



Media Release

Australian icon lights up blue for Autism

2nd April 2012

The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House in Canberra will be one of the first landmarks in the world to *Light it Up Blue* on World Autism Awareness Day.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2nd April as World Autism Awareness Day ([A/RES/62/139](#)) to help improve the lives of children and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) so they can lead full and meaningful lives.

Autism/ASD diagnoses have grown substantially over the last two decades: once ASD were rare but now over 1% of school age children in Australia are diagnosed with ASD.

Most children are diagnosed when they are still young. Autism spectrum disorders are usually severe and affect a person through their whole life. Research shows most young children with autism/ASD make substantial and lasting gains if they get appropriate treatment, so early diagnosis is crucial. Early diagnosis depends on the community's awareness of autism/ASD, especially in early childhood services and settings.

Governments in Australia advise that children with ASD need intensive ASD-specific early intervention. Unfortunately, they fund just a small fraction of the required early intervention. Few families can afford to pay for the treatment themselves so most Australian children miss out on essential treatment for their ASD.

“As well as finding funds for early intervention, the challenge is for allied health training and service provision in Australia to catch up with demand for ASD-specific early intervention and support in education” according to Bob Buckley, Convenor of Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (known as A4). “Increasing diagnoses have overtaken the capability of the trained workforce to meet demand for services and support”.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports that people with ‘autism’ have especially poor education outcomes.

“State and territory governments should recognise that their education systems are neither equipped nor resourced to teacher most students with ASD effectively”, Mr Buckley said. “Education in Australia is failing most students with ASD. Education outcomes can improve considerably.”

The ABS also reports that just 34% of people with autism (ASD) participate in the labour force. This rate is way below the rates for people with a disability (54%), indigenous Australians (56%) and Australians generally (83%).

“Labour force participation is a measure of effective education. There are increasing numbers of people with ASD leaving school with little or no prospect that an employer will employ them. People with ASD are keen to work: most of them have no physical or intellectual disability, yet they cannot get a job”, Mr Buckley said. “Federal, state and territory governments must advance education and employment of people with ASD. Employers can help enormously. Australia can do better if everyone is more *autism aware*”.

April is Autism Awareness Month in Australia.

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) is the national grassroots organisation advocating for people with autism spectrum disorders, their families/carers and associates. A4 functions though the internet so most Australians with ASD and their families can communicate and contribute on a relatively equal basis wherever they are in the country.

See: <http://www.un.org/en/events/autismday/>

<http://www.lightitupblue.org/>

Government advice on ASD early intervention:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-e-autbro>

ABS autism report: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4428.0>

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