



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

MC14-004204

Mr Peter Hill
<address>

Dear Mr Hill

Thank you for your letter of 15 November 2013 to Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services, about government services and support for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Your letter was referred to Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Assistant Minister for Social Services, as this matter falls within his portfolio responsibilities. The Minister has asked me to reply to you on his behalf.

The increasing prevalence in the number of children diagnosed with ASD was the main impetus for the Australian Government's funding of the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package in 2008. The package, which incorporates early intervention services for children up to seven years of age, parent education and support, and funding for research and best practice, is funded at over \$70 million in 2013-2014. You can access further information on the on the HCWA package at www.dss.gov.au/autism.

The aim of the Government's investments in programmes for children with ASD, such as the HCWA package, is to ensure that these children have the best start possible to reach their full potential through access to early intervention services.

In the longer term, the Government is committed to the full roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS does not differentiate between types of disability. People with disability will be able to access assistance under the scheme to meet their needs if their disability is permanent and significantly affects their communication, mobility, self-care or self-management. The supports provided may vary as they will be tailored to each person's individual needs.

Once the NDIS is in place, all Australians with disability will be able to access necessary supports based on their functional needs rather than on a specific diagnosis. The scheme recognises that disability is for a lifetime, and takes a lifelong approach to providing care and support. This means that an individual's plan looks not only at their immediate needs but also across the course of their life.

You may already be aware, in February 2013, the Government also announced funding of \$31 million over 8 years to establish the new 'Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders'. This funding is being supplemented by a further \$70 million from commercial partners.

The implementation by the CRC of an innovative “whole-of-life” research portfolio will deliver a continuum of support required for people with ASD. This approach aims to help improve outcomes on the post-school qualifications and labour force participation key measures that you mention in your letter.

In relation to your comments about the increase in the number of people being diagnosed with ASD, you may be interested to know that the Department of Social Services is working with the CRC to develop a research project to investigate diagnostic practices and the reliability of these practices in Australia. The aim of this research is to develop a better understanding of the relationship between diagnostic practices and diagnostic rates. The CRC expects to complete this research by the end of 2015.

Further information about the CRC is available at www.autismcrc.com.au.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mitchell Cole', written in a cursive style.

MITCHELL COLE
Autism and Early Intervention Branch
30 April 2014