

ALLIANCE WELCOMES BOLD SENATE REPORT TO DELIVER POSITIVE CHANGE FOR ALL AUTISTIC AUSTRALIANS

25 March 2022: The Australian Autism Alliance today welcomes the release of the Senate Select Committee Inquiry's history-making report on Autism. This is the first time there has been such a broad-ranging national inquiry into the issues facing Autistic Australians with recommendations for positive change.

Central to the report is a recommendation for a National Autism Strategy to be co-designed with Autistic people and the autism community, that will coordinate initiatives across government and address whole-of-life needs.

Co-Chair of the Australian Autism Alliance, Jenny Karavolos said, "We strongly welcome a National Autism Strategy and support the Committee's acknowledgment that generic disability strategies have not improved outcomes for Autistic people. The previous way of delivering support to Autistic people, through siloed programs and one off initiatives, has simply not worked. We also welcome co-design as an absolute must to enable effective and sustainable outcomes."

The Autism Alliance recognises that implementing all recommendations will require a long term commitment, and calls for priority action on:

1. Establishing a National Autism Strategy through co-design with Autistic people and the community with strong outcomes targets, reporting and accountability measures
2. Developing a National Roadmap for improving health and mental health services for Autistic people - something also called for by the Disability Royal Commission
3. Lifting Medicare rebates and removing the age cap for autism assessment and diagnosis together with initiatives to drive timely and quality assessments
4. Jobs initiatives to shift the dial on employment for Autistic people
5. Reforms to markedly increase inclusion and attainment in education and training
6. A National Autism Workforce plan to build autism capability of key frontline workforces

"The Committee rightly points out that life outcomes for Autistic Australians are unacceptably poor, and that the personal, social and economic costs of this are simply enormous to all of society" said Ms. Karavolos.

Also welcoming the landmark report is Autistic advocate and mother of two Autistic boys, Monique Blakemore. "We welcome the bi-partisan nature of the report and believe it can lead to life-changing benefits for the hundreds of thousands of Autistic Australians currently being left behind," said Ms Blakemore.

“In participating in the Inquiry, Autistic people, their parents and carers have had to revisit incidents of deep pain and inequality they have experienced. The Australian Autism Alliance honours their personal commitment to inform the committee even though this may have been challenging,” she said.

“While not every single Autistic person or organisation will agree with every recommendation in this report, the critical thing is that we finally have in front of us a plan for providing Autistic people with the educational, employment, health and social connection opportunities that are desperately needed,” said Ms Blakemore.

“As an Autistic mother and parent of Autistic children, I am personally pleased to see Autistic women, their reproductive healthcare, domestic violence and difficulties obtaining support for them and their children acknowledged.”

Jenny Karavolos, Co-Chair of the Alliance thanked all Senators and their staff who had been involved in the Committee Report for their substantial effort and commitment to improving the life outcomes of Autistic people. The release of this report is monumental for all of society to enable the Shifting of the Dial on Autism to improve the life outcomes of an estimated autistic population of 650,0000 Australians.

“The Australian Autism Alliance is calling on all major parties to support urgent action on advancing priority recommendations. We look forward to working closely with the Government to deliver positive change” said Jenny Karavolos.

NOTE: The Alliance is holding a webinar on Tuesday 29 March (from 12.15pm-1.00pm) at which Chair of the Select Committee, Senator Hollie Hughes, and Deputy Chair, Senator Carol Brown will outline the report’s key findings and recommendations. Register at: <https://senateinquiryonautism-whatdoesitmean.eventbrite.com.au/>

The full Senate Committee report is available at:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Autism

The Australian Autism Alliance is a national network that brings together 12 partner organisations to represent people on the spectrum, their parents and carers, service providers and researchers. By creating one united and expert voice, the Alliance aims to add unique value to the lives of people on the autism spectrum, engage key decision makers and educate the community. For more information about Alliance and its pre-election statement that has been circulated to all major parties, go to: australianautismalliance.org.au

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Latest research on Autism:

- 1 in 4 Australians have a family member with autism
- Autistic people are half as likely to complete Year 10 than the general population, and only half as likely to complete either VET or Uni courses than those with other disabilities
- Autistic people are 3 times more likely to be unemployed than others with disability, and nearly 8 times the rate of people without disability
- 50-70% of autistic people experience mental health conditions, with a suicide rate 9 times the general population
- 70% of Autistic people report feeling socially isolated
- Autistic Australians experience a 20-36 year life expectancy gap compared with the general population.