



## DIAGNOSIS infoSheet

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are developmental disabilities (see <http://www.a4.org.au/autism.htm>). A person may be diagnosed with an ASD if they have difficulty with communication, social interaction and behaviour. People with ASD have a wide variety of differences from behavioural norms.

Contact your state autism organization (links can be found at <http://www.a4.org.au/links.htm>) for information about autism and how to proceed. Diagnosis is normally done by a specialist multi-disciplinary team preferably headed by a psychologist (as ASD is primarily a behavioural diagnosis). Sometimes a psychologist or psychiatrist with particular knowledge and experience with ASD can/will diagnose an ASD.

Parents find a variety of pathways to ASD assessment and diagnosis, such as:

1. *Maternal, Child Health or Community Nurse*, typically a local government (council, shire) service, may refer to a psychologist, a paediatrician or a specialised assessment service (funded by state governments)
2. *General Practitioner* – your local doctor may refer you to a paediatric specialist for assessment and to co-ordinate further assessments.
3. *Teachers and school counsellors* – can suggest, recommend and possibly organise individual assessments and referral to an appropriate specialist.
4. *Paediatrician* – will assess your child, may recommend/organise medical tests and may refer a child for specialist assessment and diagnosis.
5. *Psychologist* – may refer a child to a specialist or make a diagnosis of ASD.

In most states, waiting lists for assessment and diagnosis by a state-run specialist team are inappropriately long (6-18 months). Delays getting an ASD diagnosis waste crucial time in terms of early intervention therapy.

There may be a maze of services to negotiate along the way and this can be extremely frustrating. Each state and territory is different. Waiting lists may be long; if at all possible avoid delays. It is worthwhile exploring all options. It may be possible to get a more immediate service via the private system, though expect the cost of a psychologist seen privately to be at least hundreds of dollars (APS scheduled fees are no longer available to the public, see [www.psychsociety.com.au](http://www.psychsociety.com.au)). Medicare does not provide a rebate on psychologist fees. Private health insurance rebates vary (see [http://www.psychsociety.com.au/fees/health\\_funds/default.asp](http://www.psychsociety.com.au/fees/health_funds/default.asp)).

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Ideally, early diagnosis might lead immediately to early intervention. There is general agreement that appropriate early intervention for children with ASD provides the best prospect for improving long-term outcomes. A diagnosis provides the opportunity to move forward with rehabilitative therapy. In addition, you may be eligible for Government assistance in terms of Carer's Allowance/Payment and Health Care Card, which may assist with the costs of therapies, some medications and medical consultations.

Insist on getting a diagnosis in writing. You may need to return to a paediatrician to get your paperwork. When a diagnosis has been made, you may be able claim *Carer's allowance/payment* and health care card from the Disability Office at Centrelink – you will need the paediatrician to complete the medical report.