



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Select Committee on Autism report:

Services, support and life outcomes for autistic Australians

DECEMBER 2022

Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Senate Select Committee on Autism (the committee) final report from their inquiry into services, support and life outcomes for autistic Australians.

The Australian Government is committed to improving services and outcomes for all Australians with disability, including autistic Australians.

The committee tabled their final report on Friday 25 March 2022. The report makes 81 recommendations and 5 dissenting recommendations. The committee supports the development of a person and family-centred National Autism Strategy that establishes a clear roadmap, with specific goals and targets, to drive comprehensive and coordinated efforts to improve life outcomes for autistic people.

The committee recommends the National Autism Strategy be co-designed by the autistic community and address whole-of-life needs for all autistic people, and include targeted actions to support priority cohorts.

Key priorities identified by the committee include:

- building understanding of autism within key professions and across the wider community;
- improving access to early diagnosis and intervention;
- improving service integration and coordination;
- improving education, employment and health services for autistic people;
- supporting parents and carers; and
- establishing a national autism research agenda.

The Australian Government supports the development of a National Autism Strategy.

The Australian Government supports, or supports in principle, or partially supports, 73 of the committee's recommendations, and 3 of the dissenting report recommendations.

The Australian Government does not support 2 of the committee's recommendations and noted an additional 6, and noted 2 of the dissenting report recommendations.

The Australian Government acknowledges that people use many terms when referring to autism, and that each individual will have a preferred way of communicating and self-describing. There are people in the autistic community who either prefer the terms 'identity first language;' or 'people first language' or interchange between both. The Australian Government has used identity first language in this response, to ensure consistency with the committee's final report and its terms of reference.

Inquiry into services, support and life outcomes for autistic Australians

Recommendations made by the committee

A National Autism Strategy

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a National Autism Strategy and accompanying implementation within 12 months to drive nationally-coordinated action to improve services and supports for autistic Australians. The National Autism Strategy should:

- be both person-and family-centred;
- address whole-of-life needs for people across the breadth of the spectrum;
- align with other national strategies, including the National Disability Strategy; and
- be informed by the recommendations of this inquiry and the Disability Royal Commission.

Supported

The Australian Government supports this recommendation and will work to develop and implement a National Autism Strategy within 12 months with an aim to improving services and supports for autistic Australians. The Government notes, to allow for extensive sector consultation on all components, it may take longer than 12 months to be developed and implemented in full.

Development of a National Autism Strategy should provide a coordinated, long-term approach to how governments work to improve outcomes for autistic people.

A National Autism Strategy should also clearly identify how it will contribute to achieving the outcomes of the Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31 (Australia's Disability Strategy) and maintain a continued focus on intersectionality enabling a more accurate, accessible and culturally sensitive understanding and response to the needs of all Australians. It should also clearly identify how it will contribute to achieving the outcomes of the Early Years Strategy for autistic children.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that development of a National Autism Strategy be driven by a national taskforce established under the auspices of the National Federation Reform Council. The taskforce should adopt a co-design approach drawing on the autistic community, as well as parents, carers, researchers, and policy makers.

The definition of co-design, and the principles underpinning it, should be agreed at the start of the development process.

Partially Supported

The Australian Government supports this recommendation and will work with state and territory governments to ensure the development of a National Autism Strategy adopts a co-design approach and is driven by, and in close consultation with, autistic people, their families and carers, advocates, peak bodies, researchers, and policy makers.

The approach to its development and underpinning principles will be agreed at the start of the process with all stakeholders.

The Conran Review of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Ministerial Forums and Councils (the Conran Review) aimed to reduce the number of ministers' meetings, related forums and streamlining intergovernmental bodies. The Australian Government notes that where there are suitable existing forums, these should be used in the first instance to progress any new priorities and ensure alignment with the Conran Review.

Development of a National Autism Strategy should be driven within one of the suitable existing forums which include the Australian, state and territory governments.

Where an existing forum is used, oversight processes will already be in place that can oversee the work of the forum and the development of a strategy with a key priority to ensure a co-design approach is adhered to.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy and accompanying implementation plan include an outcomes framework, as well as specific and measurable actions, targets and milestones. Where appropriate, the framework and measurable items should align with those in other national strategies.

Supported

The Australian Government supports the development of a National Autism Strategy and accompanying implementation plan. It is envisaged this will include an outcomes framework with specific and measurable actions, accountabilities, targets and milestones that will align with other national strategies, including Australia's Disability Strategy outcomes framework.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the taskforce monitor and report annually on the implementation of the National Autism Strategy.

Supported in principle

Annual reporting on the implementation of a National Autism Strategy, through governance designed to support and oversee the implementation of the strategy will be developed.

As noted in the response to Recommendation 2, the Australian Government will consider the most appropriate forum to oversee development of the strategy.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that an independent review of the National Autism Strategy be undertaken three years after implementation begins, with the findings to be publicly released and used to inform the next iteration of the strategy.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle. An independent review of the National Autism Strategy will be considered as part of the development of the strategy.

The adequacy of available services and supports

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends the Joint Steering Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) undertake an inquiry into the experiences of autistic participants in the NDIS with particular focus on:

- The level of reasonable and necessary supports required by autistic participants across the course of their life;
- Whether the NDIS is currently funding these reasonable and necessary supports;
- The implementation of the new Early Childhood Approach;
- Whether adequate information and support is being provided to participants and prospective participants in a timely manner;
- How autism diagnosis is recognised by the NDIS;
- The ability and capacity of planners to make informed decisions regarding the reasonable and necessary supports to be funded by the NDIS;
- The level of under-utilisation in NDIS plans for autistic participants;
- Ensuring there is sufficient service capacity to deliver funded supports; and
- How the NDIS interacts with other government funded support services – such as education, employment and health services – to provide coordinated and holistic care for autistic participants.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle and the intention to initiate a Joint Standing Committee (JSC) inquiry into the experiences of autistic participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The Australian Government is committed to delivering a better and fairer NDIS, and welcomes the opportunity to work with the JSC as the inquiry proceeds.

While the NDIS plays a significant role in supporting the independence and social and economic participation of eligible Australians with permanent and significant disability, it is not designed to duplicate or replace other government funded mainstream services and community supports. The NDIS should be complementary to, and work alongside, existing mainstream and community services and supports.

All levels of government continue to play a role in providing mainstream and targeted services, supports and infrastructure systems to people with disability.

The Australian Government supports all levels of government working together to ensure supports for autistic Australians are coordinated and integrated to the greatest extent possible.

Any inquiry into the interaction of the NDIS with other government funded support services should take account of recent and ongoing consultation activities in this area to ensure participants are not burdened with duplicative engagement processes.

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* sets out disability criteria and early intervention requirements for deciding the eligibility of applicants to be supported by the NDIS. A person's NDIS eligibility is not based on types of disability or the presence of an underlying condition, illness or injury. Rather, eligibility is based on evidence a person has substantially reduced functional capacity affecting their communication, social interaction, learning, mobility, self-care or self-management because of their disability or would benefit from the provision of early intervention supports.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is also working with people with disability and the broader disability community to co-design a new person-centred model of gathering information for access and planning decisions, known as the Information Gathering for Access and Planning (IGAP).

The IGAP Steering Committee continues to meet regularly to provide guidance for the project, including representatives from the NDIS Independent Advisory Council, Disability and Carer Representative Organisations, participants, Commonwealth agencies and states and territories. The Steering Committee has also engaged the disability community to understand people's access and planning experiences, including through targeted focus groups and an online survey which is open to everyone.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy identify actions to drive better integration between federal and state service systems, including a roadmap to better integrate NDIS and mainstream services. This roadmap should be consistent with the recommendations made by the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS in relation to service integration and overlap with other systems.

Supported in principle

In 2015, all governments agreed to the ‘Principles to determine the responsibilities of the NDIS and other service systems’ (‘the Principles’). In addition to these six general principles, all governments agreed to the Applied Principles and Tables of Support (APTOS) which are used as a guide to determine the funding and delivery responsibilities of other service systems and the NDIS. The APTOS also outlines how these systems can work together to support the vision of an inclusive Australian society.

The Australian Government continues to work with state and territory governments to integrate NDIS and mainstream services. Through the former Disability Reform Council and the current Disability Reform Ministers’ Meetings, significant progress has been made to better integrate the NDIS with health, child protection, transport, justice, school and mental health mainstream systems.

The NDIA seeks to work in partnership with these service systems, and where possible will assist a participant to learn about other non-NDIS services that may be available in their local community, including through the NDIA, Partners in the Community.

The NDIA also continues to work with state and territory representatives to improve information sharing to support the effective delivery of the NDIS and mainstream services. Initiatives include:

- The NDIA Complex Support Needs Pathway to support participants with complex support needs, including those that interact with other service systems;
- The NDIA’s younger people in residential aged care team established to prevent younger NDIS participants from entering aged care and to support those living in aged care to leave;
- The introduction of Liaison Officers, as a conduit between the NDIA and state and territory health and justice systems, supporting existing and prospective participants; and
- Standing quarterly meetings with senior officials from each state and territory, attended by senior staff from the NDIA to discuss and resolve operational issues between the NDIS and state or territory programs and services.

The National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) 2020-25 includes shared commitments from Australian, state and territory governments regarding the interfaces between health and disability systems. This includes hospital and NDIS service integration. Priority activities include:

- Developing national indicators and data sets to monitor performance, identify barriers and gaps, and inform solutions; and
- Clarifying governance arrangements for monitoring and resolving policy and operational issues between health and disability systems.

Additionally, a key area of the Australia's Disability Strategy, Safety Targeted Action Plan, is to strengthen the interface between the NDIS and mainstream service systems with the aim to improve the design of government service systems and supports for people with disability at risk of harm.

To date, this work has focussed on improving data collection and reporting to better identify issues and barriers, inform solutions and support health workers' decision making.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency provide support coordination assistance as a default inclusion in plans for autistic NDIS participants who:

- have complex or high care needs;
- are from other identified disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts; and
- have significantly underutilised plans.

One year of support coordination assistance should also be a default inclusion in plans for all new NDIS participants.

Not supported

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation. Funding for an NDIS participant's plan is based on the reasonable and necessary supports a participant requires. While support coordination plays an important role in helping NDIS participants to make the most of their plans and to pursue their goals, it can only be included in a participant's plan if it meets the funding criteria in the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* and Rules.

The NDIS already provides support for participants to implement their plans through NDIA Early Childhood Partners and Local Area Coordination services. NDIA partners support participants to understand the NDIS, create and implement a plan, and assist participants to understand how the NDIS works with other service systems and what other supports might be available in the local community.

For those participants for whom support coordination is a reasonable and necessary support, the NDIA is working to improve participant understanding of the role of support coordinators, as part of the Participant Service Improvement Plan.

As part of this commitment, in 2021 the NDIA reviewed the current support coordination model and consulted with stakeholders on how support coordination could be improved, with the report 'Improving Support Coordination for NDIS Participants' published on the NDIS website in November 2021. The report is available at [Improving support coordination for participants](#). The NDIA has also released guidance on the role of a support coordinator on the NDIS website.

The NDIA will continue to work with the sector to educate support coordinators on their roles, and deliver consistency and equity in planning outcomes (including support coordination).

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency continue to improve the capacity of its staff, including Local Area Coordinators, to provide better support to autistic people. This should include a focus on both understanding and meeting autistic participants' support coordination needs.

Supported

The NDIA is committed to building the capability of the Agency workforce to deliver on strategic and operational goals now and into the future. The NDIA has developed training to provide planners, Early Childhood Partners and Local Area Coordinators with the confidence and skills to ensure participants are supported to access the NDIS and implement their plans. The NDIA is also delivering training programs to help frontline staff with participant check-ins and to have more effective and meaningful conversations with participants.

Additional work is being undertaken to ensure staff have the right capabilities through the continuous design and delivery of mandatory eLearning training and induction programs. The NDIA actively recruits staff with lived experience of disability, including those with lived experience of autism.

The NDIA has also developed a Disability Navigator and disability snapshots to help NDIA staff and partners improve their awareness and understanding of the lived experience of people with disabilities. These resources include interviews with people with disability talking about their lived experience, and provide advice about how planners and partners can best communicate with and support people with disability throughout the planning process.

The Disability Navigator includes a disability snapshot on autism, featuring autistic people providing advice about their strengths, preferred communication methods, and lived experience.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that a National Autism Strategy identify actions to increase community understanding of autism. This should include consideration of a public education campaign that portrays the diversity of the spectrum and helps improve inclusion across a range of settings, including schools, workplaces and in the general community. All materials should be tailored and accessible to First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse audiences.

Supported in principle

Actions to increase community understanding of autism will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy alongside action being taken under Australia's Disability Strategy to build positive community attitudes. All material will be tailored and accessible and be appropriate to First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy identify actions to promote awareness of, and access to, quality, evidence-based information about autism for autistic people, their families, and professionals in autism-related sectors.

Supported

The Australian Government provides supports for a range of resources that promote awareness of, and access to, quality and evidence-based information about disability, including autism, for people with disability and their families and carers.

The Australian Government also provides supports for the development of resources for professionals in autism-related sectors. Actions to further promote awareness of, and access to, information and resources for autistic people and their families and carers, will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

For example, the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grants program provides funding for a range of autism-specific projects including to Amaze Incorporated for Autism Connect - a national information service for autistic people, their families and carers, health professionals, researchers, teachers, employers and the broader community.

The ILC grants program also provides funding to the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (the Autism CRC) for the National Best-Practice Assessment and Diagnosis project to develop resources to support mainstream health providers involved in the assessment and diagnosis of autism. This project builds on the Autism CRC's National Implementation Toolkit, a set of resources to promote the National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia.

The Australian Government has also committed \$2 million for the Autism CRC to continue to be Australia's leading organisation for autism research, coordination, collaboration and advice. This commitment will also support development and implementation of a National Autism Strategy, with a national research agenda and evidence-based practice platform.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop guidelines on autism-friendly service design through the National Autism Strategy in order to help service providers tailor services and service environments to meet the needs of autistic individuals.

Supported in principle

The development of guidelines on autism-friendly service design to help service providers tailor services and service environments to meet the needs of autistic individuals will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that a National Autism Workforce Plan be developed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy to ensure the supply of a suitable and appropriate workforce to deliver services for autistic people. The National Autism Workforce Plan should identify actions, accompanied by clear and measurable outcomes, to:

- improve data around current and future workforce gaps and shortages (as they relate to the needs of the autism community);
- attract, train and retain workers in identified areas of shortage (both geographic and sector/profession-specific);
- increase autism content in relevant undergraduate training courses;
- develop accredited autism-specific short courses (or promote existing accredited courses) for current workers; and
- embed autism as part of ongoing professional development requirements related to professional registration.

Where appropriate, the National Autism Workforce Plan should align with existing workforce strategies, including the *NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021–2025*.

Supported in principle

A suitable and appropriate workforce to deliver services for autistic people, both inside and outside the NDIS, will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

The Australian Government is committed to delivering the NDIS so that Australians with disability are supported to meet their needs and have equal opportunities.

The Australian Government will also develop a new comprehensive NDIS Workforce Strategy that addresses key workforce pressures resulting in shortages, including for the workforce supporting autistic people. The NDIS Workforce Strategy will be informed by the consultations for the development of a National Autism Strategy, and align with other key strategies including the Closing the Gap's Strategic Plan for Funding the Development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the Department of Home Affairs work with the Departments of Social Services, Health, and Education, Skills and Training, as well as the National Disability Insurance Agency, to ensure current skilled migration arrangements facilitate migration to fill identified autism workforce shortages.

Supported

The Department of Home Affairs will work with the Departments of Social Services, Health and Aged Care, and Education, Jobs and Skills Australia, as well as the NDIA, to support the sector's need for specialist skilled labour that cannot be sourced in Australia, through the use of existing skilled visa arrangements.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy include measures to allow for monitoring and reporting of the social inclusion of autistic people within the community.

Supported in principle

Measures to allow for monitoring and reporting of the social inclusion of autistic people within the community will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that peer-to-peer networking and support projects continue to be funded as a priority under the Department of Social Services' Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle and acknowledges the importance of peer-to-peer activities in supporting people with disability, their families and carers.

The aim of the Individual Capacity Building (ICB) Program under the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program is designed to provide people with disability the skills and confidence to participate and contribute to the community and protect their rights.

The ICB Program achieves this by enabling systematic access to peer support, mentoring and other skills building for people with disability, carers and families, to develop their individual capacity. This includes activities that empower a person to be independent and to engage in social, economic and community life.

Consideration will be given to prioritising these projects for funding as part of the review of the ILC Strategy that is underway.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that online resources be developed by existing autism education and advocacy organisations—funded through the Department of Social Services’ Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program—and made widely available to help community organisations understand how they can actively support and include autistic people.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle and acknowledges the importance of online resources being developed and made available to individuals and organisations. Advocacy groups play a significant role in this regard.

The Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program predominately provides funding to organisations through one off grants, awarded through competitive rounds, to deliver projects in the community that benefit all Australians with disability. Funding is not ongoing and organisations are expected to have plans in place to enable activities to be sustainable once grants cease.

Grant rounds are administered according to the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs), made under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. The probity principles of the CGRGs require all applicants to be treated in an open, fair and transparent manner. In keeping with this framework, all applications are to be received and processed in accordance with the relevant published Grant Opportunity Guidelines. All eligible organisations, including autism-specific education and advocacy groups, would be open to apply for any available grant round.

Supports and services for specialised groups

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy include a focus on meeting the needs of all autistic people. This should include a particular focus on the provision of adequate and appropriate services for autistic adults, women and girls, as well as disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts of autistic people such as:

- people from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- people in regional and remote locations;
- First Nations people;
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- gender diverse and non-heterosexual people; and
- people with complex needs.

Supported

The Australian Government agrees a National Autism Strategy should include a particular focus on meeting the needs of all autistic people, including autistic adults, women and girls, as well as disadvantaged and priority cohorts. This will include identifying opportunities to tailor approaches to assist autistic people who face intersectional barriers.

Through adopting a focus on intersectionality, this would ensure a stronger focus on the intersecting and often reinforcing experiences of autistic people more broadly.

Development of a National Autism Strategy should also consider NDIS strategies that guide the NDIA's work in supporting NDIS participants. These strategies, which include the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Rural and Remote, and LGBTIQ+ strategies, are expected to be reviewed and refreshed from 2022-2023. The NDIA will ensure the reviews of these strategies align with work to develop a National Autism Strategy.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy include specific actions to improve access to services in regional and remote areas. This should include options for remote service delivery (such as telehealth), as well as working with relevant medical colleges and professional bodies to increase the supply and retention of clinicians and allied health professionals available to work in regional and remote locations.

Supported in principle

The inclusion of specific actions to improve access to services in regional and remote areas for all autistic people, both inside and outside the NDIS, will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Providing services to people in remote and very remote areas is a whole-of-government challenge, as there are broader systemic challenges facing these more isolated communities. Consultations and feedback from other agencies and trial sites have recognised some of the unique circumstances which may be driving this disparity.

The Closing the Gap Disability Sector Strengthening Plan (the Plan) seeks to provide a framework for all levels of government to strengthen the community-controlled disability sector and ensure better access to services. The Plan has a strong focus on and support of First Nations people with disability living in regional, remote and very remote areas. Jurisdictions' Implementation Plans will include actions to implement this Plan. The National Autism Strategy will also align with the Plan.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy include specific actions to improve access to services for First Nations peoples. This should include building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to deliver autism services in First Nations communities, as well as trialling the use of alternative care models, such as those in place to support individuals with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

In addition, the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy should include First Nations representation.

Supported

The Australian Government supports this recommendation. Representation of First Nations people with disability to support the development and implementation of a National Autism Strategy will be meaningful, gender sensitive, culturally appropriate and determined in consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN).

The Australian Government will implement this recommendation by adopting a social model of disability as well as a cultural model of inclusion, aligning with Australia's Disability Strategy and the Closing the Gap Disability Sector Strengthening Plan (DSSP). This will allow services provided by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to be more reflective of the lived experience, unique needs and inherent strengths and capacities of First Nations people with disability, their families and broader communities.

The DSSP was co-designed with the FPDN and provides a National Framework and key guidance to all levels of government for strengthening the community controlled sector and services available to First Nations people with disability, with a strong focus on and support of First Nations people with disability living in regional, remote and very remote areas. The DSSP is a key commitment under Priority Reform 2, of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The DSSP also seeks to align its activities with other national strategies, frameworks and reform agendas underway, including Australia's Disability Strategy, state and territory disability strategies and the forthcoming final report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The National Autism Strategy will align with the DSSP and other related national frameworks for First Nations People with disability.

Additionally, the NDIA is delivering improved NDIS services via ACCHOs, including:

- An Australian Government investment of \$5.9 million in the NDIS Ready project to increase ACCHOs registrations to deliver NDIS services.
- An additional \$4.5 million provided to ACCHOs through the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, to better connect First Nations people with disability to the NDIS through the Aboriginal Disability Liaison Officer program.
- The NDIA is providing funding of \$13.8 million annually through the Remote Community Connector program to Aboriginal Controlled Organisations (primarily Aboriginal Medical Services and Aboriginal Shire Councils) in remote areas to improve access to the NDIS. The program is undergoing expansion, with an additional \$3.5 million planned for the 2022-23 financial year.
- The Agency is working closely with First Nations service partners to enhance and improve the Remote Community Connector Program and to embed co-design in the NDIA approach. The NDIA is working in partnership with people with lived experience of disability through the Independent Advisory Council and disability representative organisations on co-design projects, including on a refresh of the NDIS First Nations Strategy.

To improve early childhood services for children with developmental delay or disability in remote areas, the NDIA is funding the Torres Cape Hospital and Health Service \$4.3 million to expand services in the Torres Strait Islands and Northern Peninsula Area of Far North Queensland.

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that, as a priority, all governments through the National Federation Reform Council review their approaches to coordinating service delivery for autistic people with complex needs and implement actions to ensure integrated and appropriate support for individuals and families with complex support needs, particularly during times of crisis.

Supported in principle

Approaches to coordinating service delivery for autistic people with complex needs, and actions to ensure integrated and appropriate support for individuals and families with complex support needs, particularly in times of crisis, will be considered in the introduction of the central coordination of disability. This will ensure real action and recognition for all Australians with disability, not just NDIS participants.

The NDIA Complex Support Needs Pathway supports participants with complex support needs (including those with autism), which commonly involves supporting their interaction with multiple service systems. In addition, participants with complex support needs (including those with autism), are funded for support coordination, providing additional support and contact between service providers and participants and their families and carers. Support coordinators may be used in times of crisis to support individuals and families connect with mainstream services and NDIS supports.

The NDIA has also introduced Liaison Officers, who are the conduit between the NDIA and state and territory health and justice systems, supporting existing and prospective NDIS participants.

To support participants in times of crisis, the NDIA has committed funding over up to three years for the provision of a national After Hours Crisis Referral Service (AHCRS). The purpose of the AHCRS is to work closely with an NDIS participant in crisis, share pertinent information with emergency services, navigate reasonable support options and reduce social admissions into hospital or other emergency services because of a breakdown of disability related supports.

The AHCRS provider operates a national telephone based service and is able to respond to requests for assistance from state and territory government emergency services. These services include police, ambulances and hospitals.

NDIS participants aged 18 years and over, NDIS participants included in the Voluntary Out of Home Care cohort, and children with supports at risk due to their disability support needs, can access the service.

Recommendation 22

The committee recommends that the National Autism Strategy recognise the vital role that families, parents and carers play in supporting autistic individuals.

Supported in principle

The role of families, parents and carers in supporting autistic individuals will be recognised in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency work with stakeholders and experts to:

- clarify the operation of the 'ordinary role of parenting' principle, recognising the significant additional responsibilities borne by parents and carers of autistic individuals; and
- institute a family-centred approach to planning that extends beyond the Early Childhood Approach and is supported by training in family-centred approaches for National Disability Insurance Scheme Planners, Local Area Coordinators, and Support Coordinators.

Partially supported

This recommendation is partially supported.

Provisions recognising the importance of family and carers to NDIS participants were included in the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and Other Measures) Act 2022* (the Act), which commenced on 1 July 2022.

These include a new guiding principle for the administration of the Act (subsection 4(12A), that the relationship between participants and their families and carers be recognised and respected in plan preparation, plan review and management of funding (paragraph 31(ca)), and giving priority in the above activities to strengthen and build the capacity of families and carers to support participants who are children (paragraph 31(d)).

The NDIA is committed to working closely with participants, their families and carers and the wider disability community to deliver the best NDIS possible.

The NDIA has also clarified the 'ordinary role of parenting' in the Reasonable and Necessary Supports Guideline, which sets out the specific criteria considered by NDIA planners when determining what is reasonable to expect informal supports, including the parents and caregivers of young children, to provide.

The NDIA will continue to engage with the Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS on how to best support families and carers in their roles.

Recommendation 24

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency publish its guidance for planners regarding the role of caregivers and families to improve transparency and consistency of support provided.

Supported

The Australian Government supports this recommendation. In 2021 the NDIA published its guidance for planners regarding the role of caregivers and families. The NDIS Operational Guideline sets out how the NDIA considers informal supports, and interacts with families and caregivers throughout the planning process.

The Reasonable and Necessary Supports Guideline sets out how the NDIA determines what is reasonable for informal supports to provide, while the Early Childhood Guideline sets out how the NDIA works with the families and caregivers and young children receiving supports under the Early Childhood approach. These guidelines are available at: [NDIS Guidelines](#).

The NDIA has also published a suite of information on its website, which sets out how the Agency works with families and carers of participants. This includes the NDIA's approach to children younger than 7 years, supports available to carers from other government agencies, assistance on how to deal with the death of a loved one in the NDIS, the roles of participant guardians and nominees and how participants can transition to more appropriate accommodation, from residential aged care facilities. Further information is available here: [For families and carers | NDIS](#).

Recommendation 25

The committee recommends that state and territory governments undertake a mapping of respite and support services for parents and work with government and non-government providers to address identified gaps in support.

Supported in principle

This is a matter for state and territory government consideration.

The Australian Government notes there are existing measures in place to assist and provide support for all carers through the Carer Gateway. Carer Gateway is an Australian Government initiative providing a range of free in-person, online and phone-based supports and services to carers. The purpose of Carer Gateway is to provide services and support for all carers in their own right, regardless of the age or condition of their care recipient. Services include: carer needs and support planning; counselling; peer support; carer directed support packages; emergency respite; coaching; information and advice; and assistance with navigating and accessing relevant local and Australian Government services.

Through Carer Gateway, carers can access planned respite through Carer Directed Support packages brokered by Carer Gateway service providers. The Carer Directed Support service is a consumer directed approach to supporting carers in their caring role. It gives carers a greater say and more control over the design and delivery of the support provided to them and the care recipient.

Carers may also access respite through their care recipient's packages, including care recipients who are engaged with the NDIS.

Research and data

Recommendation 26

The committee recommends that a National Autism Research Framework be agreed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy. This framework should be:

- based, as a starting point, on the research priorities agreed by the Australian Autism Research Council;
- informed by the recommendations in this report; and
- compatible with the National Disability Research Agenda being developed by the National Disability Research Partnership.

Supported in principle

A proposed National Autism Research Framework will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

The Australian Government supports the committee recommendation that the proposed National Autism Research Framework be compatible with the National Disability Research Agenda (NDRA) being developed by the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP).

- The NDRP, once fully established, will facilitate a collaborative and inclusive research agenda through partnerships between academics, people with disability, their families and carers, peak advocacy groups, governments and service providers.
- The NDRP will also facilitate the translation of disability research into policy and practice and enhance the research capacity of the disability sector.

Recommendation 27

The committee recommends that the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy investigate options for improving the collection of data about autistic people to better inform research, policy and practice in relation to improving life outcomes for autistic people. This should include:

- exploring the feasibility of establishing a National Autism Register;
- engaging with the Disability Advisory Council to ensure any proposed activities build on (or are compatible with) the results of the National Disability Data Asset pilots;
- engaging with the Disability Advisory Council to ensure that data needs in relation to autistic people are adequately represented in any future National Disability Data Asset; and
- identifying any gaps in data collection that will not be met by the National Disability Data Asset.

Supported in principle

The investigation of options for improving the collection of data about autistic people to inform research, policy and practice to improve life outcomes for autistic people will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

The Australian and state and territory governments are working together to develop a National Disability Data Asset (NDDA). The NDDA project proposes to establish a collection of linked de-identified data held by governments and covering multiple service systems. The aim is to better understand how people with disability are supported through services, payments and programs, and what outcomes are experienced. The NDDA project will build on the findings of the 18-month NDDA Pilot phase, which concluded on 31 December 2021.

The NDDA project is intended to be a truly national project involving collaboration between all governments and with the disability community. Engagement with the disability community for the NDDA project will be informed by the Disability Advisory Council recommendations.

The Australian Government notes that in the process of exploring the feasibility of establishing a National Autism Register, consideration will be given to the potential scope of a register (i.e.: collection of administrative data only) compared to the scope of an outcomes registry (i.e.: collection of outcomes data for the purpose of evaluating and improving life outcomes for autistic people). Consideration will also be given to piloting how NDIS data may be used better to inform research, policy and practice to improve life outcomes for autistic people and to identify gaps in current collections.

Governments are committed to working together alongside people with disability, communities, businesses and the non-government sector to implement Australia's Disability Strategy and realise its vision in a coordinated and targeted way. This includes the implementation of an Outcomes Framework to track progress against Australia's Disability Strategy, a data strategy to support regular reporting and improvements to evaluation and research.

Under the Outcomes Framework, governments agreed to work together to develop a comprehensive data improvement plan (DIP) in 2022, which would:

- Ensure data needed to measure outcomes for people with disability is collected, shared, and progressively improved over the life of Australia's Disability Strategy.
- Identify where data needs to be linked between systems to improve our understanding of the impact of Australia's Disability Strategy.
- The purpose of the DIP is to maintain and improve the level of data quality needed to continually improve the outcomes for people with disability.

Recommendation 28

The committee recommends that the Australian Government prioritise autism research as part of the National Disability Research Agenda and National Disability Data Asset, given that autism represents the most prevalent (and fastest growing) primary disability type in the NDIS. This should include the creation of separate autism-specific funding streams within existing research grant programs.

Supported in principle

In relation to the National Disability Data Asset (NDDA), the Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting has agreed the first three national priorities for data sharing and analysis:

1. Reporting obligations for the Australia's Disability Strategy, Outcomes Framework;
2. Health outcomes for people with disability; and
3. Employment outcomes for people with disability.

It is proposed that future research priorities would be determined via the NDDA governance forum, to be established, that will include formal input and oversight by disability community representatives.

In relation to the National Disability Research Agenda (NDRA), the Melbourne Disability Institute (MDI) is developing a proposed NDRA as part of work supported by Australian Government establishment funding for an independently governed National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP). MDI's work is being guided by a working party made up of people with disability, researchers from some of Australia's leading universities and independent advisors.

The NDRP will independently implement the research agenda after developing priorities in consultation with the whole disability sector.

Advocacy

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments re-commit to a national approach to disability advocacy. This should include:

- reviewing the effectiveness of the National Disability Advocacy Framework, including the current status of its outputs and reform and policy directions; and
- updating the National Disability Advocacy Framework to include performance measures and reporting requirements for each of the outputs and reform and policy directions.

Supported in principle

On 13 December 2019, the Council of Australian Governments, Disability Reform Council agreed, with South Australia dissenting, that disability advocacy is a shared responsibility between the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

The Australian Government, and state and territory governments are working collaboratively to develop a new National Disability Advocacy Framework (NDAF), including incorporating public consultation feedback. The new NDAF is an inclusive, high-level and principle based framework which commits the Australian and state and territory governments to work together to improve access to disability advocacy services for all people with disability.

Recommendation 30

The committee recommends that a National Autism Advocacy Plan be developed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy. The National Autism Advocacy Plan should:

- align with the National Disability Advocacy Framework; and
- identify actions to:
 - improve data collection and reporting on the utilisation and effectiveness of advocacy services for autistic people;
 - encourage the growth of autism-specific advocacy services, including autistic-led services;
 - increase the numbers of autistic people appointed to key positions in all organisations, including autism and disability-related organisations;
 - ensure better understanding of, and advocacy for, the needs of autistic people with complex presentations; and
 - bring together the diverse views and perspectives of the autistic community to improve advocacy for all autistic people

Supported in principle

Australia's Disability Strategy recognises advocacy helps safeguard people's rights and overcome barriers to their inclusion and participation in the community. The Safety, Rights and Justice Outcome Area under Australia's Disability Strategy acknowledges disability advocacy as being an important way to enable and support people with disability to protect and uphold their rights. This Outcome Area aims to ensure 'the rights of people with disability are promoted, upheld and protected, and people with disability feel safe and enjoy equality before the law'.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to develop a Disability Advocacy Work Plan (work plan) to guide implementation of the National Disability Advocacy Framework (NDAF). Informed by public consultation on the NDAF, the work plan will identify areas of focus and timelines to enable the Australian Government to engage in multilateral and bilateral agreements. Areas of focus are anticipated to include data improvement and sharing, funding arrangements and service models. The NDAF, work plan and bilateral agreements are being developed to improve advocacy access and services for all people with disability.

The Australian and state and territory governments are also working together to develop a National Disability Data Asset (NDDA). The NDDA project proposes to establish a collection of linked de-identified data held by governments and covering multiple service systems. The aim is to obtain a better understanding of how people with disability are supported through services, payments and programs, and what outcomes are experienced.

In the future, it is hoped that research and data generated by utilising the NDDA will support service providers, advocacy organisations, and disability-related organisations among other groups to make evidence based, data driven decisions to better meet the needs of people they service.

Recommendation 31

The committee recommends that the proposed National Autism Advocacy Plan reflects the need for differentiated advocacy services to support the range of presentations across the spectrum and the stage of life for those autistic people requiring advocacy.

Supported in principle

The National Disability Advocacy Framework (NDAF), work plan, and bilateral agreements are being developed by the Australian and state and territory governments to reflect the range of advocacy services and improve advocacy access and services for all people with disability.

Recommendation 32

The committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that the National Disability Advocacy Program and other Commonwealth-funded disability advocacy programs fund at least one autism-specific advocacy service in each state and territory.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government currently funds 59 organisations across Australia to deliver the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP). The NDAP provides people with disability with access to effective disability advocacy that promotes, protects and ensures their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights enabling community participation. All people with disability can receive support under the NDAP.

The Australian Government also funds 17 organisations through the Disability Representative Organisations (DRO) program to provide systemic advocacy through representing people with disability and providing advice to the Australian Government. The program helps to address barriers to social and economic participation for people with disability, and ensures their voices and perspectives are reflected in Australian Government systems, policies and services. Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) is funded through the DRO program as part of the Disability Australia Consortium to provide autism-specific systemic advocacy.

Recommendation 33

The committee recommends that state and territory governments commit to funding autism-specific advocacy services under their funded disability advocacy programs. Progress toward implementation could be monitored through the National Federation Reform Council.

Supported in principle

This recommendation is principally a matter for state and territory governments. The Australian Government is currently working with state and territory governments to collectively address service standards, determine demand and unmet demand, and improve access to high quality advocacy services.

Recommendation 34

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services' Information Linkages and Capacity Building program, fund autism-specific advocacy groups to build the capacity of general disability advocacy organisations to support autistic people.

Supported in principle

The Department of Social Services (the department) is working to strengthen the current Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Strategy by responding to stakeholder feedback received to date. This includes, but is not limited to, making grant rounds more targeted to address the needs of priority cohorts that may not have their needs addressed by current ILC activities. The department understands the importance of building capacity of advocacy organisations to support autistic people, and will consider this recommendation when developing future grant activities and the broader ILC Strategy.

Recommendation 35

The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Department of Social Services' Information Linkages and Capacity Building program, fund autism-specific advocacy groups to build the self-advocacy and self-determination skills of autistic people (and their families), including through peer support programs.

Partially supported

The aim of the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program is to provide funding for activities which build the skills and confidence of all people with disability, including autistic people, to participate and contribute to their community and protect their rights.

The Australian Government acknowledges the importance of self-advocacy and self-determination for people with disability so they can develop autonomy over their lives, can make their own life choices and speak up for their needs. Advocacy groups play a significant role in this regard. This recommendation is only partially supported as the ILC program predominately provides funding to organisations through one off grants, awarded through competitive rounds, to deliver projects in the community that benefit all Australians with disability.

Grant rounds are administered according to the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs), made under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*. The probity principles of the CGRGs require all applicants to be treated in an open, fair and transparent manner. In keeping with this framework, all applications are to be received and processed in accordance with the relevant published Grant Opportunity Guidelines. All eligible organisations, including autism-specific advocacy groups, are able to apply for any available grant round.

The ILC program complements but does not diminish governments' responsibilities under Australia's Disability Strategy which recognises responsibility for supporting advocacy is substantially shared across all levels of government. The state and territory governments retain their responsibility to fund self-advocacy and self-determination activities, including autism specific activities, and the ILC program should not be viewed in isolation from the broader system of funding supports affirmed under Australia's Disability Strategy.

Recommendation 36

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Skills and Employment work with state and territory education authorities, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Education Services Australia and other relevant stakeholders to provide guidance and resources to help schools teach self-advocacy skills. While applicable to all school children, there should be a particular focus on making this content accessible to students with autism.

Supported in principle

The 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards) made recommendations to develop guidance and resources for students and their parents and carers on their rights under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and the Standards.

The Department of Education has commissioned Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) to lead a co-design process to develop the resources which are expected to be available from the second half of 2022. The resources will provide practical guidance in an easy-to-understand format for students with disability, including autistic students, and their parents and carers. The resources will help students, and parents and carers, to self-advocate through key milestone and transition periods, including practical workbooks for advocating and creating an action plan to work with their education provider.

The Department of Education will promote the resources through the education sector and disability stakeholder networks, including to state and territory education departments and non-government school representatives will be formally provided the resources and invited to consider their use in their jurisdictions.

Recommendation 37

The committee recommends, as part of the inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposed in Recommendation 6, that consideration be given to whether the National Disability Insurance Scheme could play a greater role in supporting the development of self-advocacy skills (as part of a participant's Capacity Building budget).

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle, and looks forward to working with the Joint Standing Committee.

The NDIS supports NDIS participants to develop their capacity in ways that help them pursue their goals. This may include supporting them to understand their rights or how to speak up for themselves.

Diagnostic services

Recommendation 38

The committee recommends that, as a matter of priority, the National Autism Strategy identify actions to improve access to autism diagnosis. This should include:

- establishing, and publicly reporting on progress against, an agreed target for a maximum waiting time for diagnosis that reflects best practice;
- improving information for families and adults about autism and the pathways to diagnosis;
- identifying opportunities to co-locate autism screening and assessment services within existing services, such as maternal health clinics, early childhood and child care services, and school education settings;
- a national rollout of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre's training program for maternal and child health nurses to improve early identification of autism;
- identifying opportunities for collaboration between maternal health care nurses and early childhood educators to support identification of, and communication about, autism in early childhood and child care settings;
- promoting use of the ASDetect app by parents, health practitioners and educators
- developing diagnostic tools that are more sensitive to the heterogenic presentation of autism, particularly in women and girls;
- working with medical colleges and professional bodies to improve the supply of healthcare professionals with expertise in autism diagnosis;
- embedding autism within initial education courses for healthcare professionals and educators, including training in the heterogenic presentation of autism;
- promoting use of the Autism HealthPathways platform to aid clinical decision-making in relation to autism assessments; and
- identifying ways to improve access to diagnostic services for people in regional and remote areas, including telehealth options.

Supported in Principle

The Australian Government supports in principle this recommendation and acknowledges the importance of access to information about autism, including diagnosis.

The Australian Government is already supporting implementation of the National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia (the Guideline), to create greater consistency in diagnostic practices across Australia and facilitate access to targeted supports and services. The Guideline intends to standardise and provide for rigorous and accurate diagnostic outcomes for autistic children and adults across a range of healthcare settings and professions in Australia.

To support greater take-up of the best practice approaches to assessment and diagnosis outlined in the Guideline, the Department of Social Services (the department) has established an Expert Reference Group (ERG) comprising membership from health professional associations and consumer groups. The department has also funded associated activities to support greater take-up, including:

- Funding provided to the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (Autism CRC), the Guideline developers, to develop the National Implementation Toolkit – a set of resources to promote the Guideline to health professionals and autistic people and their families and carers.
- Funding provided to the Autism CRC to support establishment and operationalisation of the ERG.
- Funding provided to Australian Healthcare Associates to conduct an independent evaluation of the reach and take-up of the Guideline.
- Funding provided to the Autism CRC through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program for the National Best-Practice Assessment and Diagnosis project to develop resources to support mainstream health providers involved in the assessment and diagnosis of autism. This project builds on the Autism CRC's National Implementation Toolkit.

The ILC program has also provided one-off grant funding to Amaze Incorporated for Autism Connect – a national information service for autistic people, their families and carers, health professionals, researchers, teachers, employers and the broader community.

The Australian Government has committed to the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People (Recommendations 61 and 62 refer). Some aspects of this recommendation will be considered in the development of a roadmap. Noting this, a number of other aspects of this recommendation would be the responsibility of state and territory governments.

A key component of the Department of Health and Aged Care's National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability is to support health care professionals to provide better care for people with intellectual disability. In addition to people with a diagnosed or suspected intellectual disability, the National Roadmap also includes people with autism who also have an intellectual disability. There is potential to build on or adapt this work to inform the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

The Department of Health and Aged Care is also working with the Department of Social Services on implementing action 1.2 under the Early Childhood Targeted Action Plan (EC TAP), under Australia's Disability Strategy.

- Objective 1 in the EC TAP: Enable early identification of disability or developmental concerns and develop clearer pathways and timely access to appropriate supports.
- Action 1.2 in the EC TAP: Provide support to facilitate, through Primary Health Networks and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, improved access to primary health care services to better enable early detection of disability or developmental concerns in young children, and appropriate referral pathways, recognising the needs for priority population groups.
- EC TAP action 1.2 is due to be completed by 30 June 2024.

On 1 January 2022 permanent telehealth arrangements were introduced to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) with the introduction of a single, national telehealth program. These ongoing arrangements support the delivery of telehealth services for a range of face-to-face services provided by General Practitioners, medical specialists, mental health practitioners and allied health professionals. Medicare eligible patients with suspected or diagnosed autism spectrum disorder are able to access to a wide range of telehealth MBS services, providing a substitute for current face-to-face services where clinically appropriate.

Recommendation 39

The committee recommends that state and territory governments review their child health and development screening programs to identify opportunities to improve early identification of autism.

Noted

This is a recommendation for state and territory government consideration.

Recommendation 40

The committee recommends that the Australian Government task the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Advisory Committee with an immediate review of MBS items related to diagnosis of autism. The aim of the review should be to align current MBS items with the diagnostic process established in the *National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Australia*, as well as recommend new items required for the same purpose.

Supported in principle

The MBS Review Advisory Committee (MRAC) supports Australian Government priorities by undertaking reviews, including as directed by the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

The scope and aim of reviews is in accordance with MRAC Terms of Reference. MRAC is an independent body, whose outcomes, including recommendations for new items, are dependent upon assessment against the committee framework, which includes findings from consideration of existing models of care against an assessment framework.

Recommendation 41

The committee recommends that the Department of Health prioritise implementation of the remaining recommendations of the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce (the Taskforce) in relation to the diagnosis of autism, complex allied health assessments and multidisciplinary planning (as set out in the Taskforce's June 2020 Report on Primary Care).

Supported

In December 2021 the Australian Government announced changes to the MBS in response to recommendations from the MBS Review Taskforce. These changes relate to diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Complex Neurodevelopmental Disorders and eligible disabilities. The changes will take effect on 1 March 2023.

Recommendation 42

The committee recommends the removal of the current age limit on Medicare Benefits Schedule items related to the diagnosis of autism.

Not supported

This recommendation is not supported. The Department of Health and Aged Care is currently implementing MBS changes in response to recommendations from the MBS Taskforce. These include increasing the eligibility age limits across MBS services for assessment, diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Complex Neurodevelopmental Disorders, and eligible disabilities from under 13 to under 25 years of age. The changes will take effect on 1 March 2023.

Any further changes to the age limits should be considered as part of the associated Post Implementation Review, which is expected to occur within 24 months of date of effect, by 1 March 2025.

Early intervention approaches

Recommendation 43

The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit funding to quality research to continue addressing gaps in the evidence for early intervention approaches.

Supported

The Australian Government supports research and best practice early intervention. Early intervention can be for both children and adults, and can help reduce the functional impairments of disability.

Early childhood intervention in relation to children, is about giving them the best possible start to life. The Early Childhood Targeted Action Plan was released in December 2021 under Australia's Disability Strategy. It contains a number of Commonwealth led actions, including the commissioning of work to review and update guidance for best practice in early childhood intervention as well as conducting a service system gap analysis. These actions are expected to commence by late-2022 and be completed by December 2023.

The Australian Government is funding quality research to grow the evidence base for early intervention approaches. In 2020, the NDIA engaged the Autism Cooperative Research Centre to undertake an independent review of the best available evidence for supporting children on the autism spectrum. The review investigated non-pharmacologic interventions and was inconclusive on the type and frequency of interventions required to achieve optimal outcomes.

The NDIA is also leading a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of behavioural interventions informed by or based on Applied Behavioural Analysis in autistic children seven years or younger. The review is examining what benefits can be expected from the main types of behavioural interventions, in relation to key NDIS outcomes, and what individual characteristics or intervention design/delivery factors may contribute to better gains. The review will also examine whether there is a relationship between outcomes, positive or negative, and different intervention intensities.

Recommendation 44

The committee recommends that the Australian Government investigate options to improve post-diagnosis support, including a one-stop shop for directing individuals to the most appropriate support services.

The one-stop shop should be accessible via a range of platforms, including more traditional mediums such as print and phone support services.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government recognises the importance of early intervention, including for young children. Recognising this, the Early Childhood Targeted Action Plan under Australia's Disability Strategy, sets out key actions to strengthen early identification, information, support and pathways, as well as collaboration between programs and services. Actions are being implemented with an intersectional and diversity lens. Actions include Australian Government, and state and territory led-actions.

On 2 August 2022, the Australian Government announced grants of \$16 million under the National Early Childhood Program (NECP). In addition to the funding under the NECP, funding of up to \$15 million over four years to 2025-26 will be offered for outreach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children ('Outreach' initiative), under the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program, which will complement the NECP.

These activities will support young children aged 0-8 years with newly identified disability or emerging developmental concerns outside of the NDIS, and build the capacity of their families and carers to support their child's development with 50 per cent of all activities under the NECP targeting children with autism or autism-like characteristics. The NECP was informed by a co-design consultation process with around 600 stakeholders and aligns with Australia's Disability Strategy. The Department of Social Services will undertake further consultation with key stakeholders to inform the design of the 'Outreach' initiative in the second half of 2022.

The NECP builds on a range of supports and services the Australian Government has provided through programs such as the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) program. Some elements of the HCWA program will cease on 31 December 2022 when supports under the NECP are expected to commence, such as autism-specific parent workshops, covering both the early and school years, and autism-specific playgroups for children. The HCWA program has also funded disability specific information on the Raising Children Network website.

The Disability Gateway offers links to autism-related information, supports and services funded by Commonwealth, state and local governments in each state and territory, including:

- Autism Connect – a free national autism helpline, providing information to support autistic people, their families and carers, health professionals, researchers, teachers, employers and the broader community; and
- Launchpad - a resource developed by Autism Spectrum Australia to help young autistic people and their families to live independently.

Funding has been allocated to ensure the Disability Gateway website content continues to be accessible, current and is expanded on in the future. This includes providing information on more autism-related services and supports, developed by Autism Spectrum Australia and other autism-related sector organisations and through user feedback and usage.

Recommendation 45

The committee recommends that all National Disability Insurance Scheme planners and educators associated with the new Early Childhood Approach undergo training in understanding autism and best evidence-based approaches to intervention.

Supported

The NDIA's early childhood approach supports best practice in early childhood intervention because it helps each child and family to build their capacity, and supports greater inclusion in community and every day settings, with the child's parents, carers, family members and educators playing an important role.

Many NDIA Early Childhood Partners (EC Partners) who support participants in their local community understand the NDIS, create and implement a plan, and assist participants to understand how the NDIS works with other service systems, are leading practitioners in the field.

The NDIA has developed training for EC Partners to engage and support participants and families and carers confidently and meaningfully.

The NDIA's Early Childhood approach is based on best practice, international standards of family centred practices, with the child's parents, carers, family members and educators playing an important role.

As part of the NDIA's commitment to uplifting planner capability as set out in the NDIA Corporate Plan, additional work is being undertaken to ensure staff have the right capabilities through the continuous design and delivery of mandatory eLearning training and induction programs.

The NDIA has also developed a Disability Navigator and disability snapshots to help NDIA staff and partners improve their awareness and understanding of the lived experience of people with disabilities, including autistic people.

The NDIA's decision making is guided by evidence-based approaches and will continue to incorporate research findings into training for EC Partners as these become available.

Education

Recommendation 46

The committee supports implementation of the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards *for Education 2005* and recommends that the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and state and territory education authorities:

- work with the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy to apply an 'autism lens' to the implementation of the Disability Standards for Education review recommendations; and
- include specific actions to ensure the Disability Standards for Education meet the needs of autistic students.

Supported in principle

The Department of Education is working with state and territory governments and education authorities to implement the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Review). The Review was conducted with extensive community consultation, including stakeholders supporting autistic students and people living with autism. The recommendations are being implemented in a consultative manner, and inclusive of the needs of autistic students.

Once the forum to drive development of a National Autism Strategy is determined (Recommendation 2 refers), the Department of Education will include the forum in its consultative process for implementation of the Review recommendations.

All schools in Australia are required under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards) to provide reasonable adjustments for students with disability, including autism, so they can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. While the Australian Government plays a leadership role in education and provides substantial funding for schools, state and territory governments are responsible for the regulation, administration and operation of schools.

Further information about the Review is available on the Department of Education website at: [Final Report – 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#).

Recommendation 47

The committee recommends that the Australian Government coordinate with all government and non-government education authorities to ensure that policies on bullying include specific measures to address bullying of autistic students, including the use of:

- frameworks for positive behaviour interventions and support; and
- opportunities for supported social engagement.

Supported in principle

State and territory education authorities have constitutional responsibility for the delivery and regulation of schooling to all children of school age in their jurisdictions, including policies on bullying and support for autistic students.

Once the forum to drive development of a National Autism Strategy is chosen (Recommendation 2 refers), the Department of Education will consult with the forum on specific measures, frameworks, policies and approaches, and the success of these measures to address bullying of autistic students.

The Australian Government takes a leadership role in setting and advocating for national priorities for school education and also supports national programs and resources that schools, students, and families can use to address bullying issues and make school environments safe and inclusive to support the wellbeing of all young people, including neurodiverse students.

The Australian Government works collaboratively with states and territories on numerous wellbeing measures. While many of these measures are not explicitly focused on autistic students, they are aimed at supporting all students. There may be opportunities to build upon the work already undertaken as part of these initiatives to provide targeted support for autistic students. Some key measures addressing bullying and supporting the wellbeing of students and school communities are outlined below:

- The Positive Partnerships program provides professional development for teachers, principals and other school staff to build their understanding, skills and expertise in working with autistic school-age students. It provides workshops, information sessions, and other online resources for parents and carers of autistic school-age students.
- The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework supports school communities to build, maintain and enhance positive and inclusive learning environments.
- The Student Wellbeing Hub provides a range of information and resources for educators, students and parents to assist them to create and maintain a safe and supportive school environment. The Hub has specific resources on: bullying and how students can be empowered to take action against it; and to assist educators to support autistic students to develop positive relationships and express their feelings.
- The Bullying. No Way! website supports school communities with evidence-informed resources and activities for a proactive approach to bullying education and prevention.
- The National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence, held on the third Friday of March each year, is an opportunity for Australian schools to build and highlight their everyday work to counter bullying and violence.
- The nationally agreed Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum (curriculum) endorsed by all education ministers, sets the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of their background or where they live. The curriculum also addresses cyber safety. State and territory curriculum authorities and school authorities are responsible for the implementation of the curriculum in their schools, and are able to adopt and adapt the curriculum to meet student and community needs.
- The Australian Government has appointed an eSafety Commissioner. The eSafety Commissioner's website provides information about cyberbullying and fact sheets on how people can assist themselves and others who may be cyberbullied. The eSafety Commissioner also investigates complaints about cyberbullying and can assist in having content removed from social media sites.

- The National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) chaplains work in collaboration with around 3,000 school communities per year to support the wellbeing of school students through the provision of pastoral care, running programs such as breakfast clubs and coordinating volunteer activities within the school community.
- The Department of Education works in partnership with the eSafety Commissioner to deliver an online cyberbullying professional learning package for NSCP chaplains.

Recommendation 48

The committee recommends that the Education Ministers Meeting develop and implement a framework for regularly monitoring and publicly reporting on education outcomes for students with disability from 2023. This should include monitoring and reporting on outcomes for autistic students as a separate cohort and should be informed by consultation with the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy.

Supported in principle

Collecting and reporting student outcomes data is a matter for state and territory governments. Once the forum to drive development of a National Autism Strategy is chosen (Recommendation 2 refers), the Department of Education will consult with the forum on improving monitoring and reporting on outcomes for autistic students as a separate cohort.

The Australian Government has a strong transparency agenda in education and is working to improve public accountability and reporting on student outcomes through national policies and frameworks including:

- Reporting commitments in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration.
- Incorporating outcomes for students with disability into broader work on national performance reporting as part of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia.
- Australia's Disability Strategy which commits governments to collecting and sharing relevant data to support effective monitoring and reporting of outcomes for people with disability in order to drive change.
- Implementing the recommendation of the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* for states and territories to develop nationally consistent principles and practices on collection and public reporting of data on school students with disability.

Recommendation 49

The committee supports the 2019 recommendation of the National School Resourcing Board in relation to refining the costing model for the students with disability loading to inform the loading settings from 2023. Accordingly, the committee recommends that implementation of the new costing model be accompanied by stronger accountability measures requiring government and non-government education authorities to demonstrate that schools are receiving adequate funds to meet the needs of students with disability— including autistic students.

Noted

The 2019 National School Resourcing Board (the Board) review of the loading for students with disability made eight recommendations. On 2 July 2020, the Australian Government released its response to the Board’s review, agreeing to the Board’s recommendation in relation to refining the costing model for the students with disability loading to inform the loading settings from 2023. In 2021, the Department of Education commissioned an independent review of the Students with Disability Loading.

This work is being progressed in consultation with the schooling sector. Findings and recommendations of this independent review will be provided to the Australian Government for consideration.

Recommendation 50

The committee recommends that, where state and territory education authorities use targeted programs to distribute funding for students with disability, eligibility for these programs be reviewed and adjusted to better meet the needs of autistic students.

Noted

This is a matter for state and territory government consideration.

Recommendation 51

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory education authorities and relevant stakeholders to identify and implement measures to build the capacity of teachers, school leaders and parents to support the inclusion of autistic students in schools. This should include the provision of additional specialist support in schools.

Supported in principle

The 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards) made recommendations to strengthen the knowledge and capability of educators and education providers to meet their obligations under the Standards, and to better embed accountability for the Standards throughout the education system.

Recommendations from the Review build on the capacity of teachers, school leaders and parents to support all students with disability, including autistic students.

Implementation of the recommendations is being guided by the Disability Standards Review Implementation Reference Group (IRG). The IRG comprises representatives from state and territory education departments and representatives of the non-government schools sector (Independent Schools Australia and the National Catholic Education Commission).

The Department of Education is also working with Education Services Australia to expand the autism-specific resources already available on the Student Wellbeing Hub and on the web portal for the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability. New resources under development include:

- Online advice and strategies to help students self-regulate when they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed by their environment, including school.
- Resources to promote a constructive dialogue by teachers and families about supporting autistic children transitioning into school.

The Positive Partnerships program has helped improve inclusion of autistic students in schools since it was established in 2008 as part of the Australian Government's cross-sectoral Helping Children with Autism initiative. The Positive Partnerships program, administered by the Department of Education, supports school-aged autistic students. The program is implemented in each state and territory by a planning group comprising representatives of government, Catholic and independent education authorities, autism associations and allied health professionals. The program provides:

- Professional development for teachers, principals and other school staff to build their understanding, skills and expertise in working with school-age autistic students;
- Workshops and information sessions for parents and carers of school-age autistic students; and
- A website providing online learning modules and other resources in different languages, for parents and carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and resources developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

More than 26,000 people participated in face-to-face workshops, online webinars and training in 2021, comprising educators and support staff and parents and family members. The Positive Partnership website has received more than 1 million visits since 2012.

Recommendation 52

The committee recommends that the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership work with state and territory teacher regulatory authorities to:

- ensure all initial teacher education courses include at least two units on inclusive education, with a focus on the functional challenges experienced by autistic students, as well as evidence-based strategies for supporting autistic students in classrooms; and
- incorporate autism understanding into professional development requirements tied to teacher registration.

Supported in principle

Initial teacher education programs are required to meet the Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (the Accreditation Standards) which set high level requirements to ensure that all initial teacher education graduates meet the Graduate career stage of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Teacher Standards). State and territory teacher regulatory authorities are responsible for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs using the Accreditation Standards.

Within this national framework, program content is the responsibility of each higher education provider.

Amendment of the Accreditation Standards requires the agreement of all Australian education ministers through the Education Ministers Meeting. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership works with state and territory regulatory authorities to implement any changes once agreed by education ministers.

The Australian Government supports the provision of quality professional development for teachers. High quality professional learning for teachers is primarily a state and territory responsibility involving teacher regulatory authorities, government and non-government education departments, schools and their teaching staff. The professional development requirements tied to teacher registration are a matter for state and territory teacher regulatory bodies.

The Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review (QITE Review), released on 24 February 2022, recommended the Accreditation Standards be amended to ensure initial teacher education graduates are taught sufficient evidence-based practices to meet the Teacher Standards and empower them with the tools to lead a classroom, including in relation to supporting diverse learners and students with disability (Recommendation 7 of the QITE Review refers). The report also delivered a finding for higher education providers to explore the potential for micro-credentials and short courses to provide quality access to opportunities to enhance teacher capability in areas where teachers feel they need additional support, including teaching diverse learners (Finding 7 of the QITE Review refers). The Australian Government is continuing to consider its response to the recommendations of the QITE Review.

Recommendation 53

The committee recommends that the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership work with relevant stakeholders create additional autism- related Illustrations of Practice—across all domains of teaching and for all career stages—to help teachers better support autistic students in classrooms and schools.

Supported in principle

In support of the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards), the then Minister for Education commissioned the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to undertake mapping and analysis of relevant national schooling standards and frameworks to determine the extent these support the achievement of the objectives of the Standards.

The Australian Government has subsequently engaged AITSL to undertake work stemming from that mapping and analysis which is relevant for this recommendation. This work includes:

- Elaborations of the Teacher Standards to provide further clarity about the Disability Standards, and their implementation in schools and to inform any future changes to the Standards.
- Leadership guides to set out explicit roles, responsibilities and accountability for school leaders with respect to inclusive education and adherence to the Disability Standards.

- Expanding the range of ‘In the Classroom’ videos available for teachers and school leaders to include examples focused on determining reasonable adjustments for students with disability.

In support of the recommendations of the Review of the Standards, the Australian Government has engaged Education Services Australia to develop a suite of case studies (leveraging the existing case studies relating to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD)) to provide practical examples for teachers and school leaders to support them in understanding and discharging their obligations under the Standards. There are already nine autism specific illustrations of practice on the NCCD portal.

The Positive Partnerships program to support school-aged autistic students has developed a range of face-to-face and online autism-specific short courses to help teachers better support autistic students in classrooms and schools, including:

- Introduction to Autism
- Introduction to Visual Supports
- Introduction to the Planning Tool
- Introduction to Positive Behaviour Support
- Understanding Sensory Processing
- Supporting Successful Transitions and Change

There is also a specific module for teachers and teacher assistants. These courses can be used across all domains of teaching and for all career stages. More than 21,000 autism-specific modules were completed in 2021, mainly by teachers and support staff.

Recommendation 54

The committee recommends that the Department of Education, Skills and Employment works with state and territory governments and the non- government school sector to develop clear guidance on the schooling options available for autistic students so that parents and carers can make more informed choices. This should include information about the role of—and interaction between—mainstream, special schools, autism-specific schools and home-schooling options within the education ecosystem.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports the rights of children and young people with disability to have the same educational opportunities as other school students.

While the Australian Government provides substantial funding for government and non-government schools, and works collaboratively with states and territories in developing national priorities for education, it does not have a direct role in the administration or operation of schools.

Under Australian constitutional arrangements, responsibility for the delivery of school education, including decisions on schooling options for autistic students, rests with the individual education authorities in each state and territory.

As part of the implementation of the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, new information products are being produced to inform children and young people with disability and their families of their rights.

These materials will include guidance for families on how to advocate for their children in school settings to ensure that they receive the support they need from their chosen school.

Recommendation 55

The committee recommends that the Australian Government coordinate the National Disability Insurance Agency, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and state and territory education authorities to:

- resolve, as a matter of urgency, any outstanding issues in relationship to the intersection of school funding and the NDIS; and
- develop clear guidance in relation to the intersection of school funding and the NDIS, including in relation to the provision of NDIS supports within schools.

Supported

The Australian Government supports the rights of children and young people with disability to have the same educational opportunities as other school students.

The Australian Government believes that we should strive for a high-quality school system that assists all Australian children to reach their full potential. There are support programs in place to help ensure students with disability have the same educational opportunities as other school students so they can fully participate in the economic and social life of the community.

The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards) specify how education and training is to be made accessible to students with disability. The Standards articulate the obligations of education providers with respect to that access, including the requirement for making any reasonable educational adjustments required to ensure a child with disability can enrol and participate in education on the same basis as their peers – these obligations apply to all public and private schools in Australia. The Australian Government provides financial support for these educational adjustments via the Students with Disability Loading, a component of Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools.

The NDIS can fund additional support that a child requires at school due to the impact of their disability on functional capacity. These supports are not primarily related to education and learning and are beyond what a school is responsible for. For example, the NDIS can fund specialist support and training for school staff related to the specific personal support needs of a student with disability, including specialised behaviour intervention and support.

The Australian Government is committed to continuing to work with state and territory governments to ensure the allocation of responsibilities and funding between the NDIS and schools is clear, well understood and working in concert with one another.

Recommendation 56

The committee recommends that the Equity in Higher Education Panel include a specific focus on the needs of autistic students as part of its work to develop a Student Equity in Higher Education Roadmap. This should include consultation with the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy, as well as a focus on:

- increasing autism understanding among all teaching and administrative staff;
- creating autism-friendly information for current and prospective students;
- creating autism-friendly campus environments and services; and
- widespread adoption of autism inclusion and peer mentoring programs.

Supported in principle

The Department of Education notes the findings of the committee's report regarding significant disparities in outcomes for autistic students. The Equity in Higher Education Panel (EHEP) will consider the needs of autistic students as part of their ongoing work on a national student equity in higher education strategy, which aims to improve the outcomes and opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage, including students with disability.

The EHEP Secretariat will engage with the forum chosen to drive development of a National Autism Strategy (Recommendation 2 refers) to identify suitable opportunities for consultation.

Recommendation 57

The committee recommends that a Transition to Work Roadmap be developed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy and as part of the National Autism Employment Framework proposed at Recommendation 58. This should provide a nationally agreed and coordinated approach to transition planning across school and higher education settings and should identify actions to:

- improve students' social and employability skills;
- embed the use of evidence-based transition planning resources, such as Better Outcomes and Successful Transitions for Autism (BOOST-A) and the MyWAY Employability web platform in schools and work preparation programs (including the NDIS School Leaver Employment Supports);
- improve the autism understanding of NDIS School Leaver Employment Supports providers;
- expand the reach of the Ticket to Work program; and
- establish stronger links between schools, universities and employers to facilitate autism-aware work experience opportunities.

Supported in principle

In December 2021, the Australian Government released *Employ My Ability – the Disability Employment Strategy* as a ten year commitment to improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

Through priority area two of *Employ My Ability*, the Australian Government recognises that more needs to be done to build the employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability, including young autistic people, as they transition to work.

Under *Employ My Ability*, the Australian Government has already committed to:

- Develop new approaches to support young people with disability in their transition from school to work, and
- Develop and promote information, tools and resources relating to employment pathways to build the capacity and confidence of young people with disability, as well as their support networks.

The NDIA is implementing the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy revised Action Plan for 2021-22, which aims to see 30 per cent of working age participants in employment by June 2023. The strategy maintains a shared focus of increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for participants, facilitating the transition from education to employment, and strengthening the autonomy and self-determination of people with a disability to pursue and achieve their employment goals.

The NDIA continues to focus on employment supports for young participants, particularly as they leave school. A review of the employment support available for young participants commenced in Quarter 3 of 2022, to address the identified shortcomings of school leaver employment supports, such as: delivery of a set program of interventions; variable performance of providers; a payment system unrelated to provider effort, and participant uncertainty about selecting an effective provider.

Employment

Recommendation 58

The committee recommends that a National Autism Employment Framework be agreed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy. The framework should identify actions to:

- promote the benefits of hiring autistic people to governments and business;
- further establish governments as employers of choice;
- incentivise private sector employment;
- encourage the expansion of both ICT and non-ICT autism-focused employment programs;
- support self-employment options for autistic people;
- improve information for autistic job seekers about available supports and DES providers with autism experience; and
- improve autism-related education, training and resources for DES providers and employers (building on existing resources where available).

The framework should also be compatible with the *Employ My Ability* strategy and should help inform the new Disability Employment Support (DES) Model being developed by the Department of Social Services for implementation in 2023.

Supported in principle

In December 2021, the Australian Government released *Employ My Ability – the Disability Employment Strategy* as a ten year commitment to improving employment outcomes for people with disability, including autistic people.

Through *Employ My Ability*'s priority areas, the Australian Government recognises that more needs to be done to support employers to hire and retain employees with disability, as well as to improve the supports and services available to people with disability to ensure they have choice and control over their careers.

The Australian Government is also considering how particular cohorts of people with disability, including autistic people, can be better supported as part of the new disability employment support model. The Disability Employment Services (DES) Reform Reference Group provided its final recommendations to the Department of Social Services for consideration in July 2022. The Intellectual Disability, Autism and Psychosocial Disability Working Group informed these recommendations to ensure the needs of autistic people were represented in the discussion and recommendations.

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) is supportive of this recommendation. This will be considered as the APSC rolls out work in the disability employment space, and diversity and inclusion initiatives more broadly. Some examples of activities that have been delivered or that are underway include:

- The Australian Public Service (APS) Disability Employment Strategy 2020-2025 includes actions for agencies to improve attraction, recruitment and retention of people with disability and improve disability awareness and confidence.
- An Affirmative measures cross-agency project is underway to uncover barriers or opportunities to use the Affirmative measures employment provisions. This includes improving understanding and consistent application of bulk recruitment activities using the provision to enhance candidate and agency experience.
- Practical Guide around neurodiversity investigating potential guidance for attracting, recruiting and retaining neurodivergent people.
- Guidance provided to agencies to establish Disability Contact Officers as a single point of contact to provide advice and support to employees with disability and their managers to assist with reasonable adjustments, career development and other issues that may arise.

The APSC will consider autistic people throughout the development and delivery of these projects.

The APSC recognises that further work is needed support the employment of people with neuro-diverse conditions, including autism, if the APS is to be considered an employer of choice.

Recommendation 59

The committee recommends that the Department of Social Services ensure that all monitoring and evaluation activities related to the *Employ My Ability* strategy and the new Disability Employment Support Model allow for disaggregation by disability type, including autism.

Supported in principle

Monitoring and evaluation activities for *Employ My Ability* will occur through the reporting mechanisms for Australia's Disability Strategy including the Strategy's Outcomes Framework.

The Department of Social Services (the department) is responsible for the implementation of the Strategy's Outcomes Framework, which will measure, track and report on outcomes for people with disability over the next 10 years. Reporting under the Outcomes Framework focuses on seven Outcome Areas, including employment and financial security.

The collection and presentation of outcome measures will involve various disaggregation, including gender and age as well as disability type, where possible. The ability to disaggregate data depends on the data collections from which the measures are drawn.

The department is committed to improving the quality of data collected regarding people with disability, and disability services, and supports this recommendation in principle, but is not the final decision maker regarding many of the collections used in the Outcomes Framework.

Recommendation 60

The committee recommends that the Department of Social Services incorporate into the design of the new Disability Employment Support Model:

- relevant elements of the National Autism Employment Framework; and
- lessons from autism-specific employment programs about what works in relation to achieving long-term employment outcomes for autistic people.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government is committed to assisting more people with disability into jobs so they can enjoy the social and economic benefits that work brings. People with disability and employers need a system that meets their needs and provides the appropriate supports to find and keep a job. The current Disability Employment Services (DES) program will be replaced by the New Disability Employment Support Model.

This work is being done in collaboration with people with disability, disability representatives, employers, provider representatives, academics and other experts on disability and employment matters. This has included consultation with autistic people, and those with autism experience and expertise.

Health and Mental Health

Recommendation 61

The committee recommends that the Department of Health work with the taskforce established to develop the National Autism Strategy to develop a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People, similar to the *National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for People with Intellectual Disability*.

This roadmap should include, but not be limited to, actions that address:

- best practice models of care for autistic people, including mental health care;
- the alignment of Medicare Benefit Schedule items with best practice models of care for autistic people;
- reasonable adjustments for autistic people in health care settings;
- the availability and appropriateness of tools and resources to support diagnosis of comorbidities (including mental health conditions) and the provision of reasonable adjustments for autistic people in health care settings;
- better connections between health care service sectors, including mental health services, disability services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme;
- the elimination of restrictive practices in health care settings; and
- improved autism education and training for health professionals.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government has committed to the development of a National Autism Strategy and, as part of that, a National Roadmap to specifically target health and mental health outcomes for autistic Australians.

The new Roadmap will need to consider the synergies with the existing National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability, including in the following areas:

- Improved support for people with intellectual disability and their families and carers.
- Developing better models of health care for people with intellectual disability.
- Better use of existing Medicare Benefits Schedule items.
- Continuity of care, and better care coordination and integration within the health system.
- Better coordination with other sectors.
- Better support for health care professionals to provide care for people with intellectual disability.

The 2021-22 Budget provided \$1 million over two years to continue to build the capacity of the mental health workforce through education, training and health promotion to better meet the mental health needs of people with developmental disability, including autism. This work is expected to commence in mid-2022.

There is potential to build on this work to further improve autism education and training for mental health professionals as part of the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

The Department of Social Services is leading work with states and territories through the Australia's Disability Strategy, Safety Targeted Action Plan (ADS Safety TAP) to make better connections between mainstream service systems and the NDIS. Through better connections, transitions and referrals across systems will be more efficient and effective, ensuring that a person with disability at risk of harm has the necessary safeguards in place to reduce the risk of harm.

The ADS Safety TAP also supports the commitment under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to reduce and eliminate the use of restrictive practices across government services systems. Each state and territory is responsible for implementing strategies to achieve this within the service systems that they offer.

Recommendation 62

The committee recommends that the new National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People include an associated National Autism Mental Health Plan aimed specifically at improving the treatment of autistic people with co-occurring mental health conditions. This Plan should also align with the National Mental Health and Suicide Plan.

Supported in principle

This recommendation will need to be considered in the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People. If a National Autism Mental Health Plan is developed, it would need to align with the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (National Agreement) released in March 2022. The National Agreement sets out the shared intention of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work in partnership to improve the mental health of all Australians and ensure the sustainability and enhance the services of the Australian mental health and suicide prevention system.

Recommendation 63

The committee recommends the Australian Government work with state and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to encourage hospitals and public health care settings to adopt measures to improve the experience of autistic people in their care. This may include measures such as providing guidance about reasonable adjustments or employing autism liaison officers to facilitate health care services for autistic people.

Supported in principle

A key component of the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability (the National Roadmap) is working with stakeholders to improve the way hospitals and public health care settings deliver healthcare to people with intellectual disability. This action is included in section C of the National Roadmap – 'Better support for health care professionals to provide better care for people with intellectual disability'.

This action has the desired outcome that health care professionals have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to provide quality, appropriate and disability-informed health care for people with intellectual disability.

There is potential to build on or adapt work done to address the above action in a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People and a National Autism Mental Health Plan.

Recommendation 64

The committee recommends that the health and wellbeing priority under the new National Autism Research Framework include a focus on:

- routine analysis and reporting of population health data for autistic people, including health status, health service utilisation, health outcomes and mortality data;
- the risk factors, causes and presentation of comorbidities; and
- evaluation of health and mental health interventions for autistic people.

Supported in principle

If a National Autism Research Framework is supported by the Australian Government, the Department of Health and Aged Care will provide input into the health and wellbeing priority under the Framework, including a focus on evaluation of mental health interventions for autistic people.

The Department of Health and Aged Care has allocated funding of \$9.3 million over two years to SANE Australia from July 2021 to deliver a pilot of specialised digital services for people with complex mental health needs, including intellectual disability and autism. The pilot is being independently evaluated. The evaluation will include consideration of the pilot's impact on mental health outcomes for people with intellectual disability and autistic people.

Recommendation 65

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to develop and widely promote clinical care pathways to help autistic people navigate the health care system, including mental health services.

Supported in principle

This recommendation will need to be considered in the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

A key component of the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability (the National Roadmap) is working with stakeholders to develop and widely promote clinical care pathways to help people with intellectual disability navigate the health care system. This action is included in section A of the National Roadmap - 'Improved support for people with intellectual disability and their families and carers'. This action has the desired outcome that people with intellectual disability are better supported to navigate the health system and access appropriate health services.

There is potential to build on or adapt work done to address this recommendation in the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

Recommendation 66

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to implement specialised care models targeted to meet the needs of autistic people, including mental health care needs. These models should offer tiered services and supports that are available to autistic people and their families throughout their health care journey, with a particular focus on mental health services and on preventing individuals and families from falling through the cracks between systems or reaching a crisis point.

Supported in principle

This recommendation will need to be considered in the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

A key component of the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability (the National Roadmap) is working with stakeholders to implement specialised care models targeted to meet the needs of people with intellectual disability. This action is included in section B1 of the National Roadmap - 'Developing better models of health care'. This action has the desired outcome that better models of care are developed that provide people with intellectual disability with quality health care that is person-centred, trauma-informed, and enables reasonable adjustments.

There is potential to build on or adapt work done to address this recommendation in the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People.

Through the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (National Agreement), all governments have committed to work together to consider and support the mental health and wellbeing of a number of priority population groups, including people with disability. There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to work with state and territory governments under the National Agreement to ensure mental health and suicide prevention services meet the needs of autistic people.

The 2021-22 Budget included \$9.3 million over two years for SANE Australia to deliver a pilot of specialised digital mental health services. The pilot aims to improve access to mental health services to meet the needs of people for whom mainstream services may be challenging, including those with co-occurring conditions such as intellectual disability and autism.

The pilot has been co-designed with mental health, disability and autism experts including the Council for Intellectual Disability and autism peak body Amaze Incorporated. People with lived experience of mental health, disability and autism were also closely involved in developing the pilot service delivery model. The pilot commenced in November 2021 and will be independently evaluated, including with regard to its impact on mental health outcomes for people with a disability.

Recommendation 67

The committee recommends that a national standard for information accessibility be developed under the auspices of the National Autism Strategy. This standard should align with existing accessibility standards but should also be tailored to meeting the needs of autistic people.

Supported in principle

A national standard for information accessibility, aligning with existing accessibility standards and tailored to meeting the needs of autistic people, will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Housing

Recommendation 68

The committee recommends, as part of the inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposed in Recommendation 6, that the effectiveness of funded supports to enable autistic people to live independently be reviewed. This should have particular reference to:

- the high proportion of autistic adults living in their family home;
- the impact (and appropriateness) of the informal care burden on parents and carers; and
- the need for long-term accommodation planning to enable independent living following the death of a participant's parents or carers.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle, and looks forward to working with the Joint Standing Committee.

The NDIA is developing an overarching home and living policy that will inform the way NDIS participants are supported to pursue their home and living goals.

The aim of the policy will be to give participants more choice and control over where they live, who they live with and the supports they use. This also includes supporting participants to build the skills they need to live as independently as possible.

While co-design of the new home and living policy takes place, the NDIA is also progressing a significant program of shorter term work in line with the policy intent to improve home and living supports for participants. Further information about this is available at: [Housing and living supports and services](#).

Recommendation 69

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency work with relevant stakeholders to review the Specialist Disability Accommodation Design Standard to ensure it accounts for the sensory issues experienced by autistic participants.

Supported

Following extensive feedback from the developing the Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) market for greater certainty in the process, the NDIA engaged Liveable Housing Australia (LHA) to develop a technical guide for expanding the amount of relevant detail available for the build of SDA dwellings.

The SDA Design outlines the detailed design requirements for newly built SDA seeking enrolment under the NDIS. This standard has four categories of SDA design, as set out in the SDA Rules (2020):

- Improved Liveability
- Robust
- Fully Accessible
- High Physical Support

In particular, the SDA type 'Improved Liveability' has been designed to improve 'Liveability' by incorporating a reasonable level of physical access and enhanced provision for people with sensory, intellectual or cognitive impairment.

The SDA Design Standard will be reviewed in 2023.

Recommendation 70

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to develop housing strategies to encourage the construction of social housing that responds to the needs of autistic people in relation to housing design and type.

Noted

The Australian Government provides around \$1.6 billion each year to states and territories to improve housing and homelessness outcomes through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

To receive funding under the NHHA, state and territory governments are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting.

The Productivity Commission is currently undertaking a review of the NHHA including the extent to which the NHHA is meeting the obligations of governments under Australia's Disability Strategy. The final report is due to be delivered to the Australian Government before 31 August 2022.

The Australian and state and territory governments continue to engage actively on housing issues for people with disability through regular meetings of Disability Ministers.

The Australian Government has also made a commitment to develop a National Housing and Homelessness Plan. The Australian Government will work collaboratively with states and territories and key stakeholders to design and implement the plan.

Recommendation 71

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency work with state and territory governments and non-government housing providers to increase the supply of the 'robust' category of Specialist Disability Accommodation.

Supported in principle

In 2019 the NDIA undertook a limited cost assumptions review of Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) pricing, specifically to identify where market supply was not increasing as expected. One result from this review was to increase the SDA price caps for 'robust' dwellings of between 9.4 per cent and 14.1 per cent. Since that time a steady increase in supply has been achieved. There are currently 441 dwellings enrolled in the 'robust' category.

SDA dwelling enrolment data also indicates that there are currently 334 brand new dwellings (equivalent to 624 rooms) under construction, which are intended to be enrolled in the 'robust SDA' category. These are being built by registered SDA providers including community housing providers and developers who are yet to engage or register as an SDA provider.

The NDIA also undertakes regular market development activities, most recently focussed on supporting both state and territory governments and other SDA providers to consider and develop renewal programs of their existing SDA stock. In the majority this stock is ageing, and as more contemporary homes are established using the SDA Design Standard, this need for redevelopment or refurbishment is increasing.

The SDA Pricing Review was scheduled to take place through the first half of 2023, however a decision has been made to commence this earlier to support investor and market confidence. Robust SDA pricing will be considered as part of the price review. Any changes from the review will only come into effect from 1 July 2023.

The NDIA is continuously improving the structured data available on SDA and continues to work with states and territories to ensure housing and accommodation is available for NDIS participants, including ensuring participants have access to affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing.

Recommendation 72

The committee recommends the National Disability Insurance Agency work with state and territory governments to clarify the intersection of responsibilities in relation to housing for people with complex support needs.

Noted

The responsibilities of the Commonwealth and states and territories with respect to the provision of housing for people with disability are clearly outlined in the Applied Principles and Tables of Support (APTOS).

States and territories remain responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services, including providing social and affordable housing for people with disability who are not eligible for reasonable and necessary housing supports under the NDIS.

The Australian Government will endeavour to ensure that the NDIA and state and territory agencies continue to engage effectively in line with these agreed responsibilities.

Justice

Recommendation 73

The committee recommends that, as part of the inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposed in Recommendation 6, the Complex Support Needs Pathway be reviewed to ensure its focus is on preventing (rather than responding to) escalating behaviours that may result in interactions with the justice system.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle.

The Complex Support Needs (CSN) pathway identifies personal and situational factors that may require early intervention supports to prevent a NDIS participant from entering the justice system. These supports include but are not limited to: specialist behaviour intervention and training, increased ratio of support, multi-disciplinary therapy teams and specialist support coordination. These types of supports can reduce the likelihood of behaviours of concern and can support the participant to access other mainstream services and support.

The NDIA is continuously improving the CSN pathway to ensure a stronger focus on high risk, vulnerable participants with proactive monitoring and intervention as required. This includes a stronger focus on supporting participants who are at risk, or currently within, the justice system.

Additionally, NDIA Justice Liaison Officers are working collaboratively with Youth Justice state and territory representatives to support participants or prospective participants in diversionary programs from entering the justice system.

Recommendation 74

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with states and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to investigate options for diversionary programs, rather than custodial sentences, where appropriate.

Supported in principle

Noting that diversionary programs are largely a matter for state and territory governments, the Australian Government supports in principle the improvement of diversionary pathways to ensure they deliver better outcomes for justice-engaged autistic people.

Recommendation 75

The committee recommends embedding autism as part of initial education courses and ongoing professional development requirements for all personnel involved in the justice system, including police, lawyers, and court staff.

Supported in principle

Although judicial education is voluntary in Australia, the need for and benefits of ongoing professional development for judicial officers is widely accepted. Consistent with the independence of the judiciary from the executive, it is a matter for each federal court to determine its own practices. For example, this is the case with respect to oversight of internal programs of continued judicial education and development, internal training for court staff and promoting any education programs offered by external providers.

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia currently provides online disability awareness training for court staff, through the ‘Let’s Talk Access to Justice for People with Disability’ eLearning package. This is designed to assist participants to develop the knowledge, skills and awareness to work inclusively and effectively with people with disabilities.

In 2020, a professional development session on the topic of adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities was delivered to the then Federal Circuit Court’s Court Child Experts, with the session also being open to judges and registrars. A specific session in relation to autism is currently being explored in the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, reflecting the increased awareness and diagnoses of autism in the community.

The Australian Government also contributes funding to the National Judicial College of Australia (NJCA) and the Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA). NJCA supports the provision of education and training programs for judicial officers. AIJA develops and provides educational programs for judicial officers, court administrators and members of the legal profession in relation to court administration and judicial systems. It is open to federal judges to participate in external judicial education courses offered by NJCA and AIJA.

The Australian Government will engage with NJCA, AIJA and the federal courts to encourage their consideration of the committee’s final report and this recommendation.

The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) Witness Assistance Service (WAS) provides information and support to victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses including:

- Information concerning the legal process and court procedures;
- A liaison role between victims/witnesses and CDPP legal staff;
- Updates in relation to key developments concerning the case;
- A court familiarisation tour;
- Referral to counselling and other services in the community (for a victim who has been diagnosed with autism, attempts would be made to identify specific services if required); and
- Information about Victim Impact Statements and Reparation Orders.

The WAS Service takes steps to ensure that victims are supported when attending court, and also assists with debriefing with victims after court.

WAS officers are qualified social workers with experience working with vulnerable client groups. The WAS team aim to ensure the information and support provided to victims meets their individual needs. The vulnerabilities that victims can experience are diverse and may include autism. The WAS approach may be guided by the victim and where appropriate, members of their support network including family members and professional service providers.

The CDPP Victims and Witnesses website provides further information regarding the role of the WAS and the CDPP, and various external support services available to victims of crime and witnesses: [Victims and Witnesses](#).

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) provides autism awareness training to its members and is undertaking research to further embed neurodiversity related information into AFP training materials and strategies.

Recommendation 76

The committee recommends that all jurisdictions encourage the adoption of community policing approaches in order to build understanding and trust between police and the autistic community.

Noted

The Australian Government notes it is a matter for state and territory police.

The Australian Federal Police, through their ACT Policing responsibilities, supports and adopts a community policing approach in order to build understanding and trust between police and the autistic community.

Recommendation 77

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with states and territory governments to promote a culture in the justice system where autistic people feel supported to disclose their diagnosis and where people with undiagnosed disabilities feel comfortable requesting an assessment.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government considers that the justice system should be accessible to all users, including people with disabilities.

Having regard to the range of disabilities that court users may experience and the unique needs of any individual with a disability, general information is provided on the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, and the Federal Court of Australia's websites about the process for requesting reasonable adjustments. Reasonable adjustments could include any adjustments for someone who discloses a diagnosis of autism. In addition to a party or their legal representative making a request pursuant to this process, the courts through their proactive case management can explore what supports or reasonable adjustments may be made at various stages of court proceedings.

Consistent with the independence of the judiciary from the executive, the federal courts are each responsible for their own operation and management, including the development and maintenance of organisational culture.

Recommendation 78

The committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments and relevant stakeholders to develop nationally consistent guidance on the type of adjustments that should be made available to autistic people in justice settings. This should include:

- the provision of autism-friendly information resources;
- the involvement of disability advocates as standard practice in police interviews and during court proceedings; and
- adjustments to physical environments and police and court interview processes.

Supported in principle

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) (the Act) requires reasonable adjustments to be made available to people with disability in justice settings, unless doing so would cause unjustifiable hardship. Specifically, the Act is in place to eliminate discrimination against people with disability as far as possible, and to promote community acceptance of the principle that people with disability have the same fundamental rights as all members of the community.

The Act provides that direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of disability is unlawful in a broad range of areas of public life, relevantly including access to premises and access to goods, services and facilities. The Act requires reasonable adjustments to be made in the aforementioned areas of public life. A reasonable adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a person with disability to participate on the same basis as others.

Consistent with the independence of the judiciary from the executive, it is a matter for each of the federal courts to implement any guidance on the type of adjustments that should be made available to autistic people in justice settings.

The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) Witness Assistance Service (WAS) provides information and support to victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses including:

- Information concerning the legal process and court procedures;
- A liaison role between victims/witnesses and CDPP legal staff;
- Updates in relation to key developments concerning the case;
- A court familiarisation tour;
- Referral to counselling and other services in the community (for a victim who has been diagnosed with autism, attempts would be made to identify specific services if required); and
- Information about Victim Impact Statements and Reparation Orders.

The WAS Service also takes steps to ensure that victims are supported when attending court, and also assists with debriefing with victims after court.

WAS officers are qualified social workers with experience working with vulnerable client groups. The WAS team aim to ensure the information and support provided to victims meets their individual needs. The vulnerabilities that victims can experience are diverse and may include autism. The WAS approach may be guided by the victim and where appropriate, members of their support network including family members and professional service providers.

The CDPP Victims and Witnesses website provides further information regarding the role of the WAS and the CDPP, and various external support services available to victims of crime and witnesses: [Victims and Witnesses](#).

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) has autism awareness training available to AFP members and is undertaking research to further embed neurodiversity related information into AFP training materials and strategies, to assist members when interacting with autistic people.

Recommendation 79

The committee recommends that, as part of the inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposed in Recommendation 6, the effectiveness of the National Disability Insurance Agency's response to previous recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS be assessed in relation to support for autistic people within the justice system.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle.

The NDIA, in consultation with the Department of Social Services and the states and territories, has implemented actions to improve the NDIS interface with justice systems, including the development of operational guidelines for participants or prospective participants in the justice system and the implementation of Justice Liaison Officers across the country.

Recommendation 80

The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency publish:

- the findings of its review into the Complex Support Needs Pathway; and
- the Maintaining Critical Supports Framework, including its policy on provider of last resort arrangements.

Supported

Proposed changes to the Complex Support Needs Pathway and related initiatives will be published as updates to the service model are finalised and endorsed.

Recommendation 81

The committee recommends that, as part of the inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposed in Recommendation 6, the effectiveness of the Justice Liaison Officer program be assessed in relation to supporting the transition of autistic people from detention settings into the community.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle.

The NDIA continues to work with state and territory governments to improve information sharing to support the effective delivery of both NDIS and mainstream services to NDIS participants.

The Australian Government has already developed a national standard practice map to help guide both NDIA and state and territory justice staff working with NDIS participants, and published NDIS Justice Operational Guidelines to assist participants and the community in understanding how the NDIS provides supports for participants in custody and when they leave custody.

The Justice Liaison Officer (JLO) service offer assists prospective and current NDIS participants who intersect with the justice system. This includes working in partnership with mainstream justice services to ensure NDIS supports and services are delivered in a timely manner to support effective and person-centred transition. The NDIA continues to enhance and grow the JLO service offer in consultation with key stakeholders.

Australian Greens Senator's Dissenting Report

Recommendation 1

That the Australian Government takes urgent steps to ensure that all policies relating to autistic people:

- place the perspective of autistic people at the centre;
- are evidence informed and human rights-based;
- are informed by the social and affirmative model of disability; and
- are aligned with Australia's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government considers that the implementation of Recommendation 18 of the committee's report would be strengthened by being implemented in conjunction with the elements of Recommendation 1 of the Dissenting Report.

These elements mirror the Guiding Principles of the Closing the Gap Disability Sector Strengthening Plan, and Australia's Disability Strategy, which is based on the social model of disability and aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendation 2

That the National Autism Strategy:

- closely align with the National Disability Strategy to recognise the interaction between autism and other disabilities and mental illnesses;
- focus on the autistic community and that a separate strategy is considered which focuses on the families and carers to recognise the individual access needs and support requirements of these two groups; and
- is created through a process of co-design with autistic people and those they choose as support people, the Disability Royal Commission and stakeholder groups, with the recognition that its design may or may not align with the recommendations of this report.

Supported in principle

Alignment of a National Autism Strategy to Australia's Disability Strategy, recognition of the interaction between autism and other disabilities, a focus on the autistic community and families and carers, and a co-design process, will be considered in the development of a National Autism Strategy.

Recommendation 3

That the Australian Government transition to a fully inclusive education system by 2030, through a National Inclusive Education Transition Plan with disabled people, families, disability representative organisations, education experts, teachers, and their unions.

Noted

The Australian Government supports the rights of children and young people with disability to have the same educational opportunities as other school students.

While the Australian Government provides substantial funding for government and non-government schools, and works collaboratively with states and territories in developing national priorities for education, it does not have a direct role in the administration or operation of schools.

Under Australian constitutional arrangements, responsibility for the delivery of school education, including decisions on schooling options for autistic students, rests with the individual education authorities in each state and territory.

Recommendation 4

All further research, education and training relating to autistic people should be co-designed and co-delivered by autistic people.

Supported

The Australian Government supports the development of a whole-of-life plan for all autistic Australians, including the importance of further research, education and training relating to autistic people being co-designed and co-delivered by autistic people.

Any representative or authoritative body established in conjunction with the co-design, development and/or implementation of a National Autism Strategy would also align with the Commonwealth's commitment to Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Representation of First Nations people with disability would be meaningful, gender sensitive, culturally appropriate and determined in consultation with key stakeholders, including but not limited to the First Peoples Disability Network.

Recommendation 5

That an easy-read version of the committee's report and this dissenting report be distributed so that it is widely accessible to the autistic community.

Noted

This is a matter for consideration of the committee.