

SHIFTING THE DIAL ON AUTISM: ALLIANCE CALLS ON MAJOR PARTIES TO ACT NOW TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF AUTISTIC AUSTRALIANS

7 February 2022: The Australian Autism Alliance is calling on major political parties to make four key commitments to enhance the quality of life and lifelong outcomes for Australians living with autism and their families ahead of this year's federal election.

Education, employment, health and mental health are the key areas of focus, as research shows the 650,000 autistic people in Australia continue to experience poorer health, higher rates of mental health conditions, unemployment and lower levels of education.

According to the latest research:

- 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.

The Australian Autism Alliance, which is a national network of autism organisations, has outlined four key commitments it wants all major political parties to make ahead of the federal election:

1. **Develop and fund a National Autism Strategy**, co-designed with autistic people and their advocates, to provide a coordinated national approach, featuring specific targets and actions. This strategy must focus on improving: access and participation in early learning, education and training; employment rates; social and economic participation; community awareness and attitudes; health and wellbeing outcomes; justice; domestic violence and research.
2. **Convene an 'Autism and COVID Summit' in 2022** to identify initiatives in education, training, employment and mental health that address the longtail adverse health, social and economic impacts of COVID.
3. **Develop a National Roadmap to improve health and mental health outcomes** for autistic people, given the appalling health and mental health inequalities currently faced.

4. **Ensure an enduring and effective National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** by recommitting to its original vision. We encourage the government and community to focus on the long term individual and collective benefits of the NDIS, rather than the short term costs.

“We believe the current approach to autism policy needs a more coordinated, national approach as more and more people get diagnosed with the disability,” said Co-Chair of the Autism Alliance, Jenny Karavolos.

“The Australian Autism Alliance believes by adopting these four commitments, our next Federal Government will help hundreds of thousands of autistic Australians to realise their potential and fundamentally improve their quality of life.

“COVID-19 has also presented significant additional challenges to autistic people. Ensuring they are not forgotten in the pandemic recovery plans will be vital for those who are already facing much worse outcomes than their fellow Australians,” said Co-Chair of the Autism Alliance, Paul Micallef.

“1 in 4 Australians now have a family member with autism so it’s in our national interest that we act now,” he said.

For more information go to: australianautismalliance.org.au

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