



2015 Chairperson's Report

2015 was a year of significant change for personnel on the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders (AAB) after a decade of considerable stability.

Penny Beeston, the former Chairperson of the AAB resigned from her role as Chief Executive Officer of Autism Queensland after ten years of service to that organisation as well as her role as a director of the AAB. On behalf of the Board I want to thank Penny for her many contributions to this Board and wish her well for the future.

There were three new Board members including Fiona Sharkie the new CEO of Amaze, Barrie Elvish, the new CEO of Autism SA. and Rod Cameron, the new CEO of Autism Queensland and then in the latter part of the year Peter Brady resigned as the CEO of Autism Asperger ACT.

We used the opportunity with the change of personnel on the Board to refresh the charter and purpose of the AAB at this time of transformational change for the disability sector with the rollout of the NDIS fast approaching as well as do some planning for the future.

The major activity of the year was the **Asia Pacific Autism Conference 2015** held in Brisbane on 9 – 11 September 2015 and co-sponsored by Autism Queensland and the AAB. Congratulations to Autism Queensland for holding this successful meeting attended by 1300 participants from all over the world and around Australia. The conference theme of *Transforming Futures* brought together the voices of those with the lived experience, parents and carers, practitioners, researchers, administrators and policy makers to explore today's world for those on the spectrum. Also it was the first conference where the Autism Cooperative Research Centre played a significant role, demonstrating its early significant results including the importance those on the spectrum being part of every step in the research process.

The most important idea we agreed in 2015 was that we believed there was an extraordinary opportunity to bring together the many facets of the autism community so that there would be one strong voice for the whole community nationally.

The AAB has played and will continue to play an important role for peak organisations and major service providers but we also recognised that for a national voice to be effective with the Commonwealth Government it needed to be more inclusive of all stakeholders.

The idea, which had its genesis this year, was to explore the possibility of forming the **Australian Autism Alliance**. This would comprise national groups representing those with the lived experience of autism, national groups representing parents and carers of people on the spectrum, national research groupings, autism-



Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders

specific service providers operating in more than one state or territory and the directors of the AAB.

A preliminary breakfast was held in September this year where those able to attend were supportive of the idea. A stakeholder day conference will be held in February 2016 to see if agreement can be reached for this new inclusive network so that the many voices of the autism community can be brought together into this one strong voice.

Other tasks undertaken by the AAB were a review of the host agreement for the Asia Pacific Autism conference by the body partnering with the AAB and planning began to research the impact of the NDIS on people on the spectrum and their families.

My thanks to all members of the Board for their continuing support of the AAB and particularly my thanks to Fiona Sharkie, the CEO from Amaze who has been Deputy Chairperson and Terry Burke, CEO of Autism Tasmania who has carried the joint roles of Honorary Treasurer and Company Secretary. All the work undertaken by the directors is additional to their busy full time jobs so their commitment is appreciated.

Regards

Adrian Ford
Chairperson
26 November 2015