

April 2025



The Fatal Seven



The Leading Causes of Fatality for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

Healthcare researchers in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, along with governmental agencies providing oversight of IDD-related programs and services, strive to promote the health, safety, quality of life, and length of life of individuals with IDD (1).

Gathering information and performing comprehensive reviews of the previous deaths of individuals with IDD, is one method used to lower risk of future adverse outcomes.

The goal of their work is aimed at developing recommendations intended to improve healthcare services, advance clinical and caregiver education, expand training, enhance licensing oversight, develop governmental regulations, and expand licensed provider policies, etc.

Death-related data is examined to look for similarities and trends among previous fatalities, and a determination of whether or not a death may have been prevented or avoided is made (1).

If there is a possibility the death may have been avoided, and has been caused by a particular condition, the information relating to the condition or "cause of death", is recorded and used to develop a "fatal conditions list".

These lists are a collection of the specific health conditions, which have led to the most deaths among individuals with IDD within the particular group being studied (1).

Public health, governmental agencies and advocates for individuals with IDD use these conditions "lists" as a quality improvement tool (1).

The lists are aimed at "bringing attention to" a particular health condition. There is no set number of health conditions on any particular list. One list may focus on the top five causes of fatality, which would then be dubbed a "Fatal 5" list. Other lists may include the top ten causes of fatality, which would be dubbed a "Fatal 10" list, and so forth.

The Goal of a "Fatality List"

- Is to focus the individual's or caregiver's attention on the preventable deaths which are occurring as a result of a particular condition.
- To promote the individual's or caregiver's awareness to the risks related to a particular condition.
- To teach the individual or caregiver how to lower the risks relating to a particular condition.
- And promote a change in the individual's or caregiver's behaviors in order to promote and maintain the health and safety of individuals with IDD.

Ongoing monitoring to determine the topmost causes of avoidable deaths (among the IDD population), also encourages healthcare research aimed at identifying the underlying modifiable factors.

Modification of the identified factors may then help improve healthcare outcomes (1).

The Fatal Seven

The Office of Integrated Health Supports Network (OIHSN) currently offer trainings which focus on each of the seven potentially fatal conditions which occur frequently among individuals with IDD.

The OIHSN DBHDS "Fatal Seven" trainings include instruction on:

1. Dehydration.
2. Constipation.
3. Pressure Injuries.
4. Falls.
5. Aspiration.
6. Seizures.
7. Sepsis.



OIHSN Resources

The Office of Integrated Health – Health Supports Network (OIHSN) website:
<https://dbhds.virginia.gov/office-of-integrated-health#>

OIHSN Community Nursing Email Contact:
communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

OIHSN Mobile Rehab Engineering (MRE) Team Email Contact:
mreteam@dbhds.virginia.gov

OIHSN Dental Team Email Contact: dentalteam@dbhds.virginia.gov

The Risk Awareness Tool (RAT) is another tool to identify risk related to conditions which may need follow-up with medical professionals. The result of the RAT identifies the need for further evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional. Click here for more information relating to the [RAT \(faq-rat.11.6.20.pdf\)](#).

App of the Month



The Virginia Cardinal Care mobile app is FREE and designed to make it simple to find the enroll in a health care plan. Easily compare health insurance plans side-by-side. Enroll in health plan that works for the individual. Quickly find driving directions to nearby providers, hospitals, specialists and more. When you call, real people are available to answer your questions. Get the most out of your Medicaid benefits. Enrollment is easy. (App of the Month is not endorsed by DBHDS Office of Integrated Health-Health Supports Network. User accepts full responsibility for utilization of app).

Reference

1. [The Office of Integrated Health Supports Network \(OIHSN\). \(2023, August\). The Leading Causes of Fatality for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services \(DBHDS\). 1-7.](#)

Please direct questions or concerns regarding the Office of Integrated Health Supports Network "Health Trends" newsletter to communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

April 2025



ABA Snippets ...

What's in your Toolbox?

It is important to remember that while ABA is a science, with a systematic approach, it is not a cookie cutter approach. It is our ethical responsibility, as behavior specialists, to ensure the methods we use are individualized for the person receiving the services; from the assessments all the way to the interventions and data collection procedures (1)(2). We have many tools in our toolbox to choose from. Learning new, evidenced based techniques and keeping up with the literature will help you grow your toolbox. As you grow your toolbox, be sure to continue choosing the tools that best address the unique needs of each individual.

Think about a car mechanic and consider a simple tire change. You might assume all car mechanics have the right tools to change a tire. However, I once had a friend who needed new tires, but his car had locking lug nuts. When he took it to a mechanic to have the tires changed, that mechanic did not have the correct tool to remove those lug nuts, as they require a special key to remove them. Those keys are also not universal; they are often specific to the car make and/or model. My friend needed to go to a different mechanic, who had the correct tool.

Sticking with the same old procedures and refusing to learn new methods will not serve our individuals well. Just because we learn a new method does not mean it's the best approach for everyone. It's not about which methods are the best methods, but rather which method is best for each individual. Sometimes, it's that trusty old lug wrench that will do the trick, and sometimes it's a shiny new lug nut key.

You may contact DBHDS about these efforts via the following:

courtney.pernick@dbhds.virginia.gov

References:

1. [Behavior Analyst Certification Board. \(2020\). Ethics code for behavior analysts.](#)
2. [Virginia positive behavior supports code of ... \(2016, November\).](#)

April is Occupational Therapy (OT) Month



OT practitioners are health care professionals who use their knowledge of an individual's psychological, physical, emotional, and social nature, to evaluate how a medical condition (or risk for one) is affecting the body and mind, using a holistic approach.

Occupational therapy uses everyday life activities (occupations) to promote health, well-being, and the ability to participate in activities of daily living.

This includes any meaningful activity an individual wants to accomplish which might involve taking care of themselves, working, volunteering, going to school, along with numerous other activities.

Working with an OT helps individuals with IDD to:

- Achieve personal goals, such as gaining the skills to transition from high school to independent living as an adult.
- Stay as healthy and productive as possible, while managing chronic medical conditions.
- Maintain or rebuild independence, such as using assistive devices and technology.
- Participate in activities of daily living like bathing, dressing, eating, toileting and going out into the community.

Occupational therapy services typically include:

- The creation of an occupational profile to include the individual's history, life experiences, interests, and activities that are important to them.
- A unique intervention plan to improve the ability to perform daily activities and reach goals.
- And an outcomes evaluation to make sure goals are being met.

For more information about how to access OT services for an individual with IDD send emails to

David.Wilson@DBHDS.Virginia.gov or
Communitynursing@dbhds.virginia.gov

Reference:

[American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\). \(2025, January\). Occupational Therapy Month.](#)



Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) coordinated

National Take Back Day on Saturday, April 26, 2025

The drug overdose epidemic in the United States is a clear and present public health, public safety, and national security threat.

DEA's National Prescription Drug Take Back Day reflects DEA's commitment to Americans' safety and health, encouraging the public to remove unneeded medications from their homes as a measure of preventing medication misuse and opioid addiction from ever starting.

DEA is committed to making our communities safer and healthier, and we can do this by reducing overdoses and overdose deaths.

To find a location near you go to
<https://www.dea.gov/takebackday>

Enter your zip code, county, city and state.

Last April 2024 the total weight of medications turned in to the DEA was 18,570,487 lbs. (9,285 tons).

If you miss the April 2025 take-back day you can search for a Year-Round Drop-Off location near you at
<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e1s1>