewed all NHS boards against the NHS QIS Learning Disability Quality Indicators 2 and 3, following a number of key findings from Fatal Accident Inquiries where people with learning disabilities have died following gaps in care within general health settings (J Mauchland and R Donnet). Themes within these cases have also been found in UK-wide reports, such as Disability Rights Commission Equal Treatment: Closing the Gap (2006), MENCAP’s Death by Indifference (2007) and House of Lords/House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights report A Life Like Any Other – Human Rights of Adults with Learning Disabilities.
- To access the National Overview and Local Reports for each NHS Board, visit [www.nhshealthquality.org](http://www.nhshealthquality.org).
- NHS QIS is a Special Health Board that provides support to NHSScotland. We translate the latest scientific research, expert opinion and patient experience to help improve the quality of healthcare in Scotland. Key components of our organisation are: The Healthcare Environment Inspectorate, Scottish Health Council, and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines network (SIGN). We also take a lead role in co-ordinating the work of the Scottish Patient Safety Programme and provide support to the Scottish Medicines Consortium.

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