



The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister Gillard

Subject: **Autism Spectrum Disorders**

the Department of Health and Ageing may have defied instructions from the Prime Minister with its answer to Senate Community Affairs Committee Question E11-184 (see Answers To Estimates Questions On Notice, Health And Ageing Portfolio, Additional Estimates 2010-2011, 23 February 2011, ...

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/estimates/add_1011/do_ha/184.pdf). The Department of Health and Ageing said:

Autism ... is the remit of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). ...

Unless you or The Hon K Rudd MP reversed exiting policy, the answer given is contrary to instructions from the office of Prime Minister.

On 18/10/2006, the Minister for Health and Ageing, The Hon Tony Abbott MP, wrote to the Prime Minister, The Hon John Howard MP, about “the way the Commonwealth Government manages autism”.

On 18/9/2007, the Prime Minister wrote to three Ministers, including the Minister for Health and Ageing, asking them to oversee one or two components of the Commonwealth’s *Helping Children with Autism* package. In the case of the Health Minister, the Prime Minister wrote ...

I ask that you oversee the implementation of one component of this package: ‘New Medicare items for diagnosis and early intervention treatment for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders’ ...

Shortly after this, the Government announced its *Helping Children with Autism* package. The Department of Health and Ageing had clear responsibility for part of the package (see <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/autism-children>).

This shows the Department of Health and Ageing has some responsibility for autism spectrum disorders. Autism is not completely “the remit” of FaHCSIA, as Health officials claim.

In responding to the Senator's question, the Department of Health and Ageing also wrote:

... The Department is not aware of any evidence of any major shifts in prevalence of autism in Australia.

On 7/8/2007, Mr Chris Killick-Moran, Director of Children and Youth Mental Health Programs Section, Department of Health and Ageing, emailed Leonie Smith and Ben Wallace in FaHCSIA (subject: Summary Paper on Autism Spectrum Disorder Proposals from DOHA, importance: High). The content of the email said

Of very great concern is the increase in the reported prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in Australia and overseas. A recent Australian study in the Barwon region of Victoria found a 10-fold increase in the prevalence of autism diagnoses over a 16 year period. ...

The Department of Health and Ageing was aware of "very great concern" about a major shift in the prevalence of autism in Australia.

People with autism spectrum disorders, their families and carers want the Department of Health and Ageing to be responsible for ensuring quality and timeliness of ASD diagnosis, epidemiology, clinical services and the ASD-related allied health workforce. These are not FaHCSIA's responsibility.

Please ask the Health Minister to meet us. Autism Asperger Advocacy Australia is concerned that we have not been allowed to meet the Minister for Health about these issues since Labor formed Government in 2007.

Yours sincerely



Bob Buckley
Convenor

28/8/2011