



ACN 085 018 408

2010 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2009-10

The Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders has continued to develop as the national peak body providing strategic advice to the Australian Government on the issues affecting people with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.

It is always a challenge to achieve everything that we would like to achieve. Nevertheless, it has been a significant year for the Advisory Board. We are very reliant on the commitment of our directors and member organisations to ensure that the organisation continues to progress. It is important to recognise that valued contribution of all Board members who bring a range of skills to their governance roles and responsibilities. They have operated in a focused manner, ensuring a clear concentration on the strategic objectives. The 2009-10 financial year has seen some great accomplishments for the Advisory Board.

Funding made available by the Australian Government via the member organisations enabled the Board to develop a proposal to establish a National ASD Register. Consultations were conducted across Australia with diagnosticians, State and Federal government departments, researchers and the state/territory autism associations. A final proposal was submitted at the end of September 2009 and development work has continued in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Three members of the Advisory Board have been invited to operate in an advisory capacity in relation to the proof of concept and feasibility stage of this vital piece of work.

During the reporting period, the first Asia Pacific Autism Conference 2009 (APAC 09) was held in Sydney from 20 – 22 August. With the theme of “*Connecting Today – Inspiring Tomorrow*”, it was co-sponsored by the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders and Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect). 1600 participants attended this highly successful three day conference. A major outcome for the Advisory Board has been a share in the surplus generated by the conference activities, supporting a longer term goal that ensure ongoing sustainability and viability. Further, APAC 09 formed the foundation for establishing and enhancing links that assist in building capacity of ASD communities and leadership across the Asia Pacific. The Board recognises APAC as a core activity in the future and is working collaboratively to ensure a successful APAC 11 to be held in Perth, Western Australia in September 2011. Planning is also underway for APAC 13 to be held in Adelaide, South Australia.



The Board has continued to focus on the development of position papers to provide strategic advice to Government and has liaised effectively with senior staff in various Government departments, Ministerial advisory staff and direct meetings with Ministers. Particular focus has been on advancing the needs of students with ASD within the education sector.

In April 2010, as part of the Autism Month activities across Australia, the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders launched a National position paper on “The provision of appropriate educational services for school-age students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia” at the National Disability Summit. The paper calls for educational services for school-aged Australian children and adolescents with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) that are governed by the following principles:

- Every child and adolescent with an ASD should have access to an educational service appropriate to his/her needs
- All government and non-government educational sectors should provide educational services that cater to the needs of children and adolescents with an ASD
- Educational services must be responsive to all children and adolescents across the autism spectrum
- There should be a range of educational services for children and adolescents with an ASD
- Educational services must address the students’ needs in communication, social skills, learning, sensory issues and behaviour and include family involvement
- Increased provision of teacher education and training to improve the capacity of educational services to provide for students with an ASD
- Educational services are based on sound evidence and quality indicators
- Following an application for service, enrolments should proceed in a timely manner to ensure students with ASD access appropriate educational services as soon as possible.

The paper has been an excellent resource in informing both State and Commonwealth Governments of the educational needs of students on the spectrum. The Board recognises the significant work undertaken by Dr Trevor Clarke from Aspect in the development of this paper.

A joint planning session was conducted in May 2010 with the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The focus of this session was to undertake a strategic review of the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) initiative to identify and implement opportunities for the program to enhance outcomes for families and children, ensure effective synergies between program areas, build greater capacity for service responses and maximise resource utilisation. A range of issues were addressed including the role of Autism Advisors, quality monitoring of service providers, the HCWA funding model and the interface between State and Commonwealth Governments.



Throughout the reporting period, the Board also had opportunity to forge relationships with the Adam Scott Foundation to develop the Autism Grants Program. This program is designed to provide young people living with an ASD with access to Apple iPads and their innovative, ASD-specific applications. The Board recognises the significant work undertaken by Penny Beeston (CEO, Autism Queensland) in developing the partnership with the Adam Scott Foundation. It is anticipated that the Foundation will provide for two rounds of these grants annually, with applications first being accepted from November 2010.

As we look forward to the new financial year, there are a number of considerations for the Board.

Although there has been confirmation that HCWA will continue, the outcomes of the federal election will see an expanded program in operation for more children with disabilities (ie, deafness or hearing impairment, blindness or vision impairment, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome). The Board will seek to have an active role in the provision of advice to Government in relation to this initiative.

The outcomes of the federal election has also resulted in a change of key Ministerial responsibilities. The Board has developed a draft proposal to submit to Government to investigate the service needs of adults and is keen to progress this initiative.

The Board will also focus on the outcomes of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into a national disability support and care scheme.

In completing my first Chairperson report, I want to thank all members of the Board for their contribution to the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders. Upon reflection, it has been a significant year for the Board. We have been successful in increasing revenue, generating new initiatives, providing strategic advice and building relationships to support the Autism Spectrum community. However, across Australia, our ongoing challenge is to ensure that the Board provides effective advice and advocacy to ensure that quality services continue to be developed to meet the sustained and growing demand.

Jon Martin
Chairperson