



ACN 085 018 408

2012 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2011-12

The Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders is the national peak body representing the autism spectrum community. Through its members, the Advisory Board represents a significant number of Australian citizens who live with an ASD and who are members of, or who obtain services from, the Advisory Board's member organisations.

During the reporting period, there have been significant developments in the reform of the disability sector and the not-for-profit sector. The Board has been active in advancing our key strategic directions and endeavouring to lead and influence reform developments to ensure better life outcomes for people living with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families.

The key priorities for the Board in 2011-12 have focused on the following key areas:

- Raising Awareness - through key activities associated with Autism Month and the Asia Pacific Autism Conference
- Influencing Policy – through the development of position papers, meeting with politicians and key decision makers, particularly in relation to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- Developing Relationships – with key stakeholders through effective communications and representation on relevant industry groups and initiatives.

Raising Awareness

- The Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC) 2011 was a significant and key event during the financial year. APAC 2011, held in Perth from the 8-10 September 2011, was jointly hosted by the Autism Association of Western Australia and the Advisory Board. One thousand three hundred and ninety delegates (1,390) attended APAC 11 with twenty two (22) countries represented. The Conference gained prominent national and international media exposure including front page of The Australian newspaper, featured story on "AM", ABC, featured story on ABC News, featured story on Ten's national News at Five and Evening News in all capital cities, Fox News (USA, South America) and Indian Express. Evaluation survey results indicated that 89% of the delegates rated the Conference as Excellent to Above Average. The Board pass on our congratulations to Joan McKenna Kerr and the Autism Association of Western Australia for delivering a highly successful event.



- The Board and its member organisations were active during Autism Month May 2012. Many organisation now participate in the international “Light it up Blue” awareness campaign.

Influencing Policy

In budget announcements in May 2012, the Australian Government displayed great leadership in embracing the recommendations of the Productivity Commission Report and committed \$1billion over the next four years (from July 2012) to ensure the effective implementation of the NDIS. The NDIS launch sites were announced following COAG’s Select Council on Disability Reform meeting in July. The launch sites will operate in NSW, Victoria and the ACT on a specific geographical region; those in SA and Tasmania will be based on an age cohort. South Australia will focus on children, commencing with 0-5 years, expanding to 0-14 years. Tasmania will focus on young people 15-24 years.

It is critical that the unique and complex characteristics of ASD be considered within all elements of the design and development of the NDIS to ensure that families and individuals experience a service response that improves life outcomes. In particular the Board has identified the following focus areas:

- The functional assessment of people with an ASD must reflect the unique nature of the disability and ensure access to services that is appropriate to these specific needs
- Families and individuals with an ASD need specific support and resources to navigate the service system
- All people and organisations delivering services to the autism spectrum community must be skilled, competent and trained in the unique supports and interventions required to ensure the best possible outcomes
- The NDIS must support a mechanism for the continued capacity building of autism expertise across Australia
- All people with an ASD in regional and remote locations must receive a level of service that is of commensurate in quantity and quality to that received in metropolitan locations.

The Board released its first position paper relating to the NDIS “Functional Assessment”

<http://www.autismadvisoryboard.org.au/uploads/file/pdfs/Position%20Paper%201%20Assessment%20150812%20FINAL.pdf> .

The Board also updated the “National Call to Action” and the position paper on “Education and Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia”.

Towards the end of the 2011-12 financial year, the Board was successful in securing project funding from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Advisory Board has developed strong relationships over many years and is pleased that there has



been recognition of the Board's activities and expertise. The funding will allow the Board to undertake two key projects throughout the 2012-13 financial year:

- Development of a discussion paper with a focus on children and young people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder under the age of 25, highlighting the key issues regarding the level of interface between the disability sector and the health sector, in particular mental health. The paper will provide recommendations on ways in which the service system can be better streamlined, integrated and provide a more comprehensive response for people with ASD and co-morbid health issues
- Development and promotion of guidelines with a focus on children and young people with ASD under the age of 25 which are aimed at helping parents and carers of a child with ASD better understand the assistance that may be available to them. The guidelines will provide information on how to develop individualised service plans as well as key points that parents and carers should consider when choosing interventions and support that are best suited to the needs of their child with an ASD. Specific guidelines will also be developed for professionals.

Developing Relationships

A significant development throughout the year has been the appointment of two additional Directors. Professor Jacqui Roberts (Chair, Autism Centre of Excellence, Griffith University, Queensland) and Professor Katrina Williams (Director, Developmental Medicine, Royal Children's Hospital, Victoria) have added great value to the Board in relation to a greater connected with the research and clinical communities of interest for Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The Board has continued meetings with key policy and decision makers from relevant Departments and key Ministers. Throughout the year, two meetings were held with Senator Jan McLucas (or nominated representatives) and a meeting was also held with Senator Mitch Fifield.

The Board committed in-kind contributions to the Autism Cooperative Research Centre and is acknowledged as a non-essential partner in the second proposal that has been submitted. The Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) program is an Australian Government initiative administered by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and provides an exciting opportunity for the autism community in Australia.

The Board worked with the Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR) to ensure the transfer of responsibility for monitoring and allocating the Apex Trust Fund for Autism Research.

Governance

During the reporting period, Manuel Duharte resigned from the position of Chief Executive Officer, Autism Tasmania and his role on the Advisory Board. After



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appropriate selection process, Andrea Brumby, as the new Chief Executive Officer of Autism Tasmania, was appointed to the Board.

The Board continued to self-fund secretariat support throughout the year. Scott Shepherd from Autism SA assisted in this role for most of the year before resigning to take up a position with the national “Positive Partnership” program.

As the success of the Asia Pacific Conference continues to grow, the Board also formalised a process for conference protocols and agreement arrangements between the host organisation and the Board.

I have signalled my intent to step down as Chair of the Advisory Board at this year’s Annual General Meeting and would like to take the opportunity to thank my fellow directors for their support.

It is a critical time for the autism community and I trust that we will continue to be active in our key roles of national leadership and influence.

Jon Martin
Chairperson