

# Australia's first Autism Strategy



## Overview

14 January 2025

On 14 January 2025, the Australian Government released Australia's first ever [National Autism Strategy 2025 - 2031](#) (Strategy) and associated [First Action Plan](#) 2025-2026. The release of the Strategy is a significant first step towards improving the quality of life of all Autistic people and creating a safe and inclusive society where Autistic people are supported and empowered to thrive.

Amaze has been a passionate advocate for a National Autism Strategy for many years and we acknowledge the work that has been undertaken by the Oversight Council, Strategy working groups and many other Autistic people, families and carers, and stakeholders that have contributed to its development.

Supported by funding, targeted actions and a commitment to co-design, the Strategy has the capacity to significantly improve the lives of Autistic people, and their families and carers, and lead to a more Autism inclusive Australia.

## What is the Strategy?

The strategy is a framework for improving outcomes for all Autistic people in the years ahead. It is led by a vision, goal and guiding principles.

- **Vision:** a safe and inclusive society where all Autistic people are supported and empowered to thrive in all aspects of life, in line with international human rights.
- **Goal:** improve the quality of life for all Autistic people in a way that is meaningful to them.
- **Guiding principles:** Nothing about us, without us; Accessible based on Universal Design; Self Determination and Autonomy; Aligned and Accountable Outcomes; Acceptance and Inclusivity; Safety and Rights; Neurodiversity-Affirming, Individualised and Holistic.

It covers **four key outcomes** areas for change:

- social inclusion
- economic inclusion
- diagnosis, services and supports
- health and mental health.

The strategy includes **22 commitments** (extracted in the attached **Appendix A**) covering a range of issues (under the first three outcome areas) and we have welcomed each of these commitments. The [National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People](#) will address the fourth key outcome area, to improve health and mental health of Autistic people.

The Strategy identifies **priority cohorts**, acknowledging that certain cohorts of Autistic people can face additional barriers, challenges or compounding disadvantage.

The priority cohorts are:

- First Nations People
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) people
- Women and girls and gender diverse people
- LGBTQIA+ people
- Older people
- Children and young people
- People with very high support needs.

The Strategy also takes an intersectional approach, recognising that people's experiences and outcomes can differ according to a range of factors. These can include their gender, sexuality, race, culture, ethnicity, religion, citizenship, socio-economic status, geographical location, and body shape/size.

While Amaze welcomes the Strategy and sees it as a fundamental step forward for the Government's support for Autistic people, there are parts that we are disappointed about, either because detail is missing or is insufficient.

We are disappointed by the lack of commitments targeting the specific needs of the priority cohorts and addressing intersectional disadvantage. We are also concerned that the Strategy contains some significant gaps. For example, it includes no commitments relating to housing and very few regarding education, justice and parents and carers. It fails to commit to establishing Autism specific advocacy services, and is also only focused on the Australian Government, not the states and territories. We think that national consistency is important.

We are cautiously optimistic about the Strategy and are very pleased that it has finally been released.

## The Strategy is accompanied by Action Plans

Specific actions to achieve the Strategy's commitments will be detailed across numerous Action Plans.

The First Action Plan covers the period 2025–2026 and is supported by **\$42.3 million** in funding.

It identifies some immediate actions focused on reducing stigma and changing attitudes around Autism, as well as improving social connections; neurodiversity-affirming and inclusive services and supports; safety and welfare; employment and education outcomes; and diagnosis

Actions funded under the First Action Plan include:

- **\$19.9 million over 4 years** to deliver a peer support program that provides age-appropriate and culturally sensitive support tailored to the diverse needs of the Autistic and Autism community.
- **\$915,000 over 2 years** to develop new awareness and public educational initiatives to foster understanding, inclusion and respect for Autistic people in Australia.
- **\$455,000 over 1 year** to deliver resources designed to support Autistic people and their families with pre and post diagnosis information.

- **\$915,000 over 2 years** to improve employment opportunities and supports for Autistic people in the workplace.
- **\$12.2 million over 5 years** to establish a dedicated knowledge translation body to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world practices.
- **\$3.7 million over 2 years** to progress reviews and evaluations of existing programs, what works, best practice etc., in ways that directly involve the Autistic and Autism community and Autism sector.
- **\$2.8 million over 4 years** to conduct a comprehensive epidemiological study of Autism in Australia to identify the true prevalence of Autism in Australia.
- **\$858,000 over 2 years** to develop and implement an evidence and evaluation framework to lay the foundations for the Strategy based on reliable and up-to-date information about what works for Autistic people.
- **\$366,000 over 7 years** to establish a governance framework that ensures the Autistic and Autism community have sustained involvement in the implementation and monitoring of the Strategy, this Action Plan and future actions.

Amaze has welcomed the actions in the First Action Plan and the Australian Government's funding commitments. They have the capacity to meaningfully improve participation, inclusion, quality of life and the systems many Autistic people depend on, however, significantly more investment will be needed to achieve the Strategy's vision and goal.

The First Action Plan includes some welcome targeted actions for priority cohorts, and to address intersectional disadvantage, however greater investment in targeted immediate actions for these cohorts are needed to address their unique needs and reduce inequalities, particularly Autistic people with very high support needs and their families and carers.

## What's next?

An Evidence and Evaluation Framework, accompanied by a reporting mechanism, will be released within the next 12 months. It is vital that this provides meaningful and robust accountability, transparency and measurements of success.

Future action plans will be informed by the work and findings of the First Action Plan. Future actions will also be co-designed with Autistic people and their families and carers, researchers, policy makers and the broader Autistic and Autism community.

We will continue to work with government and advocate for:

- the Strategy's implementation to be informed by a diversity of perspectives and experiences to ensure its actions are meeting the needs of all Autistic people and their families and carers.
- a comprehensive Evidence and Evaluation Framework, and reporting measurement, that provides transparency, accountability and meaningful measures of success, capable of informing future actions.
- greater investment to support targeted actions for priority cohorts.
- application of an Autism lens on all reforms, including NDIS and Disability Royal Commission related reforms.
- a whole of governments commitment to the National Autism Strategy, including to drive state and territory commitments and autism plans.
- an Autism Act that embeds the Strategy, ensuring its sustainability and providing a framework for its vision, principles, timeframes, periodic review and co-design.

# Appendix A – National Autism Strategy commitments

The National Autism Strategy includes 22 commitments for the social inclusion; economic inclusion; and diagnosis, services and supports key outcome areas. The Strategy also includes enabling commitments focused on governance; reporting and evaluation; and research.

## Social inclusion commitments

1. Increase understanding, acceptance and appreciation of, and change attitudes towards, all Autistic people across all of society, through:
  - a. Greater public education including building a better understanding of the diversity of autism within workplaces and service systems, with a focus on health, education and the federal justice system.
  - b. Increasing representation of the diversity of Autistic people in the Australian Public Service, media, sports and the arts.
  - c. Increasing accessible and sensory-friendly public, broadcast and online spaces.
  - d. Increasing the capacity and capability of advocates and advocacy organisations to challenge and reduce stigma of autism and education of Autistic people and their families and carers about their rights.
2. Increase opportunities for social connections and peer support that reflect individual preferences.
3. Improve Australian Government service delivery, communication, and information to meet the needs of all Autistic people.
4. Ensure consideration of the needs of all Autistic people in the upcoming review of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and next statutory reviews of the associated disability standards.
5. Improve the safety and welfare of all Autistic people through the reduction of all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, bullying and vilification across all four Strategy outcome areas.

## Economic inclusion commitments

6. Increase meaningful employment opportunities (including business ownership, -self-employment, and entrepreneurship and social enterprises) for Autistic people.
7. Support employers to hire and retain Autistic employees through improving the accessibility of recruitment processes and workplace environments that are safe and inclusive for all Autistic people.
8. Improve the supports and services available to Autistic people to ensure they have choice and control over their education and careers.
9. Increase the diverse representation of Autistic people in management, senior executive and board positions promoting Autistic people as visible role models.

10. Improve inclusive practices, accommodations, awareness of communication needs and the quality and accessibility of advocacy resources for Autistic students, and their families, carers and support networks.

## **Diagnosis, services and supports commitments**

### **Diagnosis**

11. Consider the use, accuracy, feasibility and acceptability of current identification screening and diagnostic tools. Work with relevant professional bodies to develop a set of standardised co-designed training/professional development and resource materials to support professionals involved in the identification and diagnosis of Autism to improve the experience, and quality of this process for Autistic people (including intersectional cohorts) and their families and carers.
12. Develop best practice resources to support Autistic people and their families, carers and support networks through the identification, assessment and diagnosis process.
13. Explore ways to make Autism diagnosis and assessment processes more affordable.
14. Consider early screening and developmental monitoring to promote early identification and diagnosis of autism and improved access to health and other professionals.

### **Services and Supports**

15. Improve access to quality, timely, neurodiversity-affirming and equitable supports and services for Autistic people, including for people living in rural, regional and remote areas.
16. Encourage greater representation of people with lived experience in delivering supports and services to Autistic people.
17. Develop a set of best practice training and resource materials for people providing supports and services to Autistic people.
18. Assess the availability and suitability of current decision-making tools aimed at empowering Autistic people to make informed decisions about all areas of their life and consider ways to improve access to high quality decision-making tools.
19. Work with states and territories to improve the experience of Autistic people accessing supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), disability supports outside the NDIS and mainstream services.

*Actions delivered under these commitments will take into account: the differences in presentation by different cohorts (for example: girls, women and gender diverse people); intersectionality; and the need for tools, supports and services to be tailored for different cohorts and to be neurodiversity affirming. The development and delivery of actions will seek to be co-designed or involve Autistic community/academics as appropriate.*

## Enabling commitments

### Governance

20. Develop a governance framework to support:

- a. strong accountability mechanisms
- b. continuing co-leadership through a representative advisory group to oversee implementation of the Strategy and First Action Plan and development of subsequent actions, and active involvement of a diverse range of Autistic people, as well as families and carers, and professionals within the autism sector
- c. whole-of-government, cross-sectoral and coordinated approaches to implementation.

### Research

21. Ensure Government funded autism research conducted in Australia is underpinned by the Strategy's Guiding Principles and is used to inform policy and service delivery with a focus on priority cohorts.

### Evidence, Evaluation and Reporting

22. Develop a National Autism Strategy Evidence, Evaluation and Reporting Framework (including Outcomes and Process Frameworks), using Theory of Change and Program Logic models. Including a Participatory Evidence Framework involving Autistic people and their families and carers in the design, methods, and modes of analysis, and transparent reporting mechanisms, co-produced with the Autistic and Autism community.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Q: Were Autistic people consulted in the development of the Strategy?**

**A:** Autistic people were deeply involved throughout the advocacy that led to the Strategy and in the development of the Strategy itself. The work was overseen by a committee chaired by an Autistic person, and was informed by working groups with significant Autistic representation.

## **Q: How can I read the Strategy in full?**

**A:** The Strategy is available online and in accessible formats on the [Australian Government Department of Social Services website](#)

## **Q: Why was the Strategy created?**

**A:** Amaze and other advocacy organisations have pushed for a policy and funding framework that connects the different parts of government services and activities that support Autistic people and their families. Without a central policy framework, efforts to improve wellbeing can be disjointed and uncoordinated.

## **Q: When will we see the first actions from the Strategy be implemented?**

**A:** At this stage we don't know when the first actions will be implemented. We will continue to advocate for our community, which will include keeping you updated about the Strategy and its actions.

## **Q: Will the Strategy change how I or my family access supports through the NDIS?**

**A:** No, not directly. The Strategy is entirely separate from the NDIS.

## **Q: What does the Strategy mean for my kids and their schooling?**

**A:** The Strategy does not deal with significant changes to the education system. This is because the Strategy only applies to the Australian Government, and the education systems are the responsibility of the state and territory governments. There are some commitments that relate to advocacy for students, and this is positive.

## **Q: I'm a manager in a workplace – how will the Strategy help me support my Autistic staff and colleagues?**

**A:** The Strategy includes a focus on supporting workplaces to be more inclusive and accessible for Autistic staff. This is important work that Amaze also focuses on.



**Q: How will the strategy make it easier for children and adults to access assessment for diagnosis?**

**A:** Access to assessment and diagnosis is often expensive can involve long waits. The Strategy includes a focus on assessment and diagnosis, including looking at how they can be made more affordable. This is positive, but we don't have enough detail on how this will be managed to give further detail at this point.

**Q: Will my peer support group or Autistic organisation be eligible to be funded as part of the Strategy?**

**A:** While there is a commitment to fund peer supports, we do not know what this looks like yet. When we have more information, we will share it with our community.

**Q: What comes next now that the Strategy has been published?**

**A:** The Government needs to set up some extra governance and accountability policies and frameworks. The funding and activities listed in the Action Plan will begin and roll out over the coming two years.

**Q: I'm concerned about some parts of the Strategy – how can I give feedback?**

**A:** We can't change the Strategy at this point, but we are always open to hearing feedback and suggestions for change and improvements. Sometimes we can share them with the Government to improve future work. If you have feedback or suggestions, email us at [community@amaze.org.au](mailto:community@amaze.org.au).

**Q: I have more questions! Where can I find out more information?**

**A:** Get in touch with us through [Autism Connect](#), a free, national Autism helpline, providing independent and expert information over phone, email and webchat.

For more information and to read the Strategy, including accessible versions in Easy English, Auslan video and in community languages, visit the [Australian Government Department of Social Services website](#)

Amaze is a leading Autism organisation driving change so that Autistic people and their families can live their best lives.











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