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Cerebral Palsy Life Expectancy

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Parents of children who have cerebral palsy (CP) of perinatal origin often wish to know how long their child is likely to live. Health and social care providers, whether state authorities, as in the United Kingdom (UK), or insurance companies in Europe or the United States of America (USA) need information on life expectancy to plan for the medical, educational, and social needs of these children and their families. Although the nature and timing of the causes of CP often are unclear [1,2], if liability is admitted, information on life expectancy is an essential component in deciding the quantum of a settlement. Despite these needs, reliable estimates of life expectancy have become available only in the last 16 years.

Early studies of life expectancy assessed only children who were in long-term institutional care [3,4]. Because children in institutional care are a special subset of all children who have CP and because institutional care might systematically improve or worsen survival [5], it is difficult to relate these estimates to the general population of people who have CP. Two studies that were based on small numbers and short follow-up were published in 1985 [6,7]. The first survival estimates that were based on a geographically defined cohort with rigorous follow-up were published in 1990, and demonstrated that most children would survive to adulthood [8]. The same year saw the first results from a large Californian service register [9] (see correction [10]). Reports on life expectancy in Australia [11], Canada [12], the UK [13–18], and the USA [19–22] have been published. The causes of death of people who had CP also have been reported [15,18,23–26].

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