

Mental Health Providers Offer More Accessible, Inclusive Care

Increased confidence improves access to care for people with disabilities

Among people with disabilities, nearly half (47%) experience depression. Access to disability-competent mental health services is needed. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can find it hard to navigate the healthcare system, often don't feel heard by their providers, and may face negative assumptions. Research shows that mental health providers may lack effective strategies to work successfully with people with IDD.

In partnership with the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services, the Oregon Office on Disability and Health is training mental health care providers across the state to offer more accessible, inclusive care for people with IDD. To develop the training, we reviewed the research literature and got input from local mental health providers about what they wanted to learn. We talked with self-advocates from Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition (OSAC) and Self-Protection Advocacy Rights Council (SPARC) about what providers need to know. The training team includes a self-advocate who shares first-hand experiences getting care in Oregon.

As of March 2023, 206 people from 24 (of 36) Oregon counties participated in the live, online training. Most participants (more than 90%) gained knowledge and report that after the training they are better able to:

- Understand disability-related difficulties accessing mental health care;
- Overcome barriers to effective communication;
- Address existing assumptions or bias about mental health care for people with IDD.

Trainees shared how the training impacted them:

"I learned strategies for breaking down barriers; providing resources, [making] adaptations and modifications in the processes, [providing] care without judgement."

"Mostly, [I] increased self-awareness of biases and to step back and listen to the [person] with IDD and try to hear what they are saying without jumping in."

This project improves the confidence and capacity of mental health providers to offer disability-competent, inclusive care. As a result, people with IDD have more options for accessible mental health services. Better care leads to feeling better, and feeling better means more opportunities to maximize independence and health.

To create the training, we got input from mental health providers and self-advocates with disabilities. The self-advocates gave practical tips for providers:

"We are humans, just like you. We might just do things differently. Learn about communicating. Clarify, clarify, clarify."
- member of OSAC



"It's helpful when providers take the time to ask about what makes a crisis better or worse."
- member of SPARC

