



Roger Law  
Secretary - ATAC

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Dear Roger

Thank you for your request for information on the policies and achievements of the Bartlett Labor Government in relation to people with autism.

The Bartlett Labor Government remains committed to providing a range of high quality integrated services for all people with a disability, including children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Labor recognises that Autism brings with it a whole range of complex issues. Labor also recognises the expertise that exists within families of children with autism and organisations such as yours.

Labor has worked hard to address the needs and concerns of children with autism. Our achievements and recently announced policies are outlined below.

**I. Will you introduce screening for autism in Tasmania for children at ages 18 months and 2 years?**

The first five years of life are critical for the long-term development of our children. We need to do everything we can to support them to develop normally, learn language and fine motor skills and progress in school and life like all children should.

A re-elected Labor Government will ensure Tasmanian babies and young children have the most comprehensive health checks in Australia to help them get a good start in life. Labor would commit \$2 million over four years to ensure every child has two additional health checks in the first five years of life.

At present, up to 10 health checks are offered for every Tasmanian child before the age of four and a half - four from a doctor and six by a child health nurse. That means Tasmania is meeting the national benchmark. However, Labor is not satisfied with matching standards that apply elsewhere - we aim to be the best.

Unfortunately, some parents do not take advantage of the checks currently available and too many children are missing out. Those who drop out tend to do so early in the schedule of checks and the Child Health and Parenting Service believe that more regular checks and home visits in the first year of life could help change the pattern.

Labor has responded by providing \$2 million over four years to fund the 12 Checks Before Five Program, with two additional checks including an extra visit in the first year. This will mean every Tasmanian baby will be offered a total of 12 health checks before they reach Prep.

The 12 Checks Before Five Program, will increase the number of checks provided to our children along with extending the number of years children and their families receive these important health care services, as well as providing for more home visits.

Child and Family Health Nurses and GPs will assess children's growth (i.e. height, weight and head circumference) and their development (movement, language and social skills). They will also provide support and information to parents. Child and Family Health Nurses offer support in response to parental concerns and prepare parents for their child's next developmental stage.

Labor will work with our health professionals to ensure these health checks are comprehensive and focus on ensuring the ongoing growth and development of our children. This includes the early detection of autism.

- 2. Will your government establish AUTISM CLINICS in the four major hospital in Tasmania where those who are red flagged by the screening process can be directed for full diagnosis not only of autism, but of the many co-morbidities associated with autism (epilepsy, mental retardation, tubular sclerosis, other genetic problems, dyspraxia, A.D.H.D., anxiety disorders, gastro-intestinal and many others) to ensure that a holistic treatment plan that also covers such co-morbidities as well as for autism can be drawn up for each child?**

Assessments for Autism involve a multidisciplinary approach by a number of professions including teachers, counsellors, psychologists, GPs and medical specialists. Medical referral processes are usually undertaken following referrals from mainly three community services. These groups are child health services and providers, schools and or counselling services. In these cases, a child is taken to GP who in many cases refers to a paediatrician who is a specialist. Very often he is the first one to do a thorough assessment and then refers to (TASDAS) Tasmanian Autism Spectrum and Diagnostic Assessment Service.

The Tasmanian Autism Spectrum and Diagnostic Assessment Service (TASDAS) has taken over from the previous assessment service and the numbers of cases appear to be increasing.

The vast variety of therapies for autism in practice has also been a source of confusion at times for clinicians who are seeking to provide appropriate medical treatment which corresponds to the needs of the individuals. Many children require medication for other co-morbidities, for example, such as epilepsy.

The current development in outpatient practices for children with autism will be to move these and other services to GP Super Clinics and Integrated Care Centres (ICC) where the one stop shop concept will be fostered by federal and state health bodies. To establish another stand alone structure as a dedicated Autism Clinic in one central hospital away from the population centres targeted for ICCs, such as Glenorchy, Clarence and Kingston, may be counterproductive. With added resources now committed to children services Labor believes many of the difficulties previously experienced should be dramatically reduced.

**3. Will your government build early intervention centres in all regions of Tasmania with the capacity for outreach services so that all autistic children will be catered for?**

**Will you use the well established and most proven by research method of Applied Behavioural Analysis in the early intervention programmes for the children involved?**

**As it is now recommended that Behavioural programmes be used before drug therapy for ADHD and the effectiveness of ABA programmes for children with Developmental Delay will you include these children in early intervention programmes?**

In the South, DHHS provides funding to the non-government sector for an assessment and diagnosis service for children with developmental delay aged 0 to 4 years.

A Child Development Unit is located in both the North and North West of the State. These services form part of the Child Health and Parenting Service of Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services. These Units provide an assessment and referral service for children aged 0 to 5 years who are suspected of having delays in one or more areas of their development.

The Department of Education also has an important role in this area, through services delivered by the Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS).

The area of children's therapy services has been a complex issue for Government for some years now. We recognise that the current service system can be difficult to navigate, has significant duplication across departments, service delivery processes are inconsistent and equity of access to services can be improved.

Following a report from an independent consultant, Evolving Ways, the Bartlett Labor Government has undertaken a number of reforms to children's therapy services in Tasmania.

A new model for children's therapy services has been developed in consultation with parents and service providers. The new model requires greater collaboration between the two Departments and non-government therapy providers.

A major recommendation of the Evolving Ways report was that services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder would be improved by the establishment of a statewide Autism Spectrum Disorder Assessment and Diagnosis Team, for the provision of diagnosis, assessment and support.

The Autism Team is jointly resourced by both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education. The service model is based on the one used by Autism Spectrum Australia who have entered into a partnership with both Departments to provide expertise and support in the operation of the team over the next three years.

The new statewide Autism Team has now been operating since early July 2009. The Team consists of three members, a Senior Clinical Psychologist, (Team Leader), a Clinical Psychologist and a Speech Pathologist.

The Bartlett Labor Government is committed to improved coordination of services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and is continuing to examine new innovative models to assist in achieving this.

The new model for therapy services for children with disabilities provides clear pathways for parents requiring support.

The model is based on a family partnership approach that acknowledges the centrality of the child and their family and the benefits of families, educators and health professionals working together on shared goals for the care and support of children with disabilities.

Children's therapy service improvements are part of the broader reforms in Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services, involving new forms of partnership with the non-government sector, new resource allocation processes and ways of determining eligibility and priority for services.

Labor is committed to continued investment in these reforms to improve outcomes for children with autism.

The Bartlett Labor Government has also invested \$27.4 million in the 2009-2010 State Budget to support the establishment of the first eight Child and Family Centres at Beaconsfield, East Devonport, Queenstown, George Town, Ravenswood, Clarendon Vale, Chigwell and Risdon Cove. There will eventually be up to 30 Child and family Centres across Tasmania, to be developed in a rolling program over four years.

Each centre will be developed in consultation with the local community, but they will all support families with health and wellbeing, care and education needs of children from birth to school age - preparing them for a healthy life and success at school. They will be a key link for families into government services to support children with autism.

To bring all that together we need a co-ordinator in each centre and Labor has committed \$4 million over four years to fund co-ordinator positions for the first eight centres. This will be extended to other centres as they come on line.

**4. Will you introduce remedial programmes for school children who have missed out on early intervention programmes? Such programme to be held in withdrawal areas where special programmes to deal with the core deficits of communication, social problems and narrow interests can be addressed by qualified professionals and specially trained autism aides?**

Currently there is a range of services provided through both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, for children with autism.

In the Department of Education, special education resources support students on the Disability Register and students with additional needs including those with autism. This year, \$14.6 million is included in the initial School Resource Packages in support of students on the Register, while \$7.7 million is being provided to support other students with additional needs. On top of this, 149 FTE teaching staff have been allocated in support of students with special needs.

Labor has made a number of election commitments that will support children with autism at school.

These include:

### **\$4 million for school psychologists**

This funding will provide up to an extra 12 school psychologists to be deployed where they are most needed. This will ensure students with special needs will get the high level support they need. Receiving the right professional support is a key way to assist all students and create the supportive and safe learning environments that we are intent on maintaining in our schools.

### **\$1.56 million for students with special needs in Catholic and Independent Schools**

Labor will double its existing commitment of funding for students with special needs in Catholic and independent schools with an additional \$1.56 million over four years.

Labor will build on the current allocation of \$250,000 provided to Catholic schools and the \$140,000 provided to independent schools. Labor recognises that students with special needs require funding to support their schooling. That is Labor's values in action.

The Department of Health and Human Services Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services assists in the assessment of Autism Spectrum Disorders in school aged children and adolescents. This is available on a statewide basis.

Disability Services provides professional development services to staff to assist in the management of severe and challenging behaviour for young people with disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The models of intervention endorsed through this training are based on the work of the Institute of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Services typically provided to people with autism through Disability Services range from the provision of centre-based and in-home respite for children with autism and their families, access to funded school holiday programs for children with autism, accommodation support, day support services and therapy services.

Disability Services programs currently being accessed by adolescents and young people with autism include:

- Post School Options which provides a flexible response to individual need and enables students with a disability, including those living in rural and remote areas, to leave school and pursue chosen pathways into work, further education and vocational education and training.
- Individual Funding Unit (IFU) which provides individualised, recurrent packages of personal support that are tailored to meet the needs of clients and their primary carers.

**5. Will your government provide special programmes for adult autistics to remedy the shocking employment prospects for them?**

Labor recognises the issues that people with autism can face in relation to employment and knows we need to continue to increase employment opportunities for people with a disability.

To this end, Labor has announced a Graduate Program for people with Disabilities with funding of \$118,000.

Labor has committed to increase employment opportunities for people with a disability in the Tasmanian public sector. A whole of government graduate program for people with disabilities will be implemented. Labor will provide \$120,000 towards this program.

This program will involve a well coordinated transitional pathway program to assist people with disabilities in accessing gainful employment opportunities. Although the Public Sector is the targeted employer in this pilot project, this model of practice is transferable to the private and community sectors within Tasmania. This policy has been strongly endorsed by the CPSU as the Public Sector having a strong leadership role in improving access to employment for Tasmanians with disabilities.

**6. Are there any other initiatives that your government plans to introduce for people with autism?**

Labor is committed to a range of initiatives that will support people with autism and the organisations that support them. These are outlined below.

**\$2 million for Strengthening Community Organisations fund**

Labor is committed to a strong working relationship with the community services sector and has great respect for the work our community services sector partners do. Organisations such as Autism Tas will be able for funding under this fund to strengthen their organisational capacity.

Labor understands community services require support to ensure they deliver the best possible services to vulnerable and disadvantaged Tasmanians. Labor will develop a Partnership Agreement in collaboration with the sector to be completed in its first year back in office. Labor will dedicate \$2 million over the next four years to continue the Strengthening Community Organisations Fund.

A re-elected Bartlett Labor Government will continue to provide \$1 million over 4 years to the TasCOSS' Industry Development Unit. This will progress the Community Services Industry Action Plan and the specific work required to prepare organisations for the future.

**\$400,000 for the Community Services Action Plan**

Labor recognises the community services sector is experiencing pressures on a number of fronts including the ability to recruit and retain a skilled workforce. It requires dedicated effort to plan for future needs and to promote the sector as a positive area for young Tasmanians seeking a job.

In relation to the goals of Autism Tasmania, this plan will enable voices of organisations such as yours to be heard in relation to future needs for people with autism.

Labor will continue to apply indexation to organisations funded by the Department of Health and Human Services using the present formula over the next four years. Labor supports the joint approach of the Australian Government and relevant Unions in relation to the Fair Wage award modernisation case to be heard in 2010.

Labor is committed to working with the sector to undertake appropriate planning for the sector's future workforce needs and match these with projected need for services.

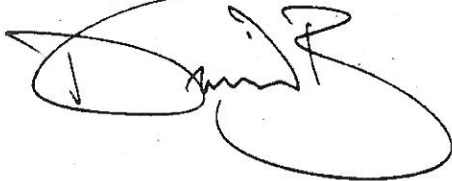
Labor will dedicate \$400,000 over four years to commission a community services workforce capability study and develop a 2025 Community Services Futures Plan by the end of June 2015.

**7. Could you provide a timetable for implementation of your proposals for people with autism?**

All of Labor's funding commitments will be met within the term of the next government.

Again thank you for your request for information on the policies and achievements of the Bartlett Labor Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Bartlett', written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp.

David Bartlett  
**Premier**