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Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback to the Royal Commission and taking the time to consider such input. This submission is a reflection of my clinical expertise as a Doctor of Clinical Psychology. I hold post-graduate training in Clinical Psychology (Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology). I am registered with the Psychology Board of Australia (AHPRA) and a member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and APS College of Clinical Psychologists. I have experience in the welfare, health (St Vincent's Hospital) and private practice sectors.

I designed The Functional Legacy Mindset approach to educate people on how different minds function, to embrace their strengths, and the legacy of such minds in terms of the benefits to society. www.functionallegacymindset.com.au

The theory of a Functional Legacy Mindset approach is grounded in the therapeutic benefits of embracing the authentic self, and empowering people to contribute to society in ways that feel authentic and meaningful to them. The assumptions and narratives that dominate different minds plays an important role in the mental health and wellbeing of our clients. This submission suggests strategies to promote resilience, wellbeing, and community empowerment - addressing terms of reference d. e. f. & k.

PROMOTING ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING

Autistic individuals can become economically and socially isolated through a lack of understanding of how best to support the Autistic community and failure to provide adequate supports. Improving community understanding and a change in mindset to realise the benefits of diversity, is in my opinion, the most crucial goal for improving the quality of life for Autistic individuals.

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Campaigns that allow people to stand with pride and celebrate the many strengths of the Autistic community at large, will help Autistic individuals to integrate a healthy sense of self, whilst also reducing stigma in society. Furthermore, this approach will have a significant ripple effect on society across families, educational institutions, workplaces, community services, and front-line services. The economic benefits and system costs saved would be significant.

RECCOMENDATION 1: Fund awareness campaigns through existing advocacy organisations to promote acceptance and understanding

This goal can be achieved by developing and implementing a multi-faceted media campaign funded by the Australian government with the work undertaken by existing advocacy Autistic led organisations such as Yellow Ladybugs, The I CAN Network, The Autistic Realm Australia – TARA, and AMAZE. It is recommended that such a campaign be modelled on past successful campaigns such as the beyond blue campaign that raised awareness for depression. The target audience would be the general community at large.

The Victorian government has established Australia's first social behaviour change campaign to promote better understanding and inclusion of Autistic people.

<https://changeyourreactions.com/>

RECCOMENDATION 2: Educate Employers about neurological diversity in the workplace to ensure that there are accommodations in place for Autistic employees

This goal can be achieved by implementing a nationally consistent framework for best practices to support Autistic individuals in the workplace. Employers need to be informed about neurological diversity in the workplace (accommodations in the workplace to support Autistic employees) and the benefits of embracing difference

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(increased productivity) to encourage inclusion and reduce discrimination. The Australian neurodiversity hub has led the way in networking employers to support neurological diversity in the workplace.

<https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/employers>

Further measures may include, providing incentives for employers to employ Autistic individuals.

RECCOMENDATION 3 – Implementing a nationally consistent framework for best practices to support Autistic Students and families in schools

We need to ensure that staff within the education sectors are utilising research informed evidence to support students who experience meltdowns, Autistic Burnout and demand-avoidance behaviours. This will prevent ineffective and sometimes harmful advice (repeated negative exposures or consequences) given to families and reduce educator, parental and student distress. Insights into psychology have included a move away from the expectation to meet neuro-normative standard (due to the clinically significant adverse impact of repression and masking), towards a mindset of acceptance. Ultimately, we want to empower Autistic children to embrace their authentic selves and to feel comfortable to ask for the accommodations they need. Many Autistic children learn to mask their behaviours to fit in and be accepted by their peers, due to an assumption that neurotypical social skills are the only way to succeed in life. Time off without the mask is not only physically and emotionally exhausting (which can lead to burnout), it is particularly adverse for mental health (anxiety, depression), self-perception and self-esteem. An important first step to removing the mask is one of acceptance, before we can identify and embrace the many strengths and beauty of the Autistic person. When we can come to accept our whole selves, we can remove the mask

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that makes us feel hidden, rejected and disconnected. By implementing a nationally consistent framework we will reduce the clinically significant adverse impact of Autistic Burnout, masking and demand-avoidance behaviours.

I would like to request funding and support (i.e., to work in conjunction with the Department of Education) to develop a free, online psycho-educational program to provide professional development for educators, with the aim of increasing perspective taking and ensuring staff are utilising research informed practices to support Autistic students and their families. Ultimately the goal would be to implement an Australia-wide approach to continuing professional development.

As part of my psychological research, I developed an online psycho-educational CBT-based intervention which aimed to significantly increase adolescents understanding and likelihood of employing coping skills that may be helpful for a victim of cyber bullying. The Increasing Resilience to Cyber Bullying program is anticipated to be offered as a free, widely and easily accessible intervention that helps to ameliorate the effects of cyber bullying. Please find below links to my publications and website that has an extensive amount of psychoeducation on Autism.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/functional-legacy-mindset/202003/the-gps-method-de-escalating-autistic-meltdowns>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/functional-legacy-mindset/202002/functional-legacy-mindset>

<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/cyber.2019.0081>

www.functionallecacymindset.com.au

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- Autistic led organisations need to be actively involved in supporting parents of Autistic Children, via outreach programs such as the I CAN network who work in conjunction with schools.
- It is important to ensure that vice principals are adequately skilled to write individual learning plans and implement evidence-based interventions that support diversity. Family and carers need to be engaged in planning and individualised treatment plans to support Autistic children.
- Accommodations in schools need to be comprehensive to ensure we are adequately supporting the Autistic community.
- Reporting systems on school portals (e.g., compass) utilised by parents do not currently include a mental health attendance option. This is important to ensure we remove judgement from Autistic parents who require flexibility in relation to attendance requirements and to allow them to meet the child's NDIS therapeutic goals.

The successful collaboration of educators, allied health professionals and the Autistic community (Autistic individuals and their loved ones), has led to a wealth of early interventions that have demonstrated significant therapeutic outcomes for Autistic Children.

RECOMMENDATION 4: *An alert card for Autistic individuals*

I recommend that Autistic individuals have access to an alert card that they can utilise in the community to access additional assistance, when needed. This would need to be

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in conjunction with systematised education to upskill front line staff (police, ambulance, and emergency department staff) to increase their understanding of how best to support Autistic individuals. This approach can be modelled on the successful implementation of the Hidden Disability Programs at major airports throughout Australia. The Hidden Disability program consists of Autistic individuals wearing a lanyard throughout the airport from check in to departure to allow airport staff to recognise that they may require additional assistance throughout the journey.

What is working well – The allocation for funds for early intervention services and NDIS has not only increased appropriate treatment and support, it has had a ripple effect of trauma being healed for past generations who did not receive such support (parents of recently diagnosed Autistic children and extended family members who have educated themselves to support their grandchildren).

Thank you for taking the time to consider my submission. Please let me know if I can be of assistance to you in implementing the proposed recommendations.

Kind Regards

Dr Kerry Chillemi
Clinical Psychologist

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