

Submission

To the Select Committee on Autism:

Study and research aimed to generate understanding of autism and autistic needs in Australia can underpin a majority of items outlined in the Terms of Reference. With appropriate understanding and insights, as well as effective services; programs and practices can become as effective as possible. Support, funding and ongoing assistance from the Australian Government to help centres and institutions is vital to a successful National Autism Strategy as well as effective services from the NDIS.

TOR d; International best practice with regards to diagnosis, support services and education, effectiveness, cost and required intensity;

Included in this would be awareness and education programs for schools, both students and educators, on how to approach autistic student appropriately given recent controversies regarding treatment of autistic students at Australian schools. Also support services for adults and the elderly with autism should be included. Regular reviews and evaluation of effectiveness and research initiatives to ensure Australia is at the forefront of international best practice. The pathways and roadblock for autistic individuals entering and staying in the workforce need to be deeply understood in order to establish support services to assist them. Services should include a national autism summit for information sharing and exchange of ideas and innovation around autism understanding and services required.

TOR e; The demand for and adequacy of Commonwealth, state and local government services to meet the needs of autistic people at all life stages

A majority of autism services are primarily aimed at children, then teenagers. With some aimed at individuals leaving school/entering the workforce and even less again for adults and older adults on the spectrum. Government services need to meet the needs of autistic individuals across all life stages. Effective services begin with thorough understanding of the needs and requirements of adults and the elderly on the spectrum. Government assistance can help studies to underpin these needs for the community. For adults with autism, awareness and information campaigns targeting workplaces is essential to helping individuals with autism in the workplace.

TOR h; The adequacy and efficacy of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for autistic people, including:

i. autism understanding within the NDIS,

For the NDIS to effectively provide services for autistic individuals, there must be a thorough and fundamental understanding of autism, as well as best practices, latest developments, benchmarks from comparable countries and new and emerging trends showing positive results. To accomplish this the

NDIS needs to invest in establishing a knowledge base of experts in autism, as well as neurodiversity hiring strategies. An advisory board consisting of autistic individuals, researchers, educators, community service experts and others would accelerate this understanding and would mirror the Independent Advisory Council structure of the NDIS.

TOR i; The development of a National Autism Strategy and its interaction with the next phase of the National Disability Strategy.

A National Autism Strategy would help create a positive change for autistic individuals living in Australia. Any such strategy would need to consider enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in diagnosis (across all age groups), but also create employment opportunities and enhance the experiences of autistic adults already employed. Another key part of a national strategy would be to enhance service organisations, research and to encourage study of autism. A national strategy should provide avenues for anyone knowledgeable about autism to assist in the dialogue, and provide input into the development of initiatives, organisations and other entrepreneurial ideas.

TOR j; The adequacy of funding for research into autism

Research is fundamental to the provision of effective services for individuals with autism. Australia is lucky to have research being conducted at university-related institutions, however these institutions (and others) would benefit greatly from secured funding. Also, funding for research should also be allocated as grants open to NGO's, individuals and other organisations.

Autism advocacy groups and awareness initiatives provide avenues for communication of the latest research as well as avenues for community and industry organisations to benefit from these developments. This information can be disseminated to a wide variety of stakeholders from community engagement, schools and universities, workplaces, recruitment, service providers and the general public. For initiatives to be viable, would require (at least partial) government funding and assistance. Funding and support made available and guaranteed through a National Autism Strategy or the NDIS would make this possible, as well as providing similar opportunities for like-minded endeavours across the country.