



making a difference

Our Ref: 29030002 v5
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Mr Bob Buckley
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Dear Mr Buckley

Further to the letter from the Hon Margaret Quirk, MLA, Minister for Disability Services, the Disability Services Commission has prepared a response to your letter dated 30 March 2006 in which you ask a range of questions relating to autism. Each question will be addressed in turn. The Commission is committed to the development and funding of effective early intervention services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

1. Does the Western Australian Government recognise that the number of children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has risen significantly over the last 10 to 15 years?
2. Does the Western Australian Government accept that around 1 in 166 young people will have been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder by the time they leave school? If not, how many school leavers in Western Australia receive as ASD diagnosis?

The number of children diagnosed and made eligible within the Autism Spectrum has increased in Western Australia over the last 10 years. Detailed information on rates of diagnosis can be obtained from the Autism Register which is maintained by the Institute of Child Health Research and can be contacted at 100 Roberts Road, Subiaco, WA 6008, enquire@ichr.uwa.edu.au. The rates of diagnosis in Western Australia are consistent with international trends. Literature identifies a range of reasons for this increase although no specific study in WA has been undertaken to evaluate causation that is unique to this state. Literature is indicating the rate of diagnosis of children with ASD is 1:166.

3. Does the Western Australian Government recognise that an autism spectrum disorder is usually severely or profoundly disabling?

ASD is recognised as a disability under the Disability Services Act (1993). To be eligible under the Act a person is required to demonstrate a disability that is:

- (a) attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment, or a combination of those impairments;*
- (b) which is permanent or likely to be permanent;*
- (c) which may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature; and*
- (d) which results in –*
 - (i) a substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, social interaction, learning*
 - (ii) a need for continuing support services.*

4. Does the Western Australian Government recognise ASD as a separate disability type that is distinct from intellectual disability, for example - What reporting of outcomes measures for people with ASD does the Western Australian Government use to ensure outcomes for people with ASD are equitable? What are the measured results achieved in Western Australia, and where are they published?

ASD is recognised as a unique diagnosis in WA. It is estimated that 35-40% of children diagnosed with ASD in WA do not have an intellectual disability. ASD as a primary disability is identified within the Annual Client Data Collection and also reported against agency outputs. Although ASD is not specified in detail, programs reporting details of Commission services can be found within the Annual Report. This can be downloaded from the Commission website (www.dsc.wa.gov.au).

5. What measures does the Western Australian Government have to show that the treatment and early intervention it provides for children with an autism spectrum disorder is effective in improving outcomes for those children?

The Commission funds a range of services to children and adults with ASD including intervention, family support, respite, alternatives to employment and accommodation support. All services are monitored for quality of outcomes via the Disability Services Standards.

6. Does the Western Australian Government accept that children with autism who do not receive effective treatment for their autism will impose substantial long-term burdens on the affected families, reduce the productivity of family members and diminish the capacity of the whole community to provide the growing level of support required for an ageing population?

The Commission is committed to the provision of early intervention/childhood development services to children with ASD. The Commission currently funds four endorsed services who provide in total 300 early intervention places. The Department of Education and Training also provide pre-school places in specialist settings for children with ASD.

7. Professor Margot Prior told the National Forum "applied behaviour analysis can achieve very good outcomes" for children with ASD but that "it is not the only approach". Prof Roberts, in a *Review of the Research to Identify the Most Effective Models of Best Practice in the Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders* prepared for DADHC, refers repeatedly to universal agreement on approaches that produce *positive outcomes* for children with autism. What approaches to treating autism known to produce the *positive outcomes* does the Western Australian Government provide (or fund)? What are the measured outcomes for children with ASD in Western Australia? How do the outcomes achieved through Western Australia Government services for children with autism compare to the positive outcomes reported in autism research literature?

As identified in Question 6 the Commission funds endorsed providers who have demonstrated that intervention is evidenced based. All providers are expected to demonstrate outcomes as documented via the Disability Professional Services Policy. A copy is enclosed for your reference.

8. What services does the Western Australian Government fund that are best practice as described by experts in autism or ASD?
- (a) Which of these services provide "between 15 and 25 hours (per week) of specific intervention?
 - (b) Which of these services provide 20+ hours per week of ASD-specific intervention?
 - (c) Apart from service mentioned in (a) and (b) above, which services funded by the Western Australian Government meet any description of best practice for children with autism or ASD, whose description of best practice is it and what is their description of best practice for treating ASD in young children
 - (d) Does the Western Australian Government have specific plans to provide best practice early intervention and treatment for children with ASD in the foreseeable future? If so, what are the Plans?

See Question 6 and 7.

No service has the funding to provide 15-20 hours of direct intervention/week to a child. The WA Government has committed significant funding over the past 10 years towards the development of early intervention services for children with ASD. The Commission will be implementing a needs based funding framework over the next 12 months. It is expected, given the committed growth funding in early intervention that service levels will increase.

The Government, over the five years from 2005/06 and 2009/10 will provide \$9.2 million in time with pre-election commitments to more than double the growth for early intervention for children with disabilities, including ASD.

9. Does the Western Australian government accept that few families of children with ASD in Western Australia can access the evidence-based intensive ASD-specific early intervention recognised national and international experts in treating ASD say their children need for their development?

The Hon Sherryl Garbutt MP, Minister for Children and Community Services in Victoria, recently wrote:

"International research supports services delivered in non-categorical settings (universal services, ECIS or a mix of both) in the child's natural environment."

My audience is keenly interested in research showing universal services and/or generic ECIS (based on non-categorical settings) are effective in improving outcomes for children with autism. Notice this view differs significantly from expert opinion on treatment and rehabilitation for autism.

Families of children with ASD in WA have access to evidence based services. Current funding does not allow the levels of service intensity that is described in the literature for some models of services.

10. What "international research" relating to outcomes for people with autism "supports" generic disability services "based on non-categorical settings"? How does the research "support" these services as they relate to children with autism?

The Commission supports the inclusion of children within their communities. It recognises that to achieve inclusive outcomes specialist services may be required for children with ASD as with other disabilities. The Commission is committed that families and children have access to a range of services to meet their specific needs. This may also include universal services if seen to be appropriate including pre-schools and day cares. In such circumstances these service are generally well supported via training and on-site support.

I am aware that you were present last year at the National Autism Forum in Canberra and heard the joint presentation by Dr Angus Buchanan, A/Director, Metropolitan Services and Ms Joan McKenna-Kerr, CEO, Autism Association of WA. I have enclosed a full copy of this presentation that provides a good overview of ASD in WA.

Yours sincerely



Dr Ruth Shean
DIRECTOR GENERAL
DISABILITY SERVICES COMMISSION

17 May 2006 W:\Director\W06\DG\Correspondence\8215 Ltr response to Mr Buckley re questionS on autism.doc

Encl: