

New study investigating how to support people with disability to have sex

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Supporting people with disability to have active sex lives is the subject of a unique study by researchers at Deakin University.

Disability and inclusion researchers with Deakin's School of Health and Social Development are calling on Victorian adults with [physical disabilities](#) to share their experiences as part of the study. Their aim is to better understand the need for facilitated sex support in the lives of adults with disability and ensure these needs have a place on state and federal policy agendas.

Lead researcher, Dr Russell Shuttleworth, says the need for facilitated sex support is often ignored by disability services and policy makers.

"Some [people](#) with disability may need assistance from their paid carers or support workers in order to express themselves sexually or participate in sexual activities (this is called facilitated sex)," Dr Shuttleworth explained.

"Currently in Australia, the need for this kind of assistance is ignored by disability services and those who make policy.

"While Victoria is relatively progressive, developing sexuality and disability policy guidelines in 2006, these do not explicitly address facilitated sex. Therefore, as in most other contexts, this practice has been left to individuals with a disability and their support workers to negotiate between themselves.

"Rigorous and systematic research is necessary in order to ensure coherent policy guidelines are developed that address both the concerns of people with disability and the support workers that assist them in their daily lives.

"Our research will be the first in a series of studies culminating in national research, which will provide the framework for policy and practice guidelines."

The researchers are looking to interview 20 Victorian adults with physical [disabilities](#) who use support workers and ask them about the kind of assistance that they need, such as help to prepare for sexual activity, to have sex with a partner or to masturbate. They will also investigate the barriers to negotiating facilitated sex and the ethical concerns that people with disability have with their reliance on support workers to assist with sexual expression.

The ground breaking nature of this research cannot be understated, according to co-researcher Dr George Taleporos.

"As a disability rights advocate and sex researcher, I know that this topic has been ignored for far too long and it's time that government and service providers recognise the sexual needs of people with disability and develop informed [policy](#) and practice in this area," Dr Taleporos said.

"Failure to do so only serves to force this topic underground, where the risks of exploitation and abuse of both people with disability and support workers are increased."

More information: More information about this research can be found at blogs.deakin.edu.au/dafs/

Provided by Deakin University

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