

Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders

formerly the Autism Council of Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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FIRST AUTISM PREVALENCE STUDY FOR AUSTRALIA

An exhaustive three year study commissioned by the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders into the prevalence of autism, led by Perth paediatrician Dr John Wray, has concluded that one in 160 Australian children aged between 6 and 12 years have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) – that is over 10,000 Australian children in that age group.

The finding is consistent with the latest overseas research on the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders.

The report's finding could be extrapolated to suggest that as many as 125,000 people may have some form of ASD in Australia. Given the difficulties faced by many families, then half a million Australians could be impacted by ASD.

"This study sets clear benchmarks for early intervention planning and other services," Advisory Board spokesman Mick Clark said today. "The Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders will seek discussions with governments at an early opportunity to better plan and fund early intervention, education and support services."

The report bears out the need for a national protocol of no more than 3 months waiting time for a diagnosis and assessment by multidisciplinary teams who are funded to provide these services. Further, no family should experience a waiting period of more than 3 months between diagnosis and early intervention service provision.

"The report reveals that in some parts of Australia, diagnosis and intervention can take up to two years – this is far too long," Mr Clark said.

The Advisory Board commissioned this important study with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) as there was no accurate and reliable figure on ASD prevalence in Australia. Researchers took great care in ensuring an accurate national figure was extracted from many sources including the Commonwealth Government's own statistics.

"The important thing was to get an accurate sounding, for the first time, on how prevalent the disorder is.

"We should act promptly as a community to tackle ASD after diagnosis, to give those who have an autism spectrum disorder the best chance in life. In most cases, early intervention followed by schooling that uses autism-specific interventions can bring real improvement," Mr Clark said.

The report is also a useful snapshot of what services are available nationally, and where strengths and weaknesses lie in diagnosis and intervention.

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The report calls for a national approach to collecting data such as a virtual register, and calls for further tightening in data collection to help research the causes and effective treatments of ASD.

The report will be presented and discussed at the 2007 Biennial Australian Conference on ASD at Royal Pines Resort on the Gold Coast on March 15. The full report can be found at:
<http://www.autismaus.com.au/aca/pdfs/PrevalenceReport.pdf>

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