



AUSTRALIAN Advisory
Board on
Autism

Chairperson's Report

2020-2021

1. Introduction

2021 has been another pivotal year for the disability sector, especially with the ongoing challenges brought about by COVID-19 and its impact. It has been an especially difficult year for people with Autism and their families across the country, with service disruption and supportive routines difficult to maintain.

Despite the many challenges, the Advisory Board on Autism (AABA) has worked throughout this time to advance the place of people with Autism in our community. In so doing, we have continued to prosecute the case to NDIS, and others, to ensure the support- needs of people with Autism are understood and addressed.

In relation to our financial position, it has been a year in keeping with our financial forecasting. However, as was reported last year, it is clear that if we wish to expand the work of the Australian Advisory Board, we will need to build on our financial position and put in place the sustainable architecture required of this important National Body.

2. A Unique Role

What makes the Australian Advisory Board on Autism unique is that it brings together in one voice, the perspective of people with Autism, families, service providers, advocates and research from every State and Territory in Australia. Its agenda is one of a commitment to the needs of people with Autism, to achieving an inclusive community and to ensuring the social and economic participation of individuals with Autism in everyday life.

3. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The National Disability Insurance Scheme turned eight years old this year. While it offers a promise of a better life to people with Autism, much work remains to be done to make this vision a reality. In this regard, we worked diligently this year with the NDIA Autism Advisory Group to bring the issues of the Autism Community to the fore, including the need for timely early intervention; access to diagnosis; community support; research; NDIA Planning; complex needs issues; and access to the Scheme. We also responded to a number of papers including Early Childhood and Independent Assessments - *Response to the Australian Government's Introduction of "Independent Assessments" to NDIA and NDIS Interventions for Children on the Autism Spectrum*. In addition, we also made submissions to the Senate (Senate Select Committee on Autism Inquiry).

During the last twelve months, the AABA fostered substantial collaboration between staff from different States and Territories. This included sharing information, liaison on key Autism issues and working collaboratively on joint submissions and papers.

In March 2021, Senator Linda Reynolds was named incoming federal Minister for the NDIS. After three months of extensive consultations, in which the AABA participated, it was agreed that the trialled format of independent assessments would not proceed. The AABA will maintain a watching brief on this issue.

4. COVID-19

It has been a difficult year for the sector with a great deal of disruption throughout the country. Our organisations across Australia, however, continued to respond with nimbleness to the challenges delivering support in new and different ways where possible. Our services adapted to physical distancing, mastering complex new protocols, and developing important communication strategies to support people with Autism and their families. We are hoping that the coming year will bring much needed relief to those most severely impacted by the current situation.

5. The Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC)

We had hoped to be able to settle on a date for APAC this year but unfortunately, we will not be able to establish a date until early 2022. It is extremely important that when we host this important international face-to-face Conference, we do so safely. We are all so much looking forward to recommencing planning for APAC. We are especially looking forward to seeing old friends in the field of Autism and making new ones. It will be such an exciting event when it does take place – reconnecting with colleagues from across the country and the world. There is no doubt that it will be a memorable event.

6. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with Disability

The Australian Advisory Board on Autism continues to vigorously support the work of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with Disability. We are committed to the ideals of the Commission to breaking down any remaining vestiges of control that limits the human rights, dignity and potential of people with Autism and, indeed, all people with disability.

7. The Australian Autism Alliance

We were very pleased to continue our work in supporting the Autism Alliance initiative this year. This included important administrative and other supports.

The AABA has been in discussion this year with the group that participates in the Alliance. These discussions were focused on the best way of maximising our efforts on behalf of people with Autism as we go forward.

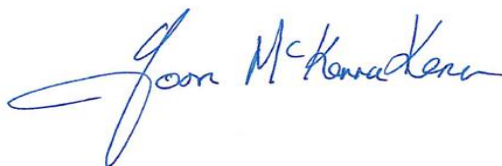
8. Conclusion

As outgoing Chair, I would like to extend my thanks to all Directors of the Australian Advisory Board for their continued diligent work this year on behalf of people with Autism and the Autism sector. In particular, I would like to acknowledge, with deep appreciation, the work of Professor Jacqui Roberts who will be retiring from the Board at the end of 2021 after many years of dedicated service to people with Autism. I would also like to acknowledge Fiona Sharkie who stepped down from the Board this year after a term of 8 years.

Enormous thanks also to Pam Macrossan, CEO of Autism Queensland, for her work as Honorary Treasurer and Company Secretary; and also, to the Deputy Chairperson Jenny Karavolos, CEO Autism South Australia, for her enormous contribution and work this year. I would also like to extend a very warm welcome to Jim Mullan and Donna Blanchard as new Directors of the Australian Advisory Board. I look forward to the valued contribution they will make as incoming Directors

It is especially important to note the commitment of time and resources of each Director to the work of the Australian Advisory Board. All of the work undertaken by Directors is additional to their demanding roles in their respective State based organisations and universities.

We look forward to the coming year and to continuing our work, with others, to advance the position of people with Autism in our community.



Joan McKenna Kerr
Chairperson
30th September 2021