



2016 Chairperson's Report

Last year the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders (AAB-ASD) began exploring the idea of bringing together the many facets of the autism community so that there would be one strong voice for the whole community nationally.

The AAB-ASD recognised that it played an important role for peak organisations and major service providers but it also recognised that for a national voice to be effective with the Commonwealth Government and the new National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) which is implementing the National disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), there needed to be a more inclusive group of stakeholders.

The idea was to explore the possibility of forming a national 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-specific service providers operating in more than one state or territory and the organisations of the AAB-ASD.

A preliminary breakfast was held in Brisbane in September 2015 at the Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC 15) to test the idea. Those present were very supportive.

Four meetings of the alliance were held in 2016. All were in Melbourne. Two were facilitated by Tony Shaddock, Emeritus Professor of Education from Canberra University and two by Jon Martin, a former Chief Executive Officer of Autism SA and now an independent consultant.

Most significantly, the Australian Autism Alliance was agreed at its meeting on 19 April with the agreed purpose of *to improve the life chances of autistic people and to facilitate cooperation among autism organisations in the alliance*. The terms of the alliance were agreed at its July meeting and member organisations joined by signing a Memorandum of Understanding.

The AAB-ASD had underwritten the first two meetings with an investment of up to \$25,000. In June it was decided that the AAB-ASD should invest a further \$50,000 from its reserves to support the establishment of the alliance during its first year of operation: July 2016 – June 2017.

In summary the AAB-ASD has taken on the role of being the “backbone” organisation for the Australian Autism Alliance where it provides seed funding to support its establishment, manages the funds of the alliance but is not a member of the alliance. Member organisations of the AAB-ASD can automatically be members of the alliance.



Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders

The AAB-ASD wants to see this more representative and inclusive network form as the voice for the whole autism community. It is a most exciting development for the autism community nationally and the AAB-ASD is delighted to play this supportive role in its establishment.

In 2016 the AAB-ASD completed a comprehensive review of the hosting agreement for the Asia Pacific Autism Conference. The review decided that the AAB-ASD would become the convenor of the conference and not the co-sponsor of the conference along with its host. The hosting organisation, which took all the risk, would run all facets of the conference but with the responsibility of reporting back to the AAB-ASD on its preparation of the conference and prepare a conference in line with the template outlined in the hosting agreement. An AAB-ASD director would be a member of the organising committee of the hosting organisation. There would be an agreed hosting fee, half of which would be paid at the time of agreeing to hosting the conference and the other half 12 months out from the conference. The hosting fee for both APAC 17 and APAC 19 is AUD\$30,000.

Preparations are well in hand for APAC 17 in Sydney in September hosted by Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) with regular reports being presented to the Board. Terry Burke is the AAB-ASD director on the Organising Committee.

The other major decision taken by the AAB-ASD was to invite the Autism Resource Centre, Singapore, one of three contenders, to host APAC 19 – the first time it would be held offshore – but consistent with the original intent of the conference that it truly become an Asian Pacific Conference.

2016 also saw the winding up of one of its member organisations – Autism Asperger ACT – which was integrated into the Marymead Centre in Canberra.

My thanks to all members of the Board for their continuing support of the AAB-ASD and particularly my thanks to Joan McKenna Kerr, the CEO from the Autism Association of WA 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