

**Chair's Report AABA 6 October 2023.**

2023 finally saw the end of COVID as a pandemic which has challenged our communities, our nation and the world for the past three years. The AABA's Asia Pacific Conference (APAC), a casualty of COVID in 2021 and 2023, has now been announced to go ahead in November 2025 with Autism Western Australia (AWA) as host. The AABA looks forward to supporting our colleagues in AWA as planning continues in 2024.

As the national peak body for the not-for-profit sector serving the autistic and autism community, the AABA continued its advocacy to ensure that Autistic people and their families receive the evidence informed services they deserve, and our vision that they lead enriched and valued lives.

Just twelve months ago, the Hon Bill Shorten, Minister for the NDIS, announced a comprehensive review into scheme, the outcome of which is now pending. The AABA welcomed this much-needed review as we approached the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NDIS. We committed considerable time and effort to our response, and we thank Nicole Fox from Fox Consulting for her leadership in this. NDIS 2.0 is an opportunity to make some much-needed change, and put a stronger focus on early childhood supports, better access for regional and remote communities and more support for Autistic people with complex needs. The next iteration of the NDIS is of profound importance to the Autism community and therefore to the AABA. Over a third of NDIS participants are Autistic, and approximately two-thirds of participants aged 7-18 years are Autistic.

The AABA supports and works towards a National Autism Strategy (NAS) which has been in development in 2023. We thank our Director, Donna Blanchard for her contribution to the NAS as the AABA representative on the Autism and Mental Health working group.

We welcomed the Disability Royal Commission's (DRC) final report delivered on 1 Oct and will work through the 222 recommendations to ensure a more inclusive and just society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (DRC Oct 2023).

We saw changes to the makeup of the AABA Board, welcoming Prof Robyn Young and Dr Lauren Taylor and farewelling Joan McKenna -Kerr as she took up her appointment to the NDIS Board, facilitating Joan's subsequent resignation from the AABA. We also farewellled AMAZE as a member organisation. We continued to support the Australian Autism Alliance (AAA) throughout 2023 and would like to acknowledge and thank Jenny Karavolos for the extraordinary amount of work she does on behalf of the Autism and Autistic Communities.

I sincerely thank my fellow directors, particularly Jacqui Borland as Treasurer and Company Secretary, who also stepped in as Acting Chair on several occasions, and for leading our response to the NDIS review. Thank you also to the other Directors; Donna Blanchard, Prof Cheryl Dissanayake, Helen Graham, Dr Lauren Taylor and Dr Robyn Young, who continue to volunteer their time in working towards a better life for Autistic people and their families.



Pam Macrossan  
Chair AABA