Ministers welcome national guideline for autism assessment and diagnosis

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The Federal Government has announced a new national standard for diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), improving diagnostic consistency across Australia.

Minister for Families and Social Services, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, and Minister for Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP, today welcomed the release of the national guideline, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency.

About 164,000 Australians, including 136,000 children and young people under the age of 25, have ASD. That represents a 79 percent increase from 2009.

Mr Fletcher said ASD is a complex condition with increasing prevalence in Australia.

“This guideline brings greater clarity to the way Autism is diagnosed – that’s good news for the families of people undergoing assessment,” Mr Fletcher said.

“The new guideline will drive better diagnostic standards so people receive optimum and comprehensive assessment that directs them to the right supports.

“The guideline includes a step-by-step, best-practice process for health professionals conducting an autism assessment and is supported by case studies and templates.”

Minister Hunt said the guideline was developed by the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) in consultation with more than 1000 autistic adults, family members, clinicians and policy makers.

“The guideline recommendations are approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), demonstrating they are based on best available scientific practice and developed to rigorous standards.

“I congratulate the guideline research Executive Committee chaired by Prof Andrew Whitehouse and coordinated by Dr Kiah Evans, the Steering Committee and all the research staff for their comprehensive, rigorous and inclusive approach to the development and production of this timely work.

“This is an excellent, well evidenced-based and comprehensive guideline for assessment and diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders in Australia.”Professor Andrew Whitehouse, Chief Research Officer, Autism CRC said the community has been requesting a national and consistent approach to autism diagnosis for many years.

“We are pleased to officially release this guideline that responds to this need following a comprehensive research process and in close consultation with the clinical, autistic and broader autism communities," Professor Whitehouse said.

In a separate project, Autism CRC, through funding provided by the NDIA, will now undertake a trial of a functional assessment tool for autism - the recently published Pediatric Evaluation of Disability Inventory - Computer Adaptive Test for autism spectrum disorder (PEDI-CAT ASD).

Minister Fletcher said today's announcement reinforces the Australian Government's commitment to support a fact-based collaborative approach to autism and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

"Along with the recent establishment of the Autism Advisory Group (AAG), this announcement shows our commitment to working with people with autism, their families and carers, key stakeholders and experts," Mr Fletcher said.

The Government will be working closely with stakeholders over the coming months to determine how the guidelines can be best implemented across the areas of health, social services and education.

Any person with autism who is eligible for the NDIS will continue to receive the reasonable and necessary supports they are assessed as needing.

To obtain a copy of the national guideline please go to www.autismcrc.com.au/national-guideline (external)

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