



30 October 2023

National Autism Strategy
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
Canberra, ACT 2601

Submitted online - <https://engage.dss.gov.au>

Dear Consultation team,

Amaze submission to the National Autism Strategy consultation.

Amaze works to build community understanding of autism, influence policy change for Autistic people and provide independent, credible information and resources to individuals, families, professionals, government, and the wider community. We are closely connected with the Autistic community through our national Autism Connect helpline, peer support networks and community capacity building initiatives.

Amaze has been an active advocate for a National Autism Strategy ('Strategy') for many years. There is clear evidence that a bi-partisan strategy can build solid foundations between governments and community that improve the life outcomes of Autistic people and their families. When backed by a firm commitment to mutually reinforcing actions and adequate funding, national autism strategies can drive real change. We are thrilled that the Australian government has now committed to developing and launching a comprehensive Strategy by mid-2024.

This consultation, and establishment of an Oversight Council and Strategy Working Groups, are welcome first steps to ensuring the Strategy is developed in co-design with Autistic people, their families and representative organisations. We have been pleased to work with Minister Rishworth's office and The Social Deck in recent weeks to ensure that this consultation is accessible and inclusive of a diverse range of lived experiences and perspectives from the autism community, and we look forward to continuing this work where required.

T 03 9657 1600
E info@amaze.org.au
W amaze.org.au

Ground Floor, 678 Victoria St
Richmond VIC 3121
PO Box 374, Carlton South VIC 3053

We agree that key themes for the Strategy should include social inclusion; economic inclusion; diagnosis, services and supports; and health and mental health (as identified in your Discussion Paper). As recommended by the Senate Select Committee on Autism in its Final Report, the Strategy should also recognise the vital role families, parents and carers play in supporting Autistic people and provide a pathway to addressing their needs, including for individual, social and financial support.

To drive sustained, meaningful, and measurable change for Autistic people, and create a nation that is truly autism inclusive, international evidence clearly shows that the Strategy must:

1. **Centre the views, voices and aspirations of Autistic people:** The development, implementation, evaluation and ongoing review of the strategy must be undertaken in co-design with Autistic people, their families and representative organisations. The views, voices and aspirations of Autistic people should be at the center of all government decisions, policy, projects and services that impact them.
2. **Embed a human rights approach:** The strategy must recognise the social construct of disability, embed an overarching commitment to celebrating the strengths of neurodiversity and advance the human rights and inclusion of Autistic people (rather than taking a deficit-based approach to 'fixing' or 'combatting' autism).
3. **Cover whole of life and the support needs of all Autistic people:** The strategy must support Autistic people from infancy to older age, through improved community access across the lifespan and increased access to diagnosis, early education, schooling, transition supports, employment, health and mental healthcare, justice and disability services. It must also recognise intersectionality and meet the needs of Autistic people with complex needs, as well as those from different population groups.
4. **Include clear and transparent objectives, targets, outcome measures and indicators:** To ensure the effectiveness of the Strategy in creating meaningful change for Autistic people, transparent targets for change and outcome measures across key indicators must be embedded in the Strategy. These should reflect key priorities across the lifespan and may include increased access to assessment and diagnosis, increased retainment of school enrolment, higher Year 12 completion rates, improved workforce participation and inclusion, and better access to health and mental health services.
5. **Provide a funded implementation plan with accountabilities for delivery:** Implementation of the Strategy must be well funded with incentives and accountabilities for delivery. Effective governance to drive, co-ordinate and monitor implementation across sectors will also be crucial. The governing body must include Autistic people, their families and representative organisations.

6. **Promote the application of an “autism lens” across Australian Governments:** The Strategy must include comprehensive linkages to the broader policy context so that an autism lens is applied to decision making, policy and projects across all relevant areas such as education, employment, justice and community and disability services.
7. **Identify timelines for review:** Timelines for review must be built into the Strategy to ensure its long-term sustainability, evolution and impact. Reviews should be driven at the Ministerial level and be undertaken with Autistic people, their families and representative organisations.
8. **Be accompanied by an autism health capability framework:** As recommended by the Disability Royal Commission, the Strategy must be accompanied by a capability framework to drive autism education and training across the healthcare sector (Recommendation 6.25 and page 361 of [Volume 6](#) the Commission’s Final Report).

To ensure a sustained commitment by Australian Governments to a National Autism Strategy, that sets ambitious targets and dedicated actions to improve the lives of Autistic people, we urge the Government to also consider **embedding the Strategy in legislation**. Legislation could provide a clear framework regarding the Strategy’s visions, principles, timeframes, periodic review and co-design requirements (including for implementation, evaluation and review). Learnings can be taken from other jurisdictions. See for example, England’s *Autism Act* (2009) which makes it mandatory for the English Government to have an autism strategy and review it every 5 years.

Amaze is ready to assist.

Please contact me by email at jim.mullan@amaze.org.au if we can assist by providing further information or answering any questions you may have. We would also be pleased to present to the Oversight Council or its working groups on any of the matters raised above.

Yours sincerely,



Jim Mullan
Chief Executive Officer

