



Media Release

Autism included at last ... but in a de-funded national disability consortium

This week saw a major milestone for autism advocacy in Australia. The *Australian Federation of Disability Organisations* (AFDO) helped *Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia* (A4) prepare and distribute a media release. It was the first time ever that the wider disability community in Australia recognised and helped advocate for specific issues/needs of people living with autism.

Bob Buckley, A4's Convenor, said, "This is a major step for both autism and the disability sector. It clearly demonstrates the value of AFDO's consortium approach ... despite the Government's refusal to support and fund advocates for disabilities like autism, and to defund recently the existing disability-specific peak bodies."

Autism was considered "rare" 2 or 3 decades ago, but the number of people diagnosed with autism is rising rapidly ... from just 13,200 Australians in 1998 to 115,400 in 2012. Recent reports show 27% of NDIS participants have autism as their primary disability. Most people who are diagnosed with autism are young males (the male:female ratio is about 4:1, though women may have more difficulty than males with getting a diagnosis) and are severely disabled.

"Autism is a substantial, distinct and rapidly growing component of the disability sector", Mr Buckley said.

"Government faces challenges that relate particularly to autism. Diagnoses are growing much faster than service availability. So individuals with autism face increasing difficulty with accessing appropriate services. Our education system does not produce graduates trained to deliver services for people with autism. The tertiary education system doesn't even try to teach most people with autism. The result is that education, employment and independent living outcomes for people with autism are abysmal, far worse than disability in general and worse than they should be. This is due to the Government's refusal to recognise and address the distinct nature of autism and the specific needs of people living with autism."

"While the disability sector face many common challenges that warrant shared advocacy, distinct disabilities have distinct issues that need to be addressed. AFDO's consortium approach is the best available option to do this", Mr Buckley said.

The Government chose to fund cross-disability national bodies such as national groups for women and indigenous Australians ... groups that warrant specific attention in disability services and supports. But the national disability bodies that the Government chose to fund have no discernible understanding of, interest in nor history of advocacy for people living with autism.

"The Government's refusal to fund peak bodies for specific disabilities disadvantages people with autism more than most. This comes at a time when good policy relating to autism is critical", Mr Buckley said.

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