



**ACN 085 018 408**

**2011 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2010-11**

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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, the Board has worked with enthusiasm within the limited resources available to advance strategic directions that ensure effective advice is provided to the Australian Government on the issues affecting people with an ASD and their families.

The key priorities for the Board in 2010-11 have focused on broadening our influence, identifying and articulating the needs of the autism spectrum community and raising awareness. This has been achieved through various activities including the development of position papers and policy submissions, meetings with Ministers and relevant senior bureaucrats, making representations for funding to support the role of the Board and planning significant events such as Autism Month and the Asia Pacific Autism Conference.

The Board updated and released the National Call to Action as part of Autism Month April 2011, generating some media activity at a National level.

The Board and its member organisations participated in a National Autism Summit held on the eve of World Autism Awareness Day (2 April 2011). The Summit was attended by a range of key stakeholders from the autism community and there was unanimous approval from the delegates to work together with the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders to further enhance the national peak body with additional representation from interest groups in the autism community. This has culminated in the Board appointing two additional directors that will enhance connections with the research community and professional groups. Further discussions continue regarding the opportunities available for broader engagement with the autism community. The Board submitted a proposal to Senator Jan McLucas regarding project-based funding to support national activities of the Board and was still endeavouring to secure a meeting during the reporting period.

It has been a significant year for the disability sector and the autism community. The Productivity Commission released a report on the proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The Productivity Commission said that "The disability support 'system' is inequitable, underfunded, fragmented, inefficient and gives



people with a disability little choice. It provides no certainty that people will be able to access appropriate supports when needed.” There are still many unanswered questions for people with an ASD and their families about the proposed scheme. There are certainly some concerns. The submission prepared by the Australian Advisory Board is available on our website and a family factsheet was also developed and widely circulated. The Board will continue to provide considered advice to the Australian Government to ensure that everyone with an ASD can access essential support, therapy, equipment, early intervention and training. Traditionally, there has been an inadequate appreciation of the size and complexity of the autism spectrum community. ASD is more common than Cerebral Palsy, Cystic Fibrosis, Down syndrome, vision impairment and hearing loss combined. The prevalence is growing at a faster rate than any other disability. As such, it is critical that the proposed NDIS will ensure a recognition and appreciation of the unique characteristics of ASD within all stages and elements of design and development.

The Federal Budget was also announced in April 2011 with the Australian Government confirming the continuity of the Helping Children With Autism (HCWA) package and providing an additional \$29 million to meet increased demand for early intervention services in 2010-11 and 2011-12. The budget also incorporated a new initiative referred to as “Better Start”, essentially building on the success of the early intervention outcomes of HCWA for a broader range of diagnostic groups. Given the extensive experience of the Board in relation to this area, we were called upon to provide advice to the disability sector.

The Board continued to have nominated representation on the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Positive Partnerships national training program. The Board also co-ordinated advice from around Australia for the review of HCWA undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Throughout the reporting period, the Board also participated in the review of Disability Standards for Education 2005 undertaken by The Honourable Peter Garrett and the Mental Health Reform undertaken by The Honourable Mark Butler.

The Board worked throughout the year to finalise a position paper on the assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia. This was launched and released in July 2011. All Australians are entitled to early, affordable and comprehensive assessment and diagnosis. As early diagnosis provides the best opportunity for positive outcomes, ASDs should be diagnosed in early childhood. Everyone who works with children in regional and metropolitan Australia ought to be aware of the signs of ASD and regularly monitor children as they develop, working to national diagnostic guidelines. The full position paper is available on our website.



## Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Board committed in-kind contributions to the Autism Cooperative Research Centre and was acknowledged as a non-essential partner in the final proposal that was 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.

Finally, as co-hosts of the Asia Pacific Autism Conference, the Board operated under a Memorandum of Understanding to support the Autism Association of Western Australia in the planning of the conference to be held in Perth, September 2011. The Board also initiated the concept of a national awards program which will be launched at this conference. Progress has already been made by Autism SA for APAC 2013. Conference dates are 8-10 August 2013, the theme will be "True Colours - Be bold, Be Brave, Be Brilliant" and the event will be held at the Adelaide Convention Centre, South Australia.

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 the valued contribution of all Board members who bring a range of skills to their governance roles and responsibilities. I want to thank all members of the Board for their contribution to the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders. 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