

2023-24

Annual Report



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About **Autism CRC**



Autism CRC

Autism CRC is the independent national source of evidence for best practice in relation to autism across the lifespan and the spectrum.

We provide the national capacity to develop and deliver evidence-based outcomes through our unique collaboration with autistic people, families, professionals, services providers, researchers, and government. Together, we are addressing agreed needs and co-producing outputs with these stakeholders for the benefit of the community.

Autism CRC was established in 2013 as the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program. We receive funding from a number of sources, including the Australian Government. Autism CRC is no longer part of, or associated with, the CRC Program.



Our vision

Autistic people with quality of life and opportunity



Our mission

Initiate, co-produce and translate collaborative research and best practice guidance that delivers positive change for all autistic people

Our values

In undertaking our mission, Autism CRC is guided by these values:



Inclusion

Valuing lived experience



Innovation

Solutions for long-term challenges



Evidence

Truth in practice



Independence

Integrity through autonomy



Cooperation

Capturing opportunities together

Statement of purpose

Together, discover and achieve more

The need for a national independent source of evidence for best practice and policy has never been greater, given the evolving autism-related practice and policy landscape resulting from a range of reforms and initiatives.

These include the development of the National Autism Strategy and other state-based strategies, the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) review, as well as the results of recent Autism CRC research undertaken in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our strategic priorities

- To support the growth and sustainability of Autism CRC as an **independent, national source of evidence for best practice** relating to autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions across the lifespan.

Our strategic imperatives

- Since 2013, Autism CRC's has facilitated \$134.4 million in autism research and its translation.



Collaborative framework

- ▶ Engage multiple stakeholders and provide a focal point for community collaboration
- ▶ Develop and maintain multiple sources of funding



Assets

- ▶ Build and maintain national and international platforms and practice communities



Impact

- ▶ Be directed by end-user defined needs and demand-driven translation
- ▶ Deliver on program objectives in an effective and timely fashion
- ▶ Grow autistic leadership and promote neurodiversity policy and practice
- ▶ Focus on evidence and impact
- ▶ Maintain independence and the right to communicate “good” and “not-so-good” news



Our members

Autism CRC is committed to a national collaborative model, working with all stakeholders. Collaboration between research and end-user Members and Affiliates is an essential element of our work.



We also welcome the continued support of the Queensland Department of Education as project partner.

Our affiliates

- ▶ Amaze
- ▶ Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia New Zealand
- ▶ Autism Spectrum Australia
- ▶ Asperger's Victoria
- ▶ Australian Psychological Society
- ▶ Autism Queensland
- ▶ Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service
- ▶ Complex Connections
- ▶ Macquarie University
- ▶ Reframing Autism
- ▶ Siblings Australia
- ▶ Spectrum Space
- ▶ Sunny Spectrum Supports
- ▶ State-wide Autistic Services
- ▶ Untapped Holdings
- ▶ University of Southern Queensland
- ▶ Wenn Lawson

Established assets and a strong framework for impactful delivery

Autism CRC has established an effective framework for coordinated, collaborative research and research translation with partners across Australia and beyond.

Our successful collaborative stakeholder model has led to the development of a range of practice platforms and resources, as well as valuable research assets. We look forward to continuing to deliver better outcomes for autistic people and those with other neurodevelopmental conditions, their families, and the individuals and organisations who work to support them.



230,000+

Professionals

involved in research programs or using our outputs

(↑ 32%)



137,660+

Unique visitors

to national practice and resource platforms relating to education and employment

(↑ 26%)



466+

Published resources

in Knowledge Centre

(↑ 11%)



276,950+

Downloads

of publications, reports and other resources

(↑ 30%)



20,400+

Followers

across our online channels including Facebook, X, LinkedIn, YouTube

(↑ 10%)



32,290+

Subscribers

to our eNews

(↑ 15%)

Report from the Chair and CEO

∴ Inform, perform and reform on a foundation of evidence and stakeholder co-design.

We trust that you will enjoy reading of the many activities, contributions and successes of Autism CRC and its unique national collaboration in this Annual Report for 2023-24.

Once again, we are most grateful for the valuable contributions of many individuals and organisations to our national collaboration over the past twelve months – a collaboration that has delivered the outputs and positive impacts described in this report.

These outcomes are only achievable through the commitment of those individuals and organisations across our stakeholder communities – autistic people, families and carers, researchers, practitioners, service providers and government – working together as peers to deliver evidence in practice and in policy. This is the essence of Autism CRC's being the independent national source of evidence for best practice in relation to autism across the lifespan and the spectrum.

We are also very grateful to those who have provided the financial resources to perform our work. In particular, we thank the Commonwealth Government for additional funding of \$5.8M awarded through a series of agreements over the course of the year.

With the support of our collaborative network and funding partners, in 2023-24 Autism CRC undertook a range of new work addressing current priority needs in practice and policy development. These demonstrate our commitment to co-design and delivery with stakeholders, founded on evidence from quality research combined with the wisdom from practice and community. The following are examples of such activities.

- ▶ **The development of the first *National framework for assessing, differentiating, and reporting children's functional strengths and support needs*.** Twenty-three community representative organisations and professional associations and societies across health, disability and education, together with Australian Government representatives, met fortnightly with the project team throughout the development process. The group took account of inputs from individuals and organisations through a six-week community survey and a review of international research and practice evidence. The final Framework, which will inform professional practice and decision-making across all states and territories, service and support systems, is to be completed by the end of 2024.
- ▶ **Assisting the Australian Department of Social Services with inputs to the *National Autism Strategy*.** For each of the service domains relevant to a national strategy, Autism CRC undertook an umbrella review of current research, a review of relevant national, state and territory policies, and a "1,000 insights" community survey, synthesising the results, mapping the landscape and associated gap analysis of evidence in practice and policy. The National Autism Strategy is due to be released by the end of 2024.

- ▶ **Assisting the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care with inputs to the *National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People*.** Autism CRC with its national partner network undertook research – analysing data on healthcare experiences and needs for many thousands of autistic people, families, carers and professionals – alongside a series of co-design and community engagement activities to define needs, experiences and ideas for change from these diverse stakeholder perspectives. The results from this work have been a key input to the development of the Roadmap, which is to be finalised by the end of 2024.
- ▶ **Getting autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand.** Working with our local partners, over 1,000 autistic individuals, family members and practitioners contributed to a better understanding of the nature of existing supports, the barriers to support, and suggestions for change across service and support systems in Aotearoa New Zealand. The result of this work is informing advocacy and systemic change.

In 2023-24, we also continued to enhance and disseminate our existing national evidence-based practice platforms and related capacity-building resources, further embedding these in practice. For example:

- ▶ Australia's first *National Guideline for assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia* was updated with the release of the second edition, renewed for the latest evidence and best practice guidance.
- ▶ A range of community and professional capacity-building resources relating to the *National Guideline for the learning, participation, and wellbeing of autistic children and their families in Australia* were released, including resources for pre-service education and training and professional development now being delivered by universities and professional societies.
- ▶ The *inclusionED* inclusive education practice platform was enhanced with a series of eLearning modules for use in teacher training and professional development. These training and practice resources are now being used in a South Australian pilot within pre-service training programs as an initiative of the State Government with the state's universities and training institutes. They are also being made available more broadly to current teachers through the South Australian Department for Education.

Through the Sylvia Rodger Academy, we continue to promote and support autistic capacity building. In 2023-24, the Academy successfully delivered a new program on autistic identity and community connection, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services – adding that program to its stable of advocacy and leadership, governance and research co-production programs – along with supporting the Self-Advocacy@Work resource launched during the year.

You will learn of more activities as you read through the report.

In all, hundreds of thousands of individuals have engaged with Autism CRC's evidence-based practice platforms, information and capacity-building resources. These are not only assets for those seeking to navigate challenges and services or support others on that journey, but they also provide substantial foundations for actions arising from the *National Autism Strategy*, the *National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People* and other autism strategies and initiatives being pursued by all levels of government and their agencies.

More broadly, the past year has seen a raft of policy and program reviews and major initiatives that, together with the autism-specific initiatives above, define a substantial agenda of inter-related reforms that will significantly impact upon the lives of autistic people, their families and carers, and those who work to support them. These include the Disability Royal Commission, which delivered its report and recommendations in September 2023; the independent NDIS Review panel delivered its recommendations in December 2023; a National Early Years Strategy released by the Australian Government in May 2024; a draft report by the Productivity Commission on the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector released in November 2023; the report by the Independent Expert Panel Review on the next intergovernmental schools agreement released in December 2023; and a series of state and territory reviews of service sectors, particularly ECEC and education.

All of these reviews and reforms contain propositions that will impact upon autistic people and those for who there are developmental concerns or delay, their families and carers, and those who work to support them.

For our community of stakeholders, 2023-24 was therefore a year of major considerations, concern, change and promise.

The challenge for all is to ensure that the objectives of these reforms are delivered, effectively and sustainably. It is critical that initiatives and actions are founded in evidence and designed and delivered together with the stakeholder community, now and over the next five to ten years of the reform agenda.

Autism CRC commits to continuing to work with all stakeholders in meeting this challenge – engaging and building its collaborative network and delivering the evidence-base for practice and policy for that purpose.

Once again and on behalf of the Autism CRC Board and team, we express our sincere gratitude to all who have contributed to our collaboration, our work and our successes over the past year – our Members, Affiliates and other project partners, government, and the many autistic individuals, family members and people working with them who have engaged with us this year. We look forward to continuing our collaborative work and seeing autistic people with quality of life and opportunity in the years to come.



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Robert van Barneveld
Chair



Andrew Davis
Chief Executive Officer

Our work

A range of policy and program reforms and initiatives are currently underway that will have significant implications across health, education and employment sectors.

This year our new and ongoing projects focussed on:

- ▶ analysing the current international research evidence for best-practice supports, along with the gaps both in the research evidence base and in the translation of evidence to policy and practice
- ▶ expanding and maintaining our range of evidence-based practice guidance and related capacity-building resources relating to assessment and diagnosis, early childhood supports, inclusive education and employment, health and wellbeing
- ▶ supporting the Australian Government's development of the National Autism Strategy and the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People and other related government initiatives by providing research evidence and co-design capacity through our collaborative national network.



Impactful
national
outcomes



Proven stakeholder
collaboration
business model



Established
research and
practice assets



Critical mass necessary
to address major
challenges



Established vehicle
and governance
arrangements

Projects



Assessing, differentiating, and reporting children's functional strengths and support needs

This project will develop an evidence-based framework to address the current gap in knowledge and lack of consensus about how best to assess, differentiate, and report children's functional strengths and support needs. The findings will inform professional practice, operational guidance, and decision making.

Project partners: Griffith University, Telethon Kids Institute, Victoria University of Wellington



Co-design consultation services for the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People (*the Roadmap*)

In 2023, the Australian Government began development of a National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People. In support of this, Autism CRC conducted a process of co-design, research, and community engagement with its national partner network from November 2023 to February 2024.

Project partners: Griffith University, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), National Ethnic Disability Alliance, Amaze, Autism Tasmania, First Peoples Disability Network, Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand (ASAN AUNZ), Spectrum Space, NT Lived Experience Network, The Autistic Realm Australia (TARA), SA Rainbow Advocacy Alliance, Yellow Ladybugs, Wenn Lawson



National Autism Strategy (*NAS or the Strategy*)

The Australian Government has committed to the co-design and development of a National Autism Strategy. Autism CRC was commissioned by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to undertake foundational work to support the co-design and development of the Strategy.

Project partners: Curtin University, Griffith University



Implementation: National Guideline for supporting the learning, participation, and wellbeing of autistic children in Australia (*Supporting Autistic Children Guideline*)

This project developed a range of implementation resources and professional learning courses for practitioners delivering supports in community and clinical settings consistent with the Guideline.

Project partners: Griffith University, Telethon Kids Institute, Autism New Zealand, The University of Queensland, Victoria University of Wellington



Update: National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia (*Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Guideline*)

First published in 2018, Autism CRC revised the Guideline to ensure it remains relevant and useful.

Project partners: Griffith University, Telethon Kids Institute, Autism New Zealand, The University of Queensland, Victoria University of Wellington



Implementation update: National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia

This project ensures continuity and continued dissemination of resources, with updates to existing capacity building resources that reflect the update of the Guideline.

Project partners: Telethon Kids Institute, Griffith University, Reframing Autism, Mater Research



inclusionED

This ongoing project included an in-depth review of the existing inclusionED platform to align with national teaching standards and frameworks while enhancing and expanding the offering. The inclusionED team is also working with the education sector to build teacher capacity through school outreach and professional development to support whole-of-school communities.

Project partners: Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, Social Science Translated



Removing educational barriers in Australian schools (REBAS)

This project identified gaps in educational practice, policy and research which have informed recommendations to progress our education system and improve the application of nationally inclusive practices.

Project partners: Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, Amaze, Autism Queensland, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), Reframing Autism, Siblings Australia



myWAY Employability

Ongoing development and evaluation focusing on a major update to enhance the personalised career planning platform. New features include smart goal creation for different career stages, and the creation of an enterprise version for service providers.

Project partners: Curtin University, MatchWorks, YouthWorX NT, Sunny Spectrum Supports



South Australian inclusive education initiative

Autism CRC is working with the South Australian Government and universities, in collaboration with Positive Partnerships, to deliver greater learning in inclusive education practices to pre-service and in-service teachers in South Australia.

Project partners: South Australian Government, Positive Partnerships, Adelaide University, Flinders University, Tabor College, University of South Australia



Strong and Resilient Communities – Autistic Identity and Connection Program

The Autistic Identity and Connection Program is empowering autistic people to develop a sense of autistic identity, connect with other autistic people and community, and upskill in self-advocacy and wellbeing.

Project partners: Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)



Self-Advocacy@Work

The Self-Advocacy@Work project co-designed and developed employment self-advocacy resources by, and for, the autistic community. The project was delivered through the Sylvia Rodger Academy's Self-Advocacy@Work Program which upskills members of the autistic community in co-design, product development and inclusive practices.

Project partners: Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand (ASAN AUNZ)



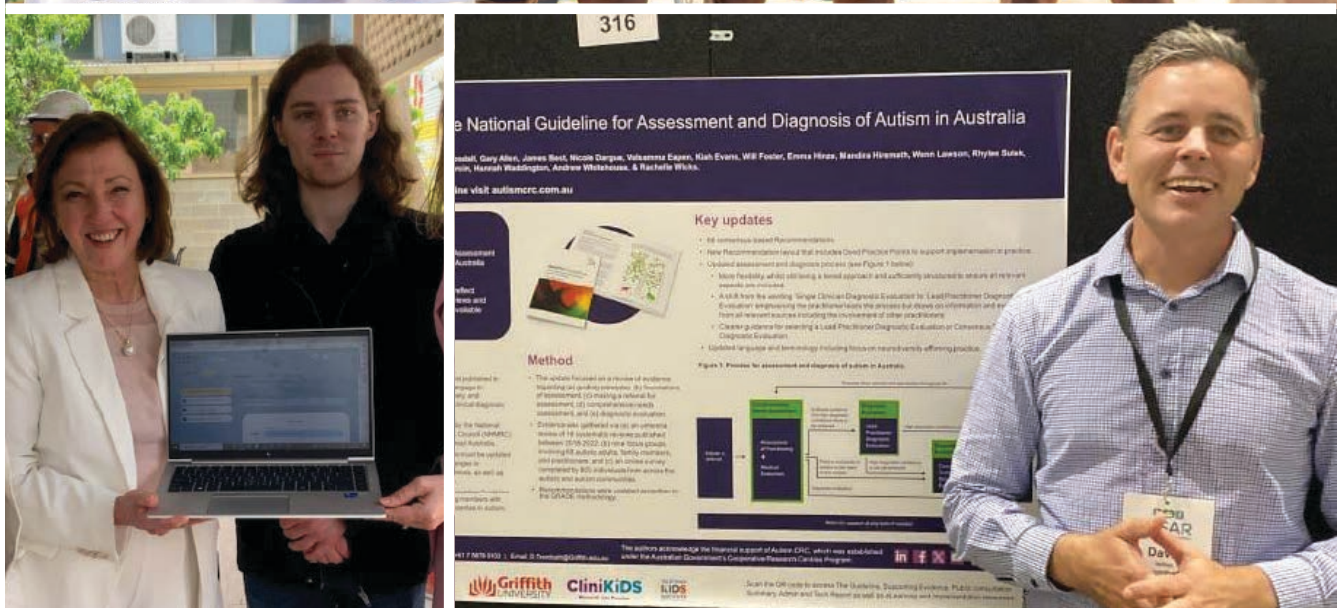
Investigating autism research priorities

This project will advance the research priorities of the AARC, which operates under the auspices of Autism CRC. The AARC was established to review and define national priorities for autism research and identify areas of research needed for the autistic and autism communities.

Project partners: Curtin University, Griffith University

Highlights and achievements





Highlights and achievements

Supporting national policy and practice development

New Commonwealth Government funding announced

In September, the Australian Government announced funding for Autism CRC from two streams within the Commonwealth Government's Department of Social Services:

- ▶ \$1.35M to extend our activities under the National Autism Strategy and National Best-Practice Resources Grant.
- ▶ \$2.65M to continue activities under the ILC Grant Program, to support the development and dissemination of new and updated evidence-based resources for mainstream services capacity-building in health, education and employment.

The funding was announced in a joint statement by The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services, and The Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

"For the past 10 years, Autism CRC has helped inform national practice and the policy landscape, and built the capacity of individuals, service providers, and community settings in the process," said Minister Shorten.

Building on previous work, this funding allowed Autism CRC to work together with all stakeholders in the next stage of the National Autism Strategy development. This included two key activities:

- ▶ comprehensive review and mapping of the research evidence and policy landscape across key service areas
- ▶ development of a co-design process to provide a set of recommendations for inclusive community engagement and consultation in the development of the Strategy.

The research evidence and policy landscape mapping project aimed to provide a review and synthesis of community views.

The funding also facilitates our ongoing work with related activities through to the end of 2024, allowing us to continue to provide our national evidence-based best practice platforms and capacity-building resources relating to assessment and diagnosis, early childhood supports, inclusive education, employment, and health and wellbeing.

We thank the Commonwealth Government, in particular Minister Rishworth and Minister Shorten, for their ongoing support of Autism CRC.

The road to improving health and mental health

The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care began development of a National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People (the Roadmap) in 2023. The Roadmap is a plan to address the health inequalities and issues that autistic people experience in the health care system.

The development of the Roadmap is being informed by a collaborative research, co-design and community engagement process involving the perspectives of almost 5,000 stakeholders.

Autism CRC was engaged by the Department to support foundational co-design work. In partnership with Griffith University, we led a series of research, co-design, and community engagement activities in November 2023. The purpose of this work was to understand the needs, experiences and ideas for change from the diverse perspectives of autistic people, their families and carers, as well as professionals in health, mental health, allied health and disability fields. This engagement was facilitated through a national collaborative network of professional and community representative organisations with deep connections and trusted relationships with their respective communities.



Stakeholders at the National Health and Mental Health Community Co-design Summit

These activities have included:

- ▶ Analysing several existing national data sets on health care experiences, needs and priorities, containing information from almost 5,000 autistic people, families, carers and professionals.
- ▶ Targeted focus groups and interviews with more than 100 people, including autistic people, parents and carers and professionals with experience working with autistic people from diverse backgrounds, abilities and life experiences.
- ▶ “Reimagining health care services co-design journey mapping workshops” with more than 40 stakeholders, including autistic people, parents and carers and professionals in health, mental health, allied health, and disability fields.
- ▶ National Health and Mental Health Community Co-design Summit (the Summit).

The Summit took place in February, with more than 50 people meeting in Brisbane, with a further 25 people who participated online. Facilitated by Autism CRC, the Summit brought together health and mental health professionals, disability and autism organisations, and autistic individuals, to discuss the finding from the research and community engagement activities.

A final report of Autism CRC’s co-design and community engagement work, including the outcomes of the Summit, was delivered to the Department of Health and Aged Care at the end of February 2024, as an input to the considerations of the Department and its Roadmap Working Group.

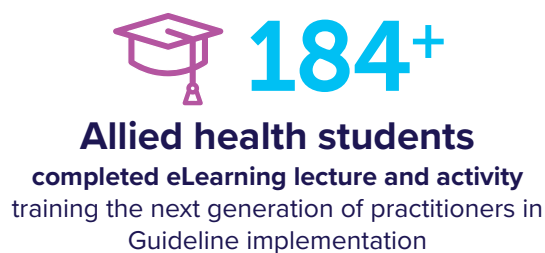
The Roadmap is expected to be completed in December 2024.



Master of Ceremonies, General Practitioner and Senior Medical Advisor for the Department of Health and Aged Care, Professor Nick Lennox at the National Health and Mental Health Community Co-design Summit

National Guidelines and best practice health and wellbeing

Autism CRC continues to develop practice and protocols for consistent national outcomes while establishing pathways to improve health service delivery and wellbeing across the lifespan.



Second edition for an Australian first

This year we finalised the update of the **National Guideline for assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia**, officially launching the second edition in April 2024 alongside other national practice guideline resources (see story on next page).

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) best practice requires guidelines to be updated every five years to ensure they remain relevant, safe and effective. Development of the second edition first began in 2022 with a review of recent research evidence and community

consultation which involved feedback from over 300 individuals along with 19 organisations.

The second edition of the Guideline builds on the evidence from the 2018 edition and includes 66 Recommendations, all of which were approved by the NHMRC. While most recommendations remain similar, the updated edition expands on information for good practice and is easier to read. It is also available in web-based format providing greater accessibility and additional features for users.

To support the update, a range of resources have been developed, with more coming online later in 2024. Uptake of the new Guideline and supporting resources has been strong in the first three months since its release.

5,450+

Downloads of the updated Guideline

12,000+

Unique visitors interacting with the web-based format of the Guideline

6,300+

Downloads of posters and infographics for practitioners and the community

1,330+

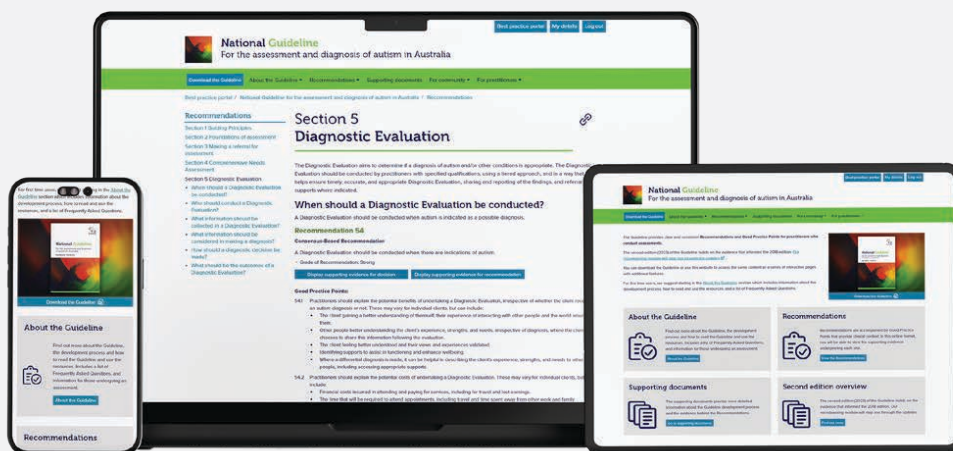
Views of microlearning module to step you through the updates

575+

Downloads of the Guiding Principles Easy Read

470+

Downloads of supporting documents such as Supporting Evidence, Admin and Tech Report, Public Consultation Summary



autismcrc.com.au/assessment-and-diagnosis

Minister launches national practice guideline resources

Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP, announced the launch of new implementation resources at an event held at Daphne St Childcare and Specialist Early Learning Centre in Adelaide.

These resources support the implementation of the **National Guideline for the learning, participation, and wellbeing of autistic children and their families in Australia**, launched in February 2023. The new implementation resources include an eLearning short course on Guideline-based practice, resources for use in pre-service education and training of professionals, and materials to help guide individuals and families in planning and managing their journey.

The Guideline defines evidence-based practices for supporting autistic children and their families that promote a child's development, participation in childhood activities and wellbeing. These resources will help practitioners, service providers, educators, peak bodies, government bodies and families gain better understanding of how to best meet autistic children's support needs in ways that are safe, effective, and desirable to children and their families.



When I go around and speak with people in mainstream services, whether that's in education, whether that's in health, what they are really yearning for and wanting is those practical resources to help them best support autistic children – and that is what these resources do. They really take what are very well-developed guidelines and bring them to life. That is such an important part of how we make sure that we get inclusion right across all of our services.

Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services

The event was also attended by SA Assistant Minister for Autism, Emily Bourke MLC, along with key stakeholder representatives from Speech Pathology Australia, Occupational Therapy Australia, Clinikids Telethon Kids Institute, universities, services providers, families and other community members.

The event also marked the official launch of the second edition of the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Guideline.



Professor David Trembath, Andrew Davis, Minister Rishworth, Dr Toby and A/Minister Bourke at the launch



The launch event was held at Daphne St Childcare and Specialist Early Learning Centre in Adelaide

Resources library

A range of resources, including posters, information booklets, videos and factsheets for practitioners and community members can be downloaded or accessed free of charge from our website.

Other valuable learning and support resources are available through our eLearning courses.

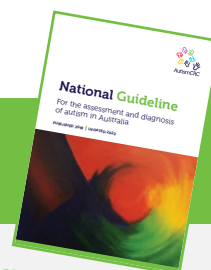


Building capacity through flexible training opportunities

Strong partnerships with universities and professional organisations are allowing us to deliver accredited learning opportunities directly to practitioners, service providers, educators, peak bodies, government bodies and families to improve diagnostic practices and overall care for autistic people across the lifespan.

Microcredentials: Assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia

Developed in partnership with The University of Western Australia



Courses offered:

Seven credit-bearing microcredentials designed to support a range of professionals who work with autistic people or contribute to autism diagnostic assessments in line with the Guideline.

Course topics include:

- ▶ Contemporary diagnostic frameworks
- ▶ Principles of best practice assessment and diagnosis
- ▶ Diagnostic features and assessment approaches (early childhood, children, adolescents and adults)
- ▶ Initiating a referral for autism diagnostic assessment
- ▶ Differential diagnosis.

Impact:

- ▶ **225+** completions across the suite.

I did learn a lot using the case studies especially, given I could relate them to clinical practice.

Course participant

Consolidated up to date knowledge on autism assessment. Was neuro-affirming and respectful towards the ND [neurodivergent] community.

Course participant



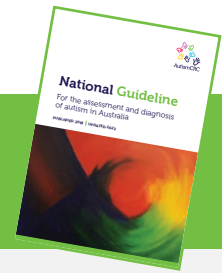
Find out more

Go to our eLearning page autismcrc.com.au/elearning for the full list of professional learning resources.



Short course: Assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia

Delivered by: Speech Pathology Australia, Occupational Therapy Australia, CliniKids Telethon Kids Institute

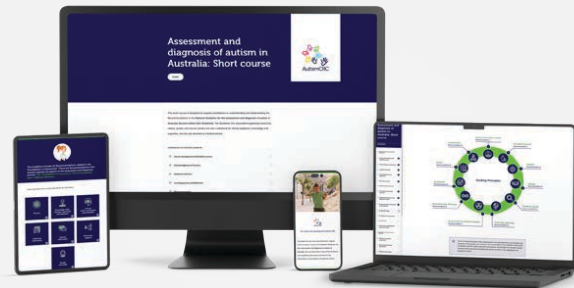


Purpose:

Designed for practitioners interested in adopting a best-practice, evidence-based approach aligned with the Guideline.

Essential learning:

- ▶ Introducing the National Guideline
- ▶ Foundations of practice
- ▶ Assessment and diagnosis process
- ▶ Guideline in Practice.



Impact:

- ▶ **260+** enrolments
- ▶ **Satisfaction:** 96% of clinicians found the course 'very useful' or 'extremely useful' for their practice.

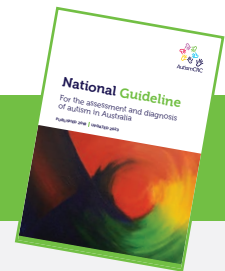
Course updated in June 2024 to reflect second edition of the Guideline. Available in July 2024.



I thought the course was really good and made understanding the guidelines easier.

Course participant

eLearning lecture and activity: Assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia



Course overview:

Tailored eLearning lecture and activity aligned with the Guideline.

Highlights:

- ▶ Lecture activity provides opportunities for engagement and collaboration across allied health courses giving students the opportunity to experience a consensus team setting
- ▶ Blended delivery approach – Self-paced online, lecturer-led, workshop style.

University partnerships:

- ▶ University of South Australia
- ▶ University of Tasmania
- ▶ Curtin University.

Impact:

- ▶ **184+** allied health and psychology students have completed the eLearning.

Course update to reflect second edition of the Guideline due for release in October 2024.

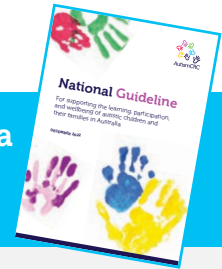


Students' feedback on the eLecture and activity was very positive. They found it highly practical and commented that the content and activities made their prior learning on autism come to life. They left class with a good sense of how assessment and diagnosis of autism looks in clinic and were enthusiastic about working in this area.

Emily Jackson, Lecturer, Curtin School of Allied Health

Short course: Supporting autistic children and their families in Australia

Delivered by: Speech Pathology Australia, Occupational Therapy Australia, CliniKids Telethon Kids Institute, Autism CRC



Course overview:

Self-directed course for key clinical professionals, families and carers exploring Recommendations from the Guideline.

Essential learning:

- ▶ Guiding principles
- ▶ Goal setting
- ▶ Selecting and planning supports
- ▶ Delivering supports
- ▶ Outcomes, quality and safeguarding
- ▶ Guideline in Practice.

Impact:

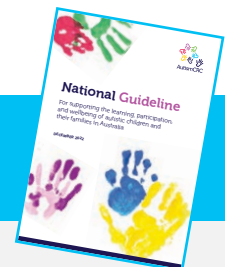
- ▶ 150+ enrolments.



Thank you. Excellent course and very relevant to me as an Occupational Therapist working in schools.

Course participant

eLearning lecture and activity: Supporting autistic children and their families in Australia



New for 2024:

Tailored eLearning lecture and activities aligned with the Guideline.

Highlights:

- ▶ 2-3hr lecture and activity which delivers an overview of the foundations of the Guideline with a focus on a First Nations case study as a core element of the Guideline in Practice module
- ▶ Content linked back to the Recommendations and relevant Good Practice Points within the Guideline, as well as valuable community insights
- ▶ Facilitator guide, session plans, PowerPoint slides, and other essential resources.

New framework places people at the heart of decision making

This year we commenced work to develop an evidence-based framework for assessing, differentiating, and reporting children's functional strengths and support needs.

"The framework will place people at the heart of decision making – the children and families – and what is unique about their functional strengths and support needs," said Professor David Trembath from Griffith University, who has co-led the project with neurodivergent speech pathologist, Amy Fitzpatrick.

Children can experience challenges to their learning, participation, and wellbeing for a range of reasons, including developmental differences and delay. Environmental factors such as inaccessible settings can also play a part. When challenges exist, children may benefit from informal and formal supports that are tailored to their individual strengths and support needs, irrespective of whether they have a diagnosed condition.

The framework is being co-produced with the stakeholder community representing 23 community and professional organisations, associations, and societies across the health, disability and education sectors. Indigenous Allied Health Australia is also partnered for the development. Representatives also include those with lived experience of disability directly as individuals and/or as parents or family members.

The project also involves representatives from the Australian Government, including the Department of Social Services,

Department of Health and Aged Care, the Department of Education, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Framework will address the current gap in understanding and lack of consensus about how best to assess, differentiate, and report children's functional strengths and support needs. The findings will inform professional practice, operational guidance, and decision making, across all states and territories, service and support settings.

"As a community we need to better focus on understanding each child and family for who they are as individuals, including their unique strengths and support needs. Diagnoses have their place, but of themselves they tell us next to nothing about an individual's strengths, and very little about any particular support needs they may have," said Ms Fitzpatrick.

The project has broadly followed the same methodology used to develop the two NHMRC-approved Autism CRC National Guidelines.

This iterative process of evidence gathering, evidence synthesis, and consensus building involves community, professional, and government stakeholders.

A six-week community consultation process in February and March sought the views and experiences of all members of the community, including children and young people, to add to the research evidence. The process gathered the views of 415 people through a 'Community member views' survey, and input from 55 organisations through an 'Organisation views survey'.

The Framework is due for completion at the end of 2024.



Getting autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand

Autism CRC research, conducted by Autism New Zealand and Victoria University of Wellington, highlighted the urgent need to address the many gaps, inconsistencies and barriers to autism supports and services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The study worked with 1,042 participants, including autistic individuals, family members and professionals, with the goal of understanding the nature of existing supports, and providing suggestions for future supports and implementation.

The report identified significant barriers to support across almost all areas of life. In particular, access to diagnosis and supports for adults was rated as extremely poor, with no public pathway to diagnosis for autistic adults in Aotearoa New Zealand. Even with a diagnosis, autistic adults indicated a complete absence of appropriate mental health support and accessible housing, leading at times to catastrophic outcomes.

The pathway to service provision is unclear even to professionals, so how can we expect parents to navigate such a tangled path?

Professional, participant survey

Further, both family/whānau and professionals noted a lack of training and access to diagnosis for children. If a diagnosis is secured, there are few options for early support – which international research demonstrates is the most effective way to allow autistic children to achieve their full potential.



Autism NZ Chief Executive Dane Dougan said, “These results affirm what we have known anecdotally for years: that the supports in place in New Zealand do not serve the community, and in many cases actively work against autistic people and their whānau.”

Autism CRC and Autism NZ hope to see this research lead to more effective outcomes for the autistic community and is advocating for systemic change and strategic planning for the community going forward.

This work was undertaken as part of a larger Autism CRC project to ensure National Guidelines are updated and deliver on the impact they promise, across both Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Autism HealthPathways

The Autism HealthPathways offer a valuable resource for sharing high-quality information about autism with healthcare professionals, including general practitioners. Nine pathways were first launched in the Mackay Health Network in 2019. Since then, the project continues to expand, and the pathways have now adopted across 19 Primary Health Networks in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

This expansion has translated to a rapid uptake in use. Health professionals accessed the resources on more than 5,000 occasions in the last year alone, an increase of 144% on the previous year.

Important to the project’s success is the adaptation and continuous improvement of each HealthPathway so that they remain relevant and up-to-date. This ensures they meet the needs of individual service regions, but also reflect latest best-practice.



Education, transitions and employment

Autism CRC has been working to understand the barriers to inclusive education and employment to improve opportunities and outcomes to autistic Australians since our first projects began. This year we've improved and expanded existing tools such as myWAY Employability and inclusionED, developed capacity building resources for the education and employment sectors, and launched the co-designed and co-developed Self-Advocacy@Work website.



8,560+

Educators

joined the inclusionED
community of practice



5,850+

Registered users

myWAY Employability career planning
platform for young autistic people



2,585+

Downloads

Integrated Employment Success Tool (Aust & NZ)
practical workplace manual for employers to improve
workplace success of autistic people



595+

Copies sold

Adolescent/Adult Goal Setting Tool (AAGST)
facilitating transition planning and goal setting

New inclusive education initiative with South Australia

Autism CRC is working with the South Australian Government and universities, along with the Positive Partnerships team, to deliver greater learning in inclusive education practices to pre-service teachers in South Australia. The aim is to assist pre-service and current educators to respond to and support diverse learners, including autistic students, in mainstream classrooms.

The Australian-first initiative is being funded by the South Australian Government. It was launched in October 2023 by the Premier, the Hon. Peter Malinauskas MP, SA Minister for Education, Training and Skills, the Hon. Blair Boyer MP and Assistant Minister for Autism and Assistant Minister to the Premier, the Hon. Emily Bourke MLC.

"Providing aspiring teachers these skills will improve the level of support and understanding in classrooms across the public and non-government school sectors", said Mr Malinauskas.

This project includes licensing of inclusionED (inclusionED.edu.au) to the three institutions and the South Australian Department for Education, along with trial and evaluation of inclusionED eLearning package. Six eLearning modules to be trialled in three South Australia institutions, over the next 18 months. An early childhood

version of the eLearning package will also be trialled by the University of South Australia.

The modules align with national frameworks of Initial Teacher Education and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Graduate teacher professional standards. They build upon and make use of the resources of Autism CRC's national inclusive education practice platform, inclusionED. To support the project, the inclusionED team also developed 14 practices for secondary educators, addressing areas of priority nominated by South Australian Department for Education.





A/Prof. Marina Ciccarelli, Co-design participant Liam Picen, Minister Rishworth, Board Member Malcolm Mayfield, A/Minister Bourke and Andrew Davis at the launch of myWAY Employability's latest features

This is a positive step towards building the capacity of teachers and school systems across the state to provide truly inclusive classrooms, ensuring parents and children can have greater confidence and choice in their local schooling options.

Speaking at the launch, Kate Daniel, member of an autistic family, said, "Schools and educators have a unique and privileged opportunity to help create inclusive and neuro-affirming environments and culture within school classrooms and communities. Better preparing our teachers by providing a disability and inclusion component of their teaching degrees will assist in creating inclusive and informed schools."

It would give me greater confidence in the education system to know there is a tertiary, embedded level of training and understanding across the teacher cohort in their degrees in regard to autism.

Kate Daniel, member of an autistic family

The official release and handover of the licensed version, along with eLearning, is scheduled for July 2024.

Education policy review

The aim of the **Inclusive education in Australia policy review** was to identify strengths, gaps, and needs in the education system to enhance autistic students' opportunities and achieve better learning outcomes.

Although state and territory education departments have developed inclusive policies and guiding documents, responsibilities for developing and enacting education policies have been blurred between the federal and the state-level.

Analysing the education policies and documents of states and territories draws attention to the need for a national approach to provide more overt and systematic policy support for inclusion in school settings.

Overall, 20 recommendations were made for policy, research, and practice to progress inclusive education in Australia.

The report and recommendations have been presented and disseminated to various stakeholders, including policy makers.

Minister launches myWAY Employability upgrade

Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, announced the launch of myWAY Employability's new and improved functionality and resources at an event in Adelaide in October 2023.

The myWAY Employability web app (mywayemployability.au) supports autistic people to map out and achieve their employment goals, communicate and champion their needs and strengths in the workplace, and engage successfully with employers and service providers.

myWAY Employability is already a valued and successful tool for young people transitioning from school to employment and training, or indeed for neurodivergent individuals of any age looking to understand their strengths, set goals and achieve their dreams.

The web app has already helped more than 5,850 registered users to create a personalised career roadmap

and convene a support team to help them achieve their goals. The enhanced version makes exploration of career choices and team collaboration in the app even easier with a responsive goal builder, enhanced dashboard and over 40 templates to help support users to tailor their goals.

myWAY Employability supporters using the platform include mentors, employment service providers, educators and parents. A new enhanced dashboard for managing multiple career explorers, including evidence-based recommendations to leverage strengths and accommodate workplace preferences.

New enterprise version

Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that Autistic Australian's are currently around six times more likely to be unemployed than people without disability. These new improvements, and the exciting work underway to develop an enterprise version means that myWAY Employability is a unique and powerful tool – bringing together employers and potential employees on a large scale to create long term successful career outcomes for autistic Australians.

A beta trial of an enterprise version of myWAY Employability commenced in January 2024, with 49 employment service staff were trained across the two organisations, supporting neurodivergent job seekers in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Staff at MatchWorks and YouthWorX

NT were trained in evidence-based career planning for neurodivergent jobseekers and myWAY Employability. New Autism CRC affiliate, Sunny Spectrum Supports, will engage in future trials.

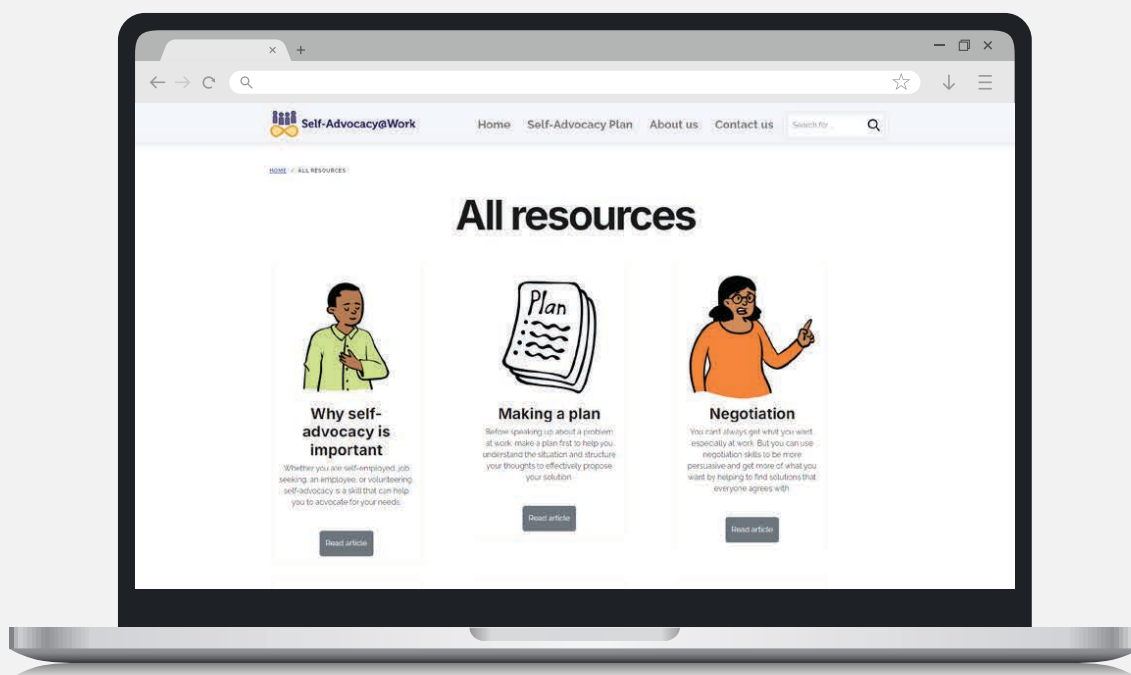
Self-Advocacy@Work website launched

The Self-Advocacy@Work online resources package was launched in November 2023 and has attracted more than 4,000 unique visitors. The website (selfadvocacy.au) helps autistic people navigate the world of employment, understand workplace rights and develop self-advocacy skills. It includes a series of accessible multimedia tools and resources designed to empower autistic individuals to better advocate for themselves in the workplace.

The Self-Advocacy@Work project was conceived and run by Autism CRC's Sylvia Rodger Academy. Led by autistic project officers, we worked with 10 autistic adults to co-design, develop and deliver self-advocacy employment resources by, and for, the autistic community.

This co-designed resource package was developed in collaboration with the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand.

1,300+ people have started a self-advocacy plan to help them advocate in the workplace



Sector-wide initiatives and assets

Autism CRC has built a range of assets and initiatives to build capacity within the autistic and autism communities, facilitate community-driven research priorities and to meet community needs.



200+

Participants

Sylvia Rodger Academy across 5 programs

Sylvia Rodger Academy

Autistic people thriving through discovering and using their strengths

It was a huge year for Autism CRC's Sylvia Rodger Academy (SRA). SRA provides programs, pathways and networks that create communities where autistic people fully contribute and influence policy, practice and culture in partnership with their peers. SRA delivers programs in leadership, autistic identity and connection, corporate governance, and research. This year, SRA and its ever-growing alumni network also delivered training and presentations to employment service providers and the National Autism Strategy Oversight Council. The SRA team also made valuable contributions to the National Autism Strategy, the Roadmap and other endeavours.

Autistic Identity and Connection Program

This year we celebrated our first ever graduates from the Autistic Identity and Connection program, with 32 people completing the Program. The Program, delivered by six established autistic leaders, aims to give autistic participants a more complete understanding of what it means to be autistic and includes both a fully online version as well as a hybrid face-to-face and online version. It also provides an opportunity to connect with other autistic people and community and develop skills in wellbeing and self-advocacy from an autistic perspective. Participants in the online version engaged in a series of Masterclasses which commenced in June 2023.



Participants and project team at the Autistic Identity and Connection Program face-to-face workshop



I think my favourite part was hearing other people's experiences... and I think that had a big impact, like hearing it in context, and then being able to relate, and feeling like you're not alone.

Autistic Identity and Connection participant

The Program was delivered in partnership with Aspect, funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services and was developed by and for autistic people. Due to the success of the inaugural Program, Autism CRC received additional funding to expand the Program into new areas in the upcoming financial year.

Governance Program

In March we began promotion for our 2024 Governance Program intake. The call-out attracted more than 100 applications, the most we've received for any Program. The Program is for autistic adults who would like to be on boards or other governance bodies, such as advisory councils, and want to develop their knowledge and skills in corporate governance. Activities include completing online modules

on a board director's duties and responsibilities, attending a 3.5-day/3-night workshop and completing a practical component.

Future Leaders Program

The Future Leaders Program is for autistic adults who would like explore and develop their leadership skills to positively impact their community. This Program helps participants to:

- ▶ develop leadership skills and gain practical knowledge from an autistic perspective
- ▶ make a positive impact in their community
- ▶ connect with a community of emerging and established autistic leaders.

The Future Leaders Program was not run in this reporting period.

Research Program

The Research Program is aimed at autistic adults who want to learn how research is done and skills for co-producing research with established researchers. The Research Program is also for researchers to learn the skills for participatory and inclusive research with the autistic community.

The Research Program was not run in this reporting period.



SRA delivers programs in leadership, autistic identity and connection, corporate governance and research



Australasian Autism Research Council (AARC)

The AARC was established to review and define national priorities for autism research, and to identify areas of research needed for the autistic and autism communities. The AARC includes representatives from the autistic and broader autism communities, service providers, health and education professionals, government representatives and policy makers, and researchers.

The objective of the AARC is to provide a regular and organised mechanism to:

- ▶ **consult** on the state of autism research in Australia and New Zealand (community-led)
- ▶ **identify** priorities for autism research in an Australian and New Zealand context
- ▶ **report** on priorities for autism research in Australia and New Zealand
- ▶ **inform** funding strategies for autism research in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

We received more than 200 expressions of interest for 2024 membership of the AARC. Interest came from across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Applicants represented a rich and diverse range of experience, perspectives and expertise. The new Council elected Dr Larah van der Meer and Dr Rebecca Poulsen as Co-chairs for the 2024 calendar year.

In 2023 the AARC recommended to Autism CRC that a project be commissioned to identify specific areas of focus and research questions for the five remaining priority research areas:

- ▶ Choice of living and housing
- ▶ Family and carer support
- ▶ Gender, diversity and inclusion
- ▶ Health and disability services delivery
- ▶ Built environment.

The report findings were released in late 2023 and found there were overarching themes across the five priority areas of:

-  Awareness and understanding of autism
-  Finances
-  The role of family
-  Mental health
-  Support needs
-  The NDIS

This report represents a continuation of work previously conducted by the Australasian Autism Research Council (AARC) in 2019 and 2021.

These themes (highlighted above) shaped and influenced the experiences of the autistic and autism community. The themes represented areas of central focus that participants believed that future research should prioritise across all priority areas.

In addition to these activities, this year the AARC published a study on community attitudes toward autism research.

Autistic activists and researchers want autistic people in the community to have more of a say about what is researched and how. The study **'We have so much to offer': Community members' perspectives on autism research**, used the information obtained from 55 community members from an existing study on their priorities for autism research. The aim was to better understand community members' views and experiences of autism research. People agreed strongly that research can play a powerful role in shaping good autistic lives. They also felt that big changes were needed for research to have this impact.

Australian Autism Biobank

A biobank safely stores ethically sourced participant data and biological samples for use in approved research. Autism CRC created the Australian Autism Biobank to help advance our understanding of how biological and environmental factors are linked to autistic health and wellbeing. We know these factors are important to all aspects of care, from diagnosis through to ageing. Understanding how these factors interact will lead to the development of more appropriate supports and practices for the benefit of autistic people and their families.

The Australian Autism Biobank is Australia's largest collection of data and samples from autistic children and their families.



New online application process for researchers

This year, we worked to streamline the application process for researchers seeking material and data access for their projects. The new system includes improvements to automate the Expression of Interest process and once approved, the new application process allows researchers to input project details and make their data selection with ease. More successful research projects will be able to start sooner thanks to improvements to reduce downtime between the application, approval and data access stages.

The Biobank webpages have also seen improvements to content and presentation for both researcher and community audiences, including the addition of multimedia content.

Utilisation

Two new applications for use were approved in 2023-24. To date, 36 research projects have been approved, covering a wide range of physical and mental health and wellbeing areas of need. Each time a study is completed, new data generated is added back into the Biobank, so that it continues to grow and evolve for the benefit of future generations.

2023-24 publications and presentations

Investigating parental observations of early autism development in simplex and multiplex families

This study explored the number and frequency of reported concerns from parents within the first year of life for children diagnosed with autism, including those who had an older sibling diagnosed with autism and those who did not (as well as for undiagnosed siblings). It found that for children at elevated likelihood of autism, parent's concerns are driven primarily by developmental differences, with child's birth order and sibling diagnostic status not impacting on parent early concerns.

The relationship between hair cortisol concentration and autism diagnosis

This study examined how hair cortisol concentration in autistic children differed from non-autistic children to explain how the heightened levels of distress to sensory, social and emotional stimuli autistic children are prone to experiencing, may relate to heightened levels of chronic stress and persistently elevated hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis activity.

Do general health, sleep, quality and fatigue contribute to cardiovascular diseases risk in autistic adults?

This study examined how cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors include age, smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, high body mass index (BMI), general health, mental health, sleep and fatigue. How may these risk factors that are often elevated in autistic adults contribute to an increased CVD risk in autistic adults.

Utilising behavioural and sensory profiles and associated perinatal factors to identify meaningful subgroups in autism

This study investigated if the behavioural, sensory and perinatal factor profiles of autistic children could be used to identify distinct subgroups using latent class analysis with 26 variables representing child's behavioural and sensory features and perinatal factors.

Elevated gastrointestinal inflammation in autism

Based on a higher prevalence of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) in autistic children, it has been proposed that gastrointestinal inflammation may affect clinical presentations and quality of life for autistic people. This study established a marker of gastrointestinal inflammation in autistic children and non-autistic controls, and sought to understand if elevated levels were associated with autistic traits, sensory sensitivities, lifestyle characteristics such as diet and other co-occurring conditions.

autismcrc.com.au/biobank



Chris Edwards and Ru Ying Cai from Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)



Tori Harr, Dr Diana Tan and Marion Rebuka from Macquarie University and Prof. Liz Pellicano (photo) from University College London



Prof. Sonya Girdler and Katharine Browne accept the Translation award on behalf of the Curtin Autism Research Group

Awards

Our network is full of talented people, dedicated to research and its translation to improve the quality of life and opportunities of autistic people and their families. Here are just a few award highlights from the year in review.

Awards for Achievement in Autism Research

The 2023 Autism CRC Awards for Achievement in Autism Research were announced at the Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR) conference in Aotearoa New Zealand on December 7, 2023.

The awards are open to all organisations and researchers undertaking quality research projects in the area of autism, regardless of affiliation with Autism CRC. Three projects (Translation of Research category was jointly awarded) have received recognition for their outstanding commitment to inclusive research practices and translation of autism research:

- ▶ Autism and mental health mass open online course
- ▶ Improving the mental health of autistic adults through the cultivation of self-compassion
- ▶ Autistic people's university experience in Australia.

Translation of autism research into practice

Recipients: Dr Wenn Lawson and Dr Ben Milbourne and their team from the Curtin Autism Research Group.

The **Autism and mental health mass open online course (MOOC)** was co-produced to empower autistic people to promote their good mental health, celebrate their individuality, strengths, and skills associated with autism, and to recognise when they may need extra support. Almost forty videos were produced, focusing on building the strengths of neurodiverse individuals and allowing learners to access multiple perspectives and insights about autism and mental health from people with direct, lived experience.

The Autism and Mental Health MOOC has received wide recognition, including being awarded the edX Prize for Exceptional Contributions in Online Teaching and Learning at the edX Global Forum in Washington, D.C in October 2023.

Recipients: Ru Ying Cai and Chris Edwards and their team from Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect).

The **Improving the mental health of autistic adults through the cultivation of self-compassion** project aimed to cultivate autistic people's self-compassion as an antidote to the negative experiences associated with unsupportive environments to improve mental health and wellbeing. The two-phase project examined, co-designed and co-produced the Aspect Self-compassion Program for Autistic Adults (ASPAA), and was piloted with 39 autistic adults who went

on to report an increase in self-compassion levels and psychological wellbeing and a decrease of anxiety and depression.

Inclusive research practice

Recipients: Dr Diana Tan and their team from Macquarie University and University College London.

The **Autistic people's university experience in Australia** project investigated the accessibility of higher education with a focus on learning why the rate of course completions of people with disability is so low despite the growing number of students with disability enrolling in universities in the last few decades. The study asked 21 autistic people about their lived experience studying at Australian universities as current students, graduates or those who discontinued their studies.

INSAR 2024 Awards

Around 1,200 researchers met in Melbourne from 15-18 May for this year's International Society for Autism Research (INSAR) Conference, the first time it has been hosted in Australia. Over 100 autistic community members also attended the conference, which covered a diverse range of topics and perspectives from around the world.

Autism CRC was well-represented by a number of researchers, delivering oral and poster presentations.

The Autism CRC exhibition booth was very popular and created the perfect opportunity to share our broad breadth of work to a large international audience. It was obvious from many conversations that while there's still much to do to improve the lives of autistic Australian's and their families, Australia is a leader in autism research, policy and practice, compared to many countries.

The conference included the INSAR 2024 Awards Ceremony.

Dr Chloe Yap

Dr Chloe Yap was awarded a **Dissertation Award** for her work on the Autism CRC Genomics project using data from the Australian Autism Biobank.

Chloe's work aimed to characterise differences in the lipidome related to autism diagnosis and neurodevelopmental traits, such as IQ and sleep problems, to understand how these differences relate to diet, the microbiome and genetics of autistic children.

The results were published in high impact journal, Nature Medicine in April 2023. This is a great example of collaborative research with real world impact for autistic people, thanks to the generosity of Biobank participants.

Professor Andrew Whitehouse

Professor Andrew Whitehouse was elected as a **Fellow of the INSAR** – only the fourth Australian to receive such an honour.

The Fellowship Program was launched in 2017 to honour INSAR members whose research has made a significant international impact on the scientific understanding, clinical practice, educational methods and/or autism-related policy. Fellows are elected at the INSAR Annual meeting, and this award is the highest honour the society gives.

Andrew was elected for his major scientific contributions, including leading the development of the two national autism guidelines and involvement in leading the research and development of the Inklings Program.



It has been such a deep privilege to share my professional life with thousands of autistic children and their families, and dozens of colleagues who share a passion for a better world. It truly feels like I've won the career lottery.

Prof. Andrew Whitehouse

Scholars highlight – Thesis of exceptional merit

Previous Autism CRC scholar, Dr Melanie Muniandy has published six first-author publications. Melanie worked on the Autism CRC Longitudinal Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA) project. Her thesis provides a comprehensive and in-depth examination of coping strategies and resilience in autistic adults which can be used to help inform the development and design of stress and mental health supports.

In the last year, Melanie's has received both the prestigious **Nancy Millis Medal for a thesis of exceptional merit**, and the **Excellent PhD Thesis in Psychology**, thanks to the Australian Psychological Society (APS).

Melanie is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC).

George's run

Melbourne Metro train driver and driver trainer, George Chijarira, completed a solo seven-day Adelaide to Melbourne walk, run and cycle, raising \$10,000 to support Autism CRC initiatives. The 822km journey was an emotional one for George who had been in training for three months in preparation for the big event.

George moved to Melbourne just under a decade ago. His seven-year-old autistic son Jordan was the fuel behind George's passion to raise awareness of autism.

George hopes his efforts will contribute to enhancing understanding of autism, developing effective supports and improving the quality of life for autistic people and their families in Australia.

Together, we can make a significant impact on understanding and supporting individuals on the autism spectrum, including my own son, Jordan, and countless others who deserve a brighter, more inclusive future.

George Chijarira

The Hon. Emily Bourke, Assistant Minister for Autism in South Australia marked the start of George's event at Adelaide Oval. He finished his journey at Fed Square Melbourne on Saturday, November 11, greeted by friends, family and supporters.

I learnt so much about myself along the journey," said George. "A lot of people are quite aware of the effect autism has on families. If I brought the subject even to the attention of one person's mind, this is a success.

We thank George for his generous and determined efforts to support Autism CRC and the autistic and autism communities.

George's Run was sponsored by Prodigy Health Solutions, a Melbourne-based nursing agency.



George (second from left) was met by friends, family and supporters at Federation Square in Melbourne at the end of his journey

Our end-users



Our end-users

Working with and for our end-users is integral to our work. This commitment is reflected in our collaborative practices and co-design efforts across research, policy and capacity-building projects.

Our end-users comprise five major groups: autistic individuals, their families and carers; professionals providing advice, assessment, and support; service providers; employment and associated education and training organisations; government policy makers and program managers.

Autistic individuals, their families and carers – our ultimate beneficiaries

- ▶ **Who they are:** Autistic individuals across the lifespan, their families and carers.
- ▶ **Importance:** Our research, policy, and practice outcomes are designed to benefit these individuals directly, enhancing their quality of life and opportunities.



Meeting and getting to speak to people who share so many similar experiences to me was validating and illuminating.... I have already made big changes in my day-to-day life to honour unique autistic needs which I may never have done without this workshop.

2023 Autistic Identity and Connection Program graduate

Professionals providing advice, assessment, and support

- ▶ **Who they are:** Professionals across various sectors, including:
 - ▶ Healthcare: Paediatricians, general practitioners, psychiatrists, nurses
 - ▶ Education: Early childhood educators, teachers, school leaders
 - ▶ Therapy and support: Psychologists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists and other allied health practitioners.
- ▶ **Roles:** They offer crucial advice, assessment, and support to autistic individuals and their families, ensuring comprehensive care and guidance.



The resources have been integrated into our onboarding of new doctors and I will continue to promote the amazing work and Guidelines wherever I can and encourage as many doctors and nurses and also our Indigenous community to use the resources.

Dr Samarra Toby, First Nations GP and mother of an autistic child

Service providers

- ▶ **Who they are:** Organisations employing professionals to deliver services, including:
 - ▶ State associations and service providers
 - ▶ Private providers
 - ▶ Commonwealth and state government agencies focused on education, health and disability
 - ▶ Non-government organisations focused on education, health and disability.
- ▶ **Roles:** These service providers facilitate essential services, ensuring that autistic individuals and their families receive consistent and high-quality support.



We're pleased to let you know that the Supporting autistic children and their families: Short course has had good interest since we added it to our CPD Library. We are delighted to be able to partner with Autism CRC to provide this important training to Occupational Therapists.

Michelle Oliver, A/General Manager, Occupational Therapy Australia

Employment and associated education and training organisations

- ▶ **Who they are:** Organisations providing employment and associated education and training, including small, medium, and large enterprises.
- ▶ **Roles:** They play a critical role in integrating autistic individuals into the workforce, offering opportunities for personal and professional development.



So, the foundations from a vocation perspective...is the work that needs to happen and that's where myWAY Employability is great. It's not a training programme to get a certificate. It's not like an alternative flexible learning opportunity because I mean, there could always be more, but those are out there. It's actually about all of the other stuff.

Employment Service Provider

Government policy makers and program managers

- ▶ **Who they are:** Those involved in setting policy, providing funding, and driving systemic change.
- ▶ **Roles:** By shaping policies and programs, they ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of support systems for autistic individuals and their families.



For the past 10 years, Autism CRC has helped inform national practice and the policy landscape, and built the capacity of individuals, service providers, and community settings in the process.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, **the Hon. Bill Shorten MP**

Research, policy and practice

Our formal collaboration of Members and Affiliates has focussed on addressing agreed needs as outlined by community research priorities, working to address the many areas of significant and unnecessary disadvantage for autistic individuals and their families with evidence-based practice and policy. These strategic partnerships provide in-kind support to deliver outcomes across a range of projects.

Valued for our collaborative, evidence-based approach, Autism CRC is also represented on a number of advisory boards and network groups, such as:

- ▶ Australian Autism Alliance
- ▶ Autism Advisory Group to NDIA
- ▶ Autism Centre for Excellence (ACE) Advisory Board
- ▶ Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care's National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People Working Group
- ▶ Commonwealth Department of Social Services' ministerially-appointed Expert Reference Group of clinical and consumer representatives to help National Guideline implementation
- ▶ Department of Education Queensland, Autism Hub Advisory Board
- ▶ Technology Wellbeing Roundtable
- ▶ Telstra Foundation Tech4Good community of practice.

To ensure practical implementation of research and policy into practice, Autism CRC seeks sector input in the design and evaluation of projects, often through iterative testing and trials of project outcomes.

This year, a new project with the South Australian Government and their Department for Education led to the development of an inclusive education teacher training package for pre-service and current teachers. The suite of eLearning modules was piloted by Tabor College in South Australia, with final updates reflecting student and staff evaluation feedback from the pilot, along with input from Positive Partnerships, University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide. This ensured the final package (due to be delivered in July 2024) aligns with the needs of stakeholders, thereby strengthening and complementing respective programs. A full evaluation of the program in practice will take place in 2025.

Capacity building

More than 56,500 professionals have been involved in our research program or have used our outputs in the last year alone.

We continue to expand and improve our range of evidence-based, mainstream capacity-building resources. These include best practice guidance, tools, products and professional development courses such as the capacity-building eLearning package for educators.

These resources are helping to set nationally-consistent standards for practitioners, educators, services providers and policy makers, as evidenced by the inclusion of a recommendation in the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care Report relating to *Leveraging early childhood education and care in the first 1000 days to reduce developmental vulnerability*. As part of the recommendation is stated:



...providing free training for early childhood education and care services on the newly released National Guideline for supporting the learning, participation, and wellbeing of autistic children and their families

Recommendation 13d, p182, Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care Report, South Australia, August 2023

This is an excellent example of the real-world impact of our capacity building resources, made possible as a result of our strong collaborative partnerships with industry, government, service providers and the community.

In the employment sector, this year we began the job of preparing myWAY Employability for a new market, with the development of an enterprise version. An implementation evaluation of a beta version commenced with the engagement of three employment service organisations. Forty-nine employment service staff were trained across two organisations (MatchWorks and YouthWorX NT), supporting neurodivergent job seekers in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. New Autism CRC affiliate, Sunny Spectrum Supports, will engage in the trial in the coming months.

Consultation and co-design

Autism CRC is committed to the adoption and promotion of participatory and inclusive research practices that:

- ▶ promote partnerships between researchers and community members, ensuring end-users have a say in the research that may impact on their lives
- ▶ produce research that is more relevant and beneficial to the community
- ▶ improve participant recruitment
- ▶ build community capacity and skills by meaningfully engaging end-users in the processes and practices of research.

Autism CRC's leadership in this area led to a contract with the Australian Government's Department of Health and Aged Care and their work to develop a National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People.

In support of this, Autism CRC conducted a process of co-design, research, and community engagement with its national partner network from November 2023 to February 2024. This involved:

- ▶ **conversations with almost 200 stakeholders**, including autistic people from diverse backgrounds and varying abilities, as well as families, carers, health and mental health practitioners
- ▶ **a review of health-related information from almost 5,000 autistic people, families, carers and professionals.**

The co-design, community engagement, and research elements of this work provide critical insights into the human stories behind the statistics and highlight stakeholders' willingness to come together to co-design and develop solutions for national challenges.

Addressing major challenges with co-designed practical solutions



Autism CRC has a long history of bringing people and organisations with different views and experience together to address major challenges and co-design practical solutions.

Autism CRC CEO, Andrew Davis

This strong record in evidence-based co-designed solutions led to Autism CRC taking up the challenge to address the current gap in understanding and lack of consensus about how best to assess, differentiate, and report children's functional strengths and support needs.

The Framework focuses on professional practice when working with children aged 0-12 years and their families in Australia, **including children who do and do not have one or more diagnosed condition(s).**

Frameworks are commonly used to set out a vision and approach for addressing complex issues, where multiple complementary tools, resources, activities, and approaches may be needed. Frameworks are particularly helpful and important when a single solution is unlikely to be appropriate for all people, in all contexts, but where all solutions should reflect a common understanding, evidence-base, and guiding principles.

The new national framework will inform professional practice, operational guidance, and decision making, across all states and territories, service and support settings.

Co-produced with the stakeholder community of 23 organisations and representative health, medical and advocacy bodies, the Framework is another example of Autism CRC's range of policy and program reforms and initiatives that will have significant implications for autistic Australians, their families and carers, and those who work to support them.

Our structure and governance



Our structure and governance

Structure

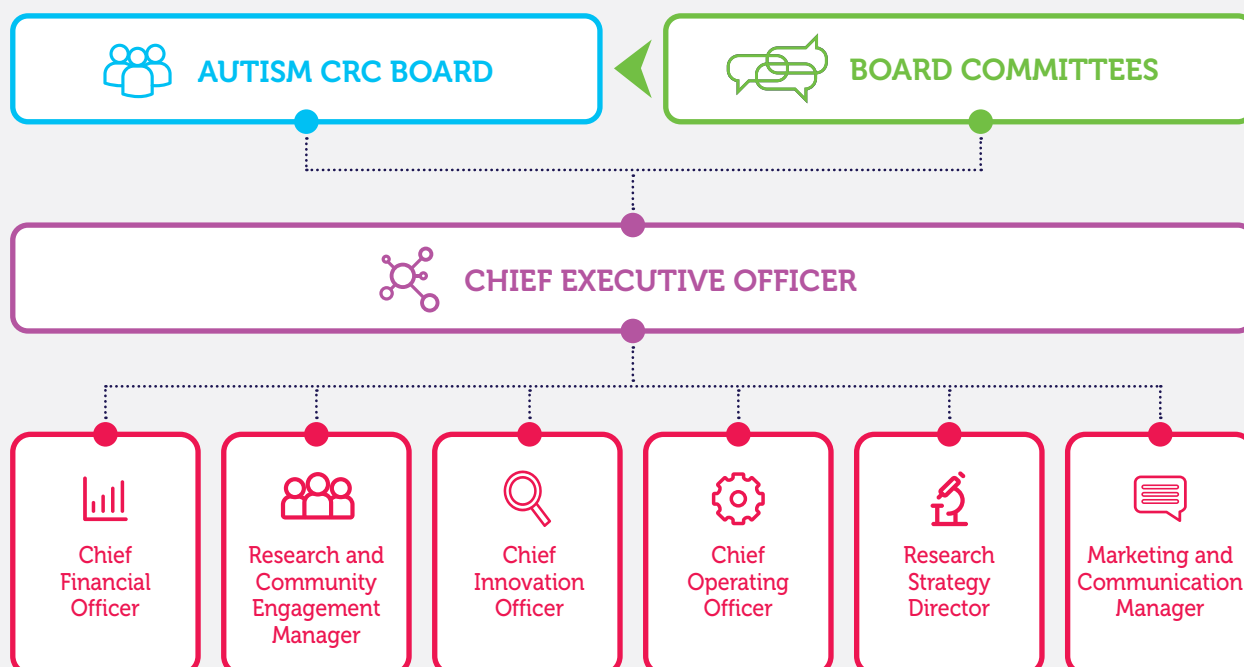
Autism CRC Ltd was established in March 2013 as a company limited by guarantee. The governance and management structure promote effective cooperation between research and end-user partners, ensuring translation-focused research and development.

Autism CRC has ensured this by:

- ▶ involving members of the autistic community throughout the research process
- ▶ including significant industry and end-user representation on our Board and various committees
- ▶ involving end-users directly in Autism CRC activities, enhancing project design and the applicability and uptake of outcomes.

Those interested in being a member of Autism CRC Ltd or an affiliate in our collaboration should contact us at info@autismcrc.com.au.

Autism CRC Governance Structure



Autism CRC Board

The Autism CRC Board is accountable to the Members of Autism CRC Ltd (the Company) and for the ongoing operations and affairs of Autism CRC. The Board is responsible for decisions relating to Autism CRC strategy, our investment of funds, our research program, the translation of our research outcomes, and our overall management.

During the reporting period, the Board consisted of an Independent Chairperson and six Independent Directors. Two of the Directors have an autism diagnosis, and a number of Board members are parents of autistic children.

The Board met eight times during the reporting period, and members bring skills and experience across a range of disciplines of direct relevance to the goals and operations of Autism CRC Ltd, including:

- ▶ service provision to the autism community
- ▶ research management and disability research
- ▶ intellectual property commercialisation
- ▶ advocacy and policy development in the disability sector
- ▶ governance and management of commercial ventures, CRCs and not-for-profits.

Management Team

Name	Role	Organisation
Andrew Davis	Chief Executive Officer	Autism CRC
Andrew Borneman	Chief Financial Officer and Company Secretary	Autism CRC
Professor Andrew Whitehouse	Research Strategy Director	University of Western Australia
Cheryl Mangan	Chief Innovation Officer	Autism CRC
Dr Olivia (Liv) Gatfield	Research and Community Engagement Manager	Autism CRC
Wojciech Nadachowski	Chief Operating Officer	Autism CRC
Sally Vidler	Marketing and Communication Manager	Autism CRC

Governance

Autism CRC Board



Professor Robert van Barneveld (Chair)

BAGrSc (Hon), PhD, RANutr, FAICD

Robert became Chair of Autism CRC in November 2017. He is an experienced Director of small and large businesses, not-for-profits, peak bodies and ASX Top 300. He has extensive experience in corporate governance, research commercialisation and management, and government liaison at state and federal levels.

As a past President of Autism Queensland he is familiar with the needs of families and carers of autistic people. His daughter was initially diagnosed as on the spectrum but later re-diagnosed with Rett Syndrome.

Robert was a Director of the Pork CRC Ltd (prior to its wind-up in 2019 and remains a Director of the legacy entity, Australasian Pork Research Institute Ltd) and has led three successful CRC bids, including the Autism CRC bid. He has also been involved in the establishment and transition of CRCs and has worked as a researcher within the Pork, Aquaculture and Aquafin CRCs.

Robert is an Adjunct Professor within the School of Environmental and Rural Science at the University of New England and the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences at the University of Queensland.

Robert is also Group CEO and Managing Director of the SunPork Group of Companies, which initiated the Autism and Agriculture Program and now employs autistic adults in specialist animal care roles.



Katharine Annear (Independent Director/ Deputy Chair)

BAppSc (DisStud) MDisStud ACBS

Katharine is an Academic at Flinders University, a registered Developmental Educator, and has served on local and national not-for-profit boards for over 20 years. These include incorporated associations and companies limited by guarantee, in the Disability and Arts industries, and National Disabled People's Organisations.

Katharine is a founding member of the ASAN AUNZ and has spent over 15 years in the autism advocacy space, in both grassroots and high-level policy settings. Katharine also sits on the Children, Young People and Families Reference Group for the NDIA's Independent Advisory Council.

Katharine brings experience as an Autistic person and a guardian of a young Autistic adult. This is complimented by over 20 years as a practicing Developmental Educator working predominantly with Autistic individuals who have complex support needs, and their families.

Katharine is a passionate advocate for co-design in research and public policy and the translation of research and policy into meaningful practice for disabled people; with a particular emphasis on including the most marginalised people.



Adrian Ford (Independent Director)

BSocStud, FAICD

As well as being an Independent Director of Autism CRC, Adrian is the Chair of the Board of Social Science Translated Pty Ltd (SST), a subsidiary of the Autism CRC.

Previous appointments have included Adrian being SST's Executive Director (2019 – 2022) and the CEO and Company Secretary of Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), Australia's largest national autism-specific service provider (2000 – 2019). While at Aspect, Adrian was a founding member the Australian Autism Alliance, a Director and former Chair of the Australian Advisory Board for Autism, Chair of the inaugural Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC) in 2009, Chair of APAC 2017 and Advisor to the Organising Committee of APAC 2019 held in Singapore.

Adrian has extensive experience of over 40 years with not-for-profit boards and management, governance structures, strategic planning, risk management, finances, HR and policy frameworks.



Dr Shirley Lanning (Independent Director)

BSc (Hons 1), PhD, FAICD

Shirley has been an independent director of Autism CRC since its inception in 2013. During this time, she has served on the Research and Development Committee, the Remuneration, Nominations and Selection Committee, the Autism CRC Access Committee and the Governance Program Management Committee. Shirley joined the Board of Social Science Translated, the wholly owned subsidiary of Autism CRC, in 2023.

She brings extensive experience in corporate governance, marketing and communications, business development, research management and commercialization in commercial and not-for-profit organisations in the UK and Australia.

She has served as a non-executive Board Director of a number of not-for-profit organisations, including NanoVentures Australia, Nanotechnology Victoria, the Pig Research and Development Corporation and AusBiotech, and as a Member of Government Advisory Councils, including the Federal Government's Advisory Council on Intellectual Property and the Victorian Cancer Agency Consultative Council. Before moving to Australia, she was the inaugural Executive Director of the UK BioIndustry Association.

Shirley has been involved with the CRC Program for many years, serving as Federal Government Visitor to the CRC for Viticulture and the CRC for Cellular Growth Factors. She is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Malcolm Mayfield (Independent Director)

BEng (Civil), GAICD

Malcolm is the founder and Managing Director of Autism STAR Pty Ltd. As well as being an independent director of Autism CRC, Malcolm has been a member of the Australasian Autism Research Council, and is a mentor and content writer for the Sylvia Rodger Academy for the Future Leaders and Governance Programs.

Malcolm's career includes working as a researcher in the UniSA Civil Engineering Laboratories and as a contract administrator in the construction industry. In those capacities, he has worked on hospitals, sports stadiums, high-rise buildings, power stations, and subdivisions, and is highly regarded in his field.

Malcolm's view of the world changed when he self-diagnosed his Asperger's Syndrome at the age of 37 and had that diagnosis confirmed a few years later. Patterns in his life that had previously been confusing began to make sense and, as part of that process of greater awareness, he realised that in order to cope and succeed as an adult and a professional, he had developed independent success strategies that could be used by others on the autism spectrum. The concept and manifestation of Autism STAR grew out of that process of self-discovery.

Malcolm's goal is to shine a light on the autism spectrum to show the world that autism is a strength to be cherished and nurtured into success for all.



Scott Reading (Independent Director)

MComm, MBus, MAICD

With over 30 years of experience in senior management and leadership, Scott has worked across a diverse range of industries, including retail, media, direct selling, governmental lobbying and small business, collaborating with both national and international companies.

As a committed private philanthropist, Scott has generously given his time and resources to numerous not-for-profit boards. His approach is consistently guided by a strong ethical framework, a reliance on evidence-based research, and a dedication to bold and effective board governance. Notably, Scott is a founding Director of the AEIOU Foundation for Children with Autism, where he played an active role as a board member for 15 years.

During the last decade, Scott has been a Director of Autism CRC, contributing significantly to various committees, such as the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee, the Research and Development Committee, and the Sylvia Roger Academy. He also stepped in as the Managing Director of the CRC temporarily, guiding the organisation through a transitional period while searching for a new CEO.

As the parent of a young adult on the autism spectrum, Scott has a personal and profound understanding of the daily challenges that families and individuals face.

Scott takes pride in his association with the dedicated team and researchers at Autism CRC, whose rigorous peer-reviewed research is poised to make a significant impact for many years to come.



Paul Vincent (Independent Director)

BBus (Acc), FCA, GAICD

Paul is a Fellow of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand and holds specialist accreditation in Business Valuation and Forensic Accounting with that body. Paul founded Vincents in 1989 and today remains a Director of Vincents which has grown to become a National mid-tier advisory firm of over 250. Paul has extensive experience in commercial litigation, providing expert accounting and financial evidence for commercial and criminal litigation matters. Paul's principal area of practice is quantification of damages and business valuations, to provide independent expert evidence for dispute resolution. Paul also mediates and arbitrates financial disputes. His accounting experience in his early career at KPMG covered audit, insolvency and reconstruction, corporate services, taxation and a wide range of consulting engagements.

Paul is a regular presenter at conferences across Australia on a range of forensic accounting topics including, commercial dispute resolution, quantifying damages in commercial disputes, fraud detection and prevention and proceeds of crime related topics.

Paul has been an independent director of Autism CRC since its inception in 2013.

Autism CRC Committees

Board Committees

The Board has established a number of Committees to assist in the execution of its duties and to allow detailed consideration of various issues. Current Committees of the Board are: Audit, Risk and Finance Committee; Remuneration, Nominations and Selection Committee; and Investment Advisory Committee. Each of the Committees has its own formal charter setting out the authority delegated to it by the Board. All matters determined by these Committees are submitted to the full Board for approval.

Audit, Risk and Finance Committee

The Audit, Risk and Finance Committee assists the Board in its oversight of the integrity of financial reporting, internal control structures, audit functions and also compliance and risk management systems relating to the finance and audit functions. This Committee ensures appropriate policies and procedures are in place to underpin best practice governance and to identify and manage corporate risk for the Company.

During the reporting period, the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee met three times and consisted of Paul Vincent (Chair), Malcolm Mayfield and Scott Reading, with the CEO and CFO in attendance.

The Remuneration, Nominations and Selection Committee

The Remuneration, Nominations and Selection Committee assists the Board in fulfilling its corporate governance responsibilities in regard to:

- ▶ providing recommendations for Director nominees to the Members
- ▶ ensuring a rotation is established whereby at least one third of Directors retire and are eligible for re-election annually
- ▶ establishing a process for the review of Board performance and the development of the Board
- ▶ undertaking succession planning for the Board

- ▶ reviewing the performance and remuneration of the CEO and make recommendations in this regard to the Chair of the Board
- ▶ reviewing the performance and remuneration framework for the executive team with the CEO.

The Remuneration, Nominations and Selection Committee did not meet during the reporting period.

Investment Advisory Committee

The Investment Advisory Committee is an advisory committee of the Autism CRC Board, appointed by the Board, comprising Board representatives, Member representatives and the Co-chairs of the Australasian Autism Research Council.

The Committee provides a forum for:

- ▶ consultation among Members and Associates and the Board
- ▶ guidance on research strategy and priorities
- ▶ recommendations to the Board in relation to research and research translation project investments by Autism CRC.

The Investment Advisory Committee did not meet during the reporting period.

Social Science Translated Pty Ltd

Social Science Translated Pty Ltd (SST) provides evidence-based materials and professional training to support communities to grow a diverse set of skills. Proud to be a wholly-owned subsidiary of Autism CRC Ltd, SST holds a vision of a world that values diverse life skills, making meaningful change in people's lives.

In 2023, SST was delighted to be one of only eight business successfully chosen in the inaugural cohort of the Paul Ramsay Foundation Social Enterprise Growth Incubator delivered by Social Enterprise Finance Australia (SEFA). In December, SST completed the incubator with valuable new connections and capacities to continue growing a sustainable business that makes a real difference in people's lives.

One of the strategic objectives of the SST strategic plan is to grow the reach and impact of the award-winning and evidence-based Secret Agent Society (SAS) Small Group Program. SST has the exclusive worldwide license for distributing and developing the SAS programs and espionage-themed resources.

SAS is a comprehensive and captivating solution to structured social and emotional learning for children aged 8-12 years old. At the end of the program, children graduate as 'Secret Agents' having learnt and practiced codes and tools that focus on four key life skills:

- 1 Emotion Recognition (in other people and self)
- 2 Emotion Regulation (particularly anxiety and anger)
- 3 Social Navigation (for friendship, team work and getting along with others)
- 4 Problem Solving (as an individual and in a group).

SST was also selected as a finalist in the Best Assistive Technology Category for the 2023 Australian Disability Service Awards. This was a wonderful achievement! The SST team are very proud of the way the platform brings technology and clinical expertise together to reach children and families wherever they are. It also has real time tracking and connected wrap-around supports outside of formal Club

Meetings.

Since the original version of the SAS Small Group Program was launched over a decade ago, program content and resources have been systematically updated over time to incorporate new research and best-practice evidence,

The third edition of SAS Small Group, which is delivered through a digital health platform, saw a new milestone in 2023 in reaching over 7,800 children, over 1,365 SAS Facilitators and Assistants scheduling over 19,400 Cadet Club Meetings, and representing over 194 SAS Provider services across seven global regions.

as well as enhance Facilitator-led activities in response to feedback, advisory group input, and diverse learning styles. The SST team are passionate about building a strong network of trained SAS Facilitators who are committed to preparing children for life's social and emotional challenges in a way that respects each child's diverse profile and own social-emotional goals. The process builds capacity within our clinical and educational services to deliver best-practice, supporting not only the children directly, but also their



Technology demonstration at INSAR



Supporting international researchers at INSAR

parents, school staff and peers. It consists of Child Club Meetings, Parent Group Meetings, Teacher Information Sessions and Teacher Tip Sheets, paired with real-life practice Missions. It also has a handy Skill Tracker system to monitor and reward skill development across home, school, and community activities.

SST received a grant from a charitable foundation for increasing family access to SAS in Western Australia in 2023-2024. The team have been busy supporting new and existing service providers to reach families in both metropolitan and regional areas of WA via both in-person and telehealth modes.

The SAS program is backed by global research. Over 22 papers and book chapters are published, including four randomised controlled trials. During the 2023-24 period two new publications joined the long list:

- ▶ MacEvilly, D., Maguire, K., Brosnan, G., Gaffny, L. (2024). Enhancing children's emotional regulation and social communication through group intervention – evidence of impact in an Irish outpatient Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 1-21. DOI: 10.1177/02656590241228424
- ▶ Lee, V., Vashi, N., Roudbarani, F., Modica, P., Pouyandeh, A., Sellitto, T., ... Weiss, J. (2024). Utility of a virtual small group cognitive behaviour program for autistic children during the pandemic: evidence from a community based implementation study. *BMC Health Services Research*, 24, 685. DOI: 10.1186/s12913-024-11033-9.

Multiple other studies have either commenced, continued or completed, and are awaiting publication. The research teams from Australia and Canada came together with the SST representatives at the International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting in Melbourne this year. Together the new research furthers evidence for SAS's role in decreased mental health challenges, attainment of social goals, improved family relationships, and improved parent and teacher alignment. There have been multiple conference presentations about or including SAS across the globe this year. Presentations, workshops and posters have been featured by independent researchers, champion clinicians, SST consultants and of course the SAS founding

author, Dr Renae Beaumont.

The entire team meet face-to-face for the first time ever in June. It was a great chance to reflect on why so much effort goes into connecting families around the world with practical and evidence-based resources like Secret Agent Society.

The award-winning and evidence-based SAS Small Group Program has been included on the following independently assessed lists in this last year:

- ▶ The Victorian Schools Mental Health Menu which opens up direct funding to schools in Victoria to use SAS to create positive impact within their school communities.
- ▶ The South Australian Department for Education 'Wellbeing Programs Directory'.
- ▶ The Australian Beyond Blue "Be You Programs Directory" for mental health and wellbeing programs.
- ▶ The evidence-based program profiles for Federal Department of Social Services funding through "Communities for Children Facilitating Partners" supporting community partners to reach disadvantaged families across Australia.

The Social Science Translated Pty Ltd Board is appointed by Autism CRC Ltd as the sole shareholder. The SST Board met on nine occasions during the reporting period. During this period Adrian Ford was Board Chair and governed SST across the period alongside Shirley Lanning, Paul Vincent and Andrew Davis. Together the SST Board and CEO congratulate and respect the dedicated operations team and SAS champions around the world.

At the heart of SST are people who hold a shared passion for seeing families access best practice services, preparing as many children as possible for life's social and emotional challenges. In June 2024, the SST team brought its global team together physically for the first time for a series of team planning days focused on professional development and finding ways to activate feedback from the valued network of providers. This was valuable time as the team prepared for upcoming projects designed to spark meaningful change in communities around the world!



Best Assistive Technology Category finalist, Australian Disability Service Awards

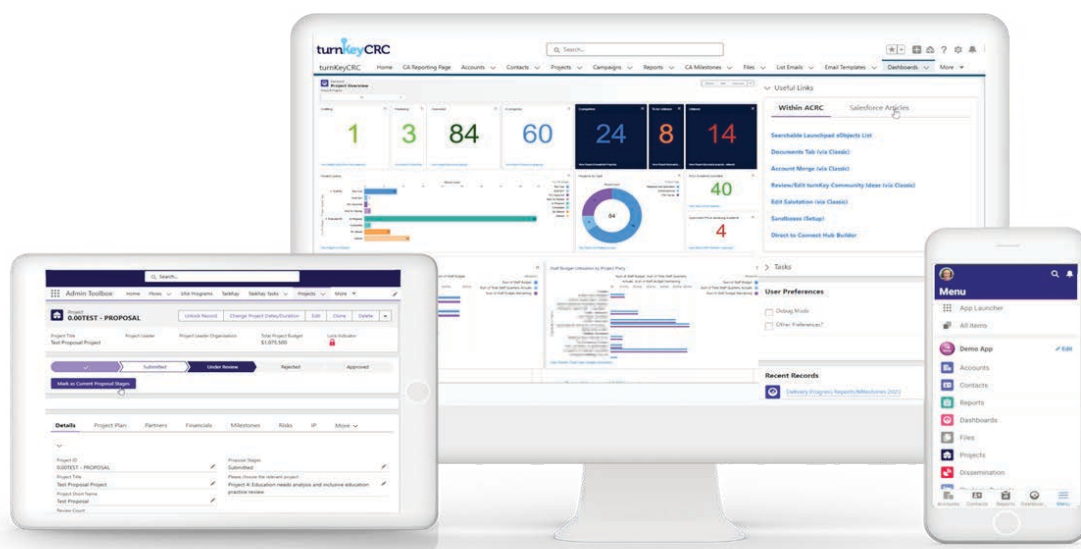


Presenting and talking to educators in London

turnKey

Capitalising on our own internal expertise and needs, Autism CRC has successfully built turnKey CRC. The ready to use software solution was developed for Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs).

The business has grown steadily, and the **Australian-based development and support team** now supports 17 CRCs across the country.



Built using a modern, intuitive user interface, turnKey CRC provides new CRCs with the power of Salesforce infrastructure to manage their work in five key ways:



Commonwealth Milestones

Commonwealth Milestones are mapped to Projects, enabling reporting on progress.



Partner engagement and stakeholder management

Achieve a complete view of your Participants and other stakeholders, including their activity history, key contacts, important project communications and internal discussions.



Project lifecycle

From an expression of interest to project commissioning through to project delivery, stay informed on all key project stages.



Automated contracts

Merge project data with project plan and contract templates. Prepare, sign, act on and manage contracts with our DocuSign integration.



Financial insights

Track detailed in-kind and cash commitments and actual contributions against individual project agreements.

Getting our message out



Getting our message out

Having built a reputation for providing independent, evidence-based policy and practice recommendations, engagement with the autistic and autism communities grows every year. Autism CRC has embraced this momentum.

Communication is key

We've seized numerous opportunities to broaden our reach by sharing our research and insights, which has led to increased social media engagement, website traffic, attendance at our events, and uptake of resources.

Key opportunities in 2023-24 included:

- ▶ launch of the second edition of the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Guideline
- ▶ launch of the Supporting Autistic Children Guideline implementation resources
- ▶ exhibition booth at INSAR
- ▶ community consultation and stakeholder engagement to support the development of the National Framework for assessing the functional strengths and support needs of children in Australia
- ▶ activities to support the development of the National Autism Strategy and the Health and Mental Health Roadmap.

These and other activities have led to a 13% increase in our online community, which now stands at 52,700+ followers and subscribers. This includes:

- ▶ 32,290+ eNews subscribers
- ▶ 12,665+ Facebook followers
- ▶ 2,595+ Twitter followers
- ▶ 4,025+ LinkedIn followers
- ▶ 1,090+ YouTube subscribers
- ▶ 37+ Podcast subscribers.



52,700+

Followers and subscribers

13% increase

in our online community in 2023-24



A/Prof. Ben Milbourn presenting at INSAR in Melbourne



The Autism CRC exhibition booth at INSAR reached an international audience



Fun all round at the Adelaide launch of the National Guideline Resources



Stakeholders at the National Health and Mental Health Community Co-design Summit in Brisbane

Improving user experience

Increased efforts on accessibility

Accessibility of our communications has been an increasingly high priority, with our teams upskilling in Easy Read and the latest online accessibility standards. Mechanisms to achieve this goal include adding accessibility tags to key documents, creating explainer videos, FAQs and research snapshots. We've also introduced closed captioning, voiceovers, transcripts and Easy Read versions where possible. We endeavour to make presentations and event recordings available via our website and YouTube channel. These efforts are part of our ongoing mission to make information more inclusive and widely accessible.

Official podcast launched

In August 2023, we launched a new podcast to bring together all the big ideas from presentations, findings, resources and discussions from previous webinars and events into a new format.

Our first series featured the Autism@Work Virtual Summit held in March 2023 with 16 episodes that released weekly and included keynote speakers, employee and employer panels, case studies and workshops.

Series two, 'The Inclusive Classroom', released at the start of 2024 and featured inclusionED content. The five episodes included: neurodiversity in the classroom, anxiety in the classroom, sensory needs, foundation practices for early

career teachers and positively engaging families.

The podcast is available via Apple, Spotify and Amazon podcasts and uploaded to the Autism CRC YouTube channel. The podcast has been downloaded more than 3,300 times.

Best practice portal

Key resources such as the Guidelines, Participatory and Inclusive Autism Research Practice Guides and the Integrated Employment Success Tool (IEST) are housed behind a registration wall on the corporate website. While these valuable documents are available free of charge, we require users to register and provide their email, name, and role to enable us to better understand and report on the usage of these key resources, as well as keep users abreast of updates and additional related resources.

This year we completed an upgrade to this area of the website, now called the 'Best practice portal'. The area is accessible to the 43,300+ registered users with a saved username and password.

Replicating the interactive functionality of the online version of the Supporting Autistic Children Guideline developed in early 2023, this year we were able to add an interactive online version of the second edition of the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Guideline.

These improvements allow users to easily jump in and out of the Best practice portal – and in the case of the Guidelines – to share relevant Recommendations and Good Practice Points with others, and to readily view supporting evidence for each Recommendation.

Appendices



Appendix 1: Annual Financial Report

Statements of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income For the financial year ended 30 June 2024

	Consolidated Entity	
	30 June 2024	30 June 2023
	\$	\$
Revenue	4,261,993	3,547,256
Expenses		
Research costs	(2,025,767)	(1,536,168)
Employee benefits expense	(2,628,030)	(2,660,377)
Board fees and related expense	(231,265)	(244,618)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(175,658)	(287,452)
Impairment Loss	(359,376)	(276,700)
Other expenses	(1,493,368)	(1,475,344)
Results from operating activities	(2,651,471)	(2,933,403)
Financing income	121,347	76,638
Finance costs	(5,086)	(19,291)
Net finance (costs)/income	116,261	57,347
(Deficit) / Surplus before tax	(2,535,210)	(2,876,056)
Income tax expense	-	10,930
(Deficit) / Surplus after tax	(2,535,210)	(2,865,126)
Other comprehensive income		
Total comprehensive (loss) / income for the period	(2,535,210)	(2,865,126)

The deficit in FY2024 and FY2023 was impacted by the timing of receipt of grant funding and related expenditure for activities under the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program and the National Autism Strategy.

Since 2018 \$5,586,682 cash and in-kind costs associated with the Australian Autism Biobank have been recognised on the Statement of Financial Position as an intangible asset. In the financial period ending 2024 an impairment of \$359,376 was recognised against this asset.

Statements of Financial Position For the financial year ended 30 June 2024

	Consolidated Entity	
	30 June 2024	30 June 2023
	\$	\$
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	3,324,598	4,928,383
Trade and other receivables	140,964	120,605
Prepayments	94,250	56,574
Inventory	9,804	15,963
Current tax asset	(77)	7,140
Total current assets	3,569,539	5,128,665
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	8,261	14,296
Right-of-use asset	126,849	147,097
Trade and other receivables	-	-
Investment in wholly owned subsidiary	-	-
Intangible Assets	3,548,393	4,013,152
Total non-current assets	3,683,503	4,174,545
Total assets	7,253,042	9,303,210
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	685,772	432,349
Provisions	421,731	195,726
Deferred revenues	180,000	23,967
Lease Liability	57,718	166,140
Current tax liability	-	-
Total current liabilities	1,345,221	818,182
Non-current liabilities		
Provisions	30,255	145,255
Lease Liability	73,004	-
Total Non-Current Liabilities	103,259	145,255
Total liabilities	1,448,479	963,437
Net assets	5,804,563	8,339,773
Equity		
Retained earnings	5,804,563	8,339,773
Total equity	5,804,563	8,339,773

Cash and cash equivalents includes grant funding received but yet to be applied to activities scheduled for FY2025.

Autism CRC prepared Special Purpose Finance Statements in FY2024 that were subject to external audit.

Appendix 2: Publications 2023-24

- Adams, D., Stainer, M., Simpson, K., Paynter, J., & Westerveld, M. (2023). Profiles and longitudinal growth trajectories of teacher-rated academic skills and enablers in autistic children and adolescents. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 1-17. doi.org/10.1007/s10803-023-06186-1.
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Reports

- Mangan, C., Clapham, H., James, B., Gatfield, O., & Malone, S. (2023). Community insights and unheard perspectives: Recommendations for inclusive community engagement in the National Autism Strategy Final Report. Autism CRC.
- Adams, D., Girdler, S., Malone, S., Lawson, W., Carroll, A., Colville, O., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., Jackson, E., Timms, L., Berg, V., Whitehouse-Smith, P., Picken, T., & Afsharnejad, B. (2023). Research evidence and policy landscape mapping to inform the National Autism Strategy: Final report. Autism CRC.
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- Simpson, K., van der Meer, L., Adams, D., Bowen, R., Chandran, H., Gable, A., Heyworth, M., Heussler, H., Hogg, G., Patrick, L., Paynter, J., & Westerveld, M. (2023). A systematic review of how quality of life and wellbeing is measured in autistic individuals with and without complex support and/or communication needs. Autism CRC.
- van der Meer, L., Moriah, C., Patrick, L., & Waddington, W. (2023). How do we get autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand? Final Report. Autism CRC.

Appendix 3: Resources developed 2023-24

Publications

Goodall, E., Dargue, N., Hinze, E., Sulek, R., Varcin, K., Waddington, H., Whitehouse, A. J. O., Wicks, R., Allen, G., Best, J., Eapen, V., Evans, K., Hiremath, M., Foster, W., Lawson, W., Toby, S., & Trembath, D. (2023). National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia. Autism CRC.

Research snapshots, FAQs and Easy Read summaries

Adams, D., Girdler, S., Malone, S., Lawson, W., Carroll, A., Colville, O., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., Jackson, E., Timms, L., Berg, V., Whitehorne-Smith, P., Picen, T., & Afsharnejad, B. (2023). Research evidence and policy landscape mapping to inform the National Autism Strategy: Easy Read Summary. Autism CRC.

Mangan, C., Clapham, H., James, B., Gatfield, O., & Malone, S. (2023). Community insights and unheard perspectives: Recommendations for inclusive community engagement in the National Autism Strategy. Easy Read Summary. Autism CRC.

Saggers, B., Mavropoulou, S., Carrington, S., Paynter, J., Adams, D., Malone, S., Westerveld, M., Mc Keown, G., Constantine, C., Bartlett, T. B. C., Gately, J., Heath, S., Porter, A., Stewart, C. J., Winspear-Schillings, H., Nepal, S., Dunne, J., Saggers, A., Wilde, J., van Leent, L., Wright, N., Marsh, C., & O'Connor, K. (2023). Removing educational barriers in Australian schools for autistic students: Current trends, gaps, and recommendations in educational research, inclusive policy, and educational practice. Research Snapshot. Autism CRC.

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van der Meer, L., Moriah, C., Patrick, L., & Waddington, W. (2023). How do we get autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand? Community Summary. Autism CRC.

van der Meer, L., Moriah, C., Patrick, L., & Waddington, W. (2023). How do we get autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand? Easy Read Summary. Autism CRC.

inclusionED practices [inclusionED.edu.au]

Autism CRC. (2024). Communicating with parents (Secondary). Autism CRC. inclusioned.edu.au/practices/secondary-communicating-parents.

Autism CRC. (2024). Establish classroom expectations (Secondary). Autism CRC. inclusioned.edu.au/practices/establish-classroom-expectations.

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Autism CRC. (2024). Understanding and supporting comprehension (Secondary). Autism CRC. inclusioned.edu.au/practices/secondary-supporting-comprehension.

Autism CRC. (2024). Use visual schedules (Secondary). Autism CRC. inclusioned.edu.au/practices/secondary-visual-schedules.

Short courses and lectures

Autism CRC. (2024). National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism: Short course (2nd edition). Autism CRC. autismcrc.com.au/elearning.

Autism CRC. (2024). Supporting autistic children and their families: eLecture and activity. Autism CRC. autismcrc.com.au/elearning.

Autism CRC. (2024). Supporting autistic children and their families: Short course. Autism CRC. autismcrc.com.au/elearning.

Appendix 4: Conference presentations 2023-24

Adams, D., Girdler, S., Malone, S., Lawson, W., Colville, O., & Carroll, A. (2024, May 15-18). "1,000 insights": Views from the autistic and autism communities on the problems experienced by autistic people in education, health, mental health and the justice system [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Adams, D., Malone, S., Carroll, A., Colville, O., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., & Girdler, S. (2023, December 6-7). Autistic people's experiences with the justice system: An umbrella review [Poster presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Adams, D., Malone, S., Carroll, A., Colville, O., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., & Girdler, S. (2023, December 6-7). Autistic people and their supporters' experiences with the mental healthcare system: An umbrella review [Poster presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Ambrose, K., Simpson, K., & Adams, D. (2023, December 6-7). The impact of anxiety on the academic outcomes of Autistic children and adolescents [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Arnold, S. R., Brett, S., Lawson, L. P., den Houting, J., Black, M. H., & Trollor, J. N. (2024, May 15-18). Suitability of the DSM-5 social anxiety disorder severity scale for autistic adults [Conference presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Arnold, S., Manalaz, J., & Higgins, J. (2023, October 17). Our emerging understanding of autistic burnout syndrome [Webinar]. Australian Psychological Society Psychology of Intellectual Disability & Autism (APS PIDA) Interest Group.

Carroll, A., Malone, S., Colville, O., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., Girdler, S., & Adams, D. (2023, December 6-7). Autistic experiences with the physical healthcare system: An umbrella review [Poster presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

D'Arcy, E., McKell, A., Afsharnejad, B., Milbourn, B., Berg, V., Whitehorne-Smith, P., Timms, L., Jackson, E., Malone, S., & Adams, D. (2023, December 6-7). Employment of autistic people: Considerations from an umbrella review [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Kuzminski, R., Lawson, W., Girdler, S., Black, M., Bolte, S., & Milbourn, B. (2024, May 15-18). Understanding the content validity and clinical utility of a quality of life measure designed with and for autistic adults [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Malone, S., Colville, O., Carroll, A., Simpson, K., D'Arcy, E., Girdler, S., & Adams, D. (2023, December 6-7). Teachers' knowledge of and attitudes towards autism: An umbrella review [Poster presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Mangan, C., Clapham, H., James, B., & Gatfield, O. (2023, December 6-7). Community insights and unheard perspectives: Recommendations for inclusive community engagement in research and policy [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Mangan, C., Clapham, H., James, B., & Gatfield, O. (2024, May 15-18). Community insights and unheard perspectives: The importance of inclusive community engagement in public policy development [Conference presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Moriah, C., Patrick, L., Waddington, H., & van der Meer, L. (2023, December 6-7). Getting autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand: What could we do in the future? [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Patrick, L., Moriah, C., Waddington, H., & van der Meer, L. (2023, December 6-7) How do we get autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand? Participatory research approach [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Paynter, J., Westerveld, M., Malone, S., Marsh, C., O'Connor, K., Adams, D., Mavropoulou, S., Carrington, S., & Saggars, B. (2023, December 6-7). Educational success for Australian autistic students: Teacher, parent and allied health perspectives on strengths, needs, enablers and barriers [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Simpson, K., Paynter, J., Westerveld, M., van der Meer, L., Patrick, L., Hogg, G., Heussler, H., Heyworth, M., Adams, D., Gable, A., Bowen, R., & Chandran, H. S. (2024, May 15-18). How is quality of life and well-being measured for autistic people with complex support and/or communication needs? [Poster Presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Sulek, R., Wicks, R., Hinze, E., Dargue, N., Dempsey, B., Goodall, E., Groves, L., Trembath, D., Waddington, H., Whitehouse, A., & Varcin, K. (2024, May 15-18). Community views on the assessment and diagnosis of autism: Principles to guide clinical practice [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Trembath, D. (2023, November 4-5). The National Guideline for supporting learning, participation and wellbeing of autistic children and their families in Australia: What it means for you [Keynote Presentation]. My Life My Decisions 2023 Conference, Wollongong, Australia.

Trembath, D., Goodall, E., Allen, G., Best, J., Dargue, N., Eapen, V., Evans, K., Foster, W., Hinze, E., Hiremath, M., Lawson, W., Sulek, R., Toby, S., Varcin, K., Waddington, H., Whitehouse, A., & Wicks, R. (2024, 15-18 May). Update of the National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Trembath, D., & Sparks, J. (2024, May 1-3). Implementing the Australian National Autism Guidelines [Conference presentation]. PRECI 2024 Conference, Surfers Paradise, Australia.

Waddington, H., Moriah, C., van der Meer, L., & Patrick, L. (2023, December 6-7). How do we get autism supports right in Aotearoa New Zealand? Understanding current supports [Conference presentation]. Australasian Society for Autism Research 2023 Conference (ASfAR), Christchurch, New Zealand.

Waddington, H., & Patrick, L. (2024, May 15-18). Getting autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

White, J., & Black, M. H. (2023, November 22-24). Inclusion of autistic high school students through strengths-based approaches: Educators' experiences and perspectives [Conference presentation]. Educational Research Association of Singapore International Conference and the World Education Research Association 2023 Focal Meeting (ERAS-WERA), Singapore.

White, J., Black, M. H., Williams, P. J., & McGarry, S. (2023, November 26-30). Strengths-based approaches for high schoolers on the autism spectrum [Conference presentation]. Australian Association for Research in Education 2023 Conference (AARE), Melbourne, Australia.

White, J., McGarry, S., & Black, M. H. (2024, May 15-18). Educators' experiences and perspectives on inclusion for autistic high school students through strengths-based approaches [Poster presentation]. International Society for Autism Research 2024 Annual Meeting (INSAR), Melbourne, Australia.

Appendix 5: Glossary

ADAG	Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Guideline / National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism in Australia
AITSL	Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership
ALSAA	Australian Longitudinal Study of Autistic Adults
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia Medal
ASAN AUNZ	Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASfAR	Australasian Society for Autism Research Conference
Aspect	Autism Spectrum Australia
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Autism SA	Autism South Australia
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CU	Curtin University
DSS	Australian Government Department of Social Services
GCAD	Graduate Certificate in Autism Diagnosis
GP	General Practitioner
GU	Griffith University
IEST	Integrated Employment Success Tool
ILC	Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program
INSAR	International Society for Autism Research
IP	Intellectual property
LASA	Longitudinal Study of Australian Students with Autism
NAS or the Strategy	National Autism Strategy
NCCD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability

NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NESA	New South Wales Education Standards Association
Neurodiversity	Concept that neurological differences – such as Autism, ADHD and Tourette Syndrome – are to be recognised, accepted and respected as any other human variation.
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NSW	New South Wales
OT	Occupational Therapy
OTA	Occupational Therapy Australia
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QED	Queensland Department of Education
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
Roadmap	National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic Australians / Health and Mental Health Roadmap
SACG	Supporting Autistic Children Guideline / National Guideline for supporting the learning, participation, and wellbeing of autistic children and their families in Australia
SAS	Secret Agent Society
SASLA	Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism
SAS-WOC	Secret Agent Society Whole-of-Class program
SPA	Speech Pathology Australia
SST	Social Science Translated Pty Ltd – a wholly owned subsidiary of Autism CRC (formerly Social Skills Training Pty Ltd)
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UQ	The University of Queensland
UTAS	University of Tasmania
UWA	The University of Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation
WMR	Wesley Medical Research

Our values



Inclusion

Valuing lived experience



Innovation

Solutions for long term challenges



Evidence

Truth in practice



Independence

Integrity through autonomy



Cooperation

Capturing opportunities together



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