



Information for Parents and Carers - Overview

Background Information

An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a life long neuro-developmental disorder of unknown cause which is thought to begin at birth or shortly after. While there is no cure, there are treatments and strategies that are effective for improving the lives of children with an ASD. Children and adults continue to change and grow and many show dramatic improvements in a range of skills throughout their lives.

ASDs have specific characteristics that may present in a variety of combinations and range along a continuum from mild to severe. Children with ASDs may have deficits in behavioural, communication and social interaction skills.

It is estimated that 1 in 160 children have an ASD.

Under the early intervention component of the Helping Children with Autism package, all children aged six and under who are diagnosed with an ASD and are not yet at school will be eligible for a funding package of up to \$12 000 (up to \$6 000 per financial year) to assist with the financial cost of accessing early intervention services. An eligible child is one who has been diagnosed with an ASD, who is aged zero to 6 years and who has not yet begun full time school.

Families living in rural and remote areas may also be able to access an additional \$2 000 in recognition of the challenges they face in accessing services. This will provide these families with options for accessing early intervention services, such as accommodation and travel to and from support, as well as training, respite and resources such as books and computers to access online information.

Accessing the early intervention component of the package

Under the increased access to early intervention component of the package, all children aged six years and under who are diagnosed with an ASD and who are not yet at full time school will have access to a funding package of up to \$12 000 (up to \$6 000 per financial year).

Families will choose the early intervention service that best suits their child from a panel of service providers currently being established by FaHCSIA. FaHCSIA will reimburse panel members in arrears on behalf of families for services delivered.

The panel will be made up of providers delivering evidence based multidisciplinary interventions. It is expected that the panel of service providers will be announced in late October 2008 and families will be able to access the panel from late October 2008.

Families will need to visit an Autism Advisor prior to accessing service providers on the panel. There will be new Autism Advisors across Australia providing advice, information and practical help following diagnosis. It is expected that both the Autism Advisors and the service provider panel will be available from late October 2008.

To access the early intervention components of the package an acceptable diagnosis is one

that meets one of the following listed disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (DSM) IV under Pervasive Developmental Disorders:-

- Autistic Disorder
- Asperger's Disorder
- Rett's Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)

Diagnosis will be made prior to contact with the Autism Advisors. These autism advisory services have been established to confirm eligibility of the child and advise families on the panel of service providers, along with providing advice, information and practical help following diagnosis.

Families who reside in an outer regional or remote area may also be eligible to access a one off payment of \$2 000 per eligible child to cover the additional expenses associated with accessing early intervention services. This payment is in addition to the \$12 000 funding package and to any outreach services available to these areas.

Eligibility for this payment will be based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia + (ARIA+) classification. During 1998, the Department of Health and Aged Care commissioned a project to measure and classify the remoteness of populated localities in relation to 'service centres' of various sizes (based on the 1996 census). The result was the ARIA index developed by the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (GISCA) at the University of Adelaide . Further information on ARIA can be obtained by visiting the [GISCA website](#). Families in an area classed as outer regional or beyond, according to ARIA+ will be eligible. This additional funding will be administered by the Autism Advisors and will provide these families with options for accessing early intervention services as well as training, respite, resources (such as computers to access online information and books), and accommodation and travel to and from support. The Autism Advisors will advise families if they are eligible for this payment.

All funds must be spent while the child is still eligible. Each family with an eligible child has access to funding of up to \$6000 per financial year, up to a total of \$12 000. Children are no longer eligible once they start formal (i.e. full time compulsory) school or turn 7 years of age (whichever happens sooner). Families may choose to spread the funding over the course of a financial year or may choose to use it within a short period of time for the period of time that the child remains eligible.

The diagnosis must have been made under the new Medicare diagnosis items through the Helping Children with Autism package or by a state or territory government assessment service or by a private paediatrician or psychiatrist. To be eligible to access services under the Helping Children with Autism package, the diagnosis of ASD must have been made under the new Medicare diagnosis items or by a state or territory government assessment service or by a private paediatrician or psychiatrist.

From 1 July 2008, the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) introduced new Medicare items. These new items are for:

- consultant physicians (paediatricians and psychiatrists) to diagnose and develop a treatment plan for children aged under 13 years on referral from a GP
- psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists to provide up to four services in total per child to collaborate with the psychiatrist or paediatrician on the assessment where required, and

- psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists to provide early intervention treatment following diagnosis (providing up to 20 services in total per child).

In addition the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is delivering two initiatives:

- professional development for teachers and other school staff to support school students with ASD to achieve better educational outcomes, and
- funding for parents and carers of school students with an ASD to attend workshops and information sessions and to access online workshops and information.

This support will help improve the educational outcomes for school aged children with ASDs.

FaHCSIA is currently developing an ASD website that offers information, online resources and interactive functions to support parents, carers and professionals. The site will provide impartial and evidence based information about ASDs and early intervention approaches. It will also include the locations and contact details of the advisory services and approved early intervention services (searchable by postcode and shown on maps). The website will build upon the existing Raising Children website and is expected to be available from February 2009.

If you would like more information about these components of the Helping Children with Autism package, fact sheets are available on this website, the [Department of Health and Ageing website](#) and the [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website](#). You can also call the Helping Children with Autism Inquiry Line on 1800 289 177.

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can use the [National Relay Service](#) to contact any of FaHCSIA's listed phone numbers.

Additional Information

If you would like more information about the Helping Children with Autism package, fact sheets are available this website, the Department of Health and Ageing website and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website.

You can also:

- call the Helping Children with Autism Inquiry Line on 1800 289 177.

email

- asd@fahcsia.gov.au (general enquiries), or
- asdpanel@fahcsia.gov.au (enquires regarding the panel).