



Media Release

An open letter about Autism to the new Minister for Social Security

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (known as A4), the national peak body for autism spectrum disorder (ASD), wrote [an open letter](#) to Scott Morrison MP, the new Minister for Social Security. The letter gives essential information about ASD and the impact of Government policy for people living with ASD, and asks for a meeting to discuss improving outcomes.

Bob Buckley, A4's Convenor and father of a 22 year old with severe ASD, said "Kicking people with ASD off subsistence level support is known to fail. Rather than waging war on people with disability, the Government needs to lead in disability employment, to create jobs for people with disability. Employment of people with disability in its own Public Service is below 4%. Even its showcase, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) that runs the NDIS, only achieved 11% employees with a disability, behind businesses like the ANZ Bank with 13%. That's not 'leadership'."

"People with ASD have a little chance of employment: in 2012, 67% were unemployed. Usually, they lack essential education.

"Australian education systems fail people with ASD. Australian students with ASD have particularly poor outcomes because they miss out on the early intervention they need to best prepare them for their education. Australia does not train allied health professionals to provide best practice early intervention for ASD. Children with ASD do not get a fair go. Adults with ASD do not get a fair go either", he said.

Up to the 1980s, autism was considered rare ... but ABS reports show that the number of Australians grew from just 13,200 in 1998 to 115,400 in 2012. "This massive increase in ASD diagnoses needs to be understood properly", Mr Buckley said.

The Health Department told politicians that it "is not aware of any evidence of any major shifts in prevalence of autism in Australia".

Typically, Government officials claim that increasing diagnoses are milder cases. The ABS reported in 2012 that 73% of people with autism have severe or profound disability. Mr Buckley says, "the evidence does not support their claim. Most Australians with ASD do not have 'mild disability'".

The NDIA's latest quarterly report (Sep 2014) shows 27% of NDIS recipients list autism as their primary disability. Apparently, the NDIA was surprised earlier in 2014 when it realised how many NDIS participants have autism.

The Government decided recently that it would cut funding to a consortium of disability peak bodies that included A4, the national grassroots advocacy organisation for autism spectrum disorders.

"Clearly, Government officials do not understand ASD: they often provide wrong information. Government needs an autism peak body for stakeholder advice and accurate information to support policy development and to report on outcomes. The Government never funded a peak body for autism. It decided not to fund the consortium that included autism when it cut funding for disability peak bodies just before Christmas. There is little prospect for effective policy without accurate information relating to ASD", Mr Buckley said.

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link to open letter: <http://a4.org.au/a4/node/922>