



The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Subject: **inappropriate response from the Health Department**

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, known as *A4*, [wrote to you on 29/10/2020](#) about an especially poor approach to a young autistic student. Apparently, you passed our letter on to the Health Department who wrote an alarmingly inappropriate response (MC20-042016, 4/1/2021).

The primary issues raised, and the questions we asked, relate to behavioural support for autistic Australians (including children and school students) and police training. The Department's response ignores these issues completely. Their response invokes [A4's unanswered questions policy](#) and requires that we interpret their response especially negatively.

The reason we wrote to you in the first place was because the Health Department's response to autistic Australians is at best severely uninformed but is mostly simple neglect. The Health Department does not recognise the needs of autistic Australians.

Their response to our letter (to you) is typical of their misguided attitude to autism. There are many more examples of young autistic children missing out on the essential behaviour support they need in school and in the rest of their lives. The fundamental issue is that young autistic children cannot access the clinical behaviour support they need because the Health Department simply has no idea about (or intention to address) the behavioural needs of autistic Australians. Unfortunately, untrained police are left to tackle the consequences and the results are often very bad.

Australia has no registration for "behaviour support" services and very little training is available.

Lack of trauma recognition and support for autistic people to address the life-long issues arising from experiences like this also has especially poor consequences.

The Health Department's response to our letter says, "I want to highlight some of the activities the Australian Government is doing to improve the care and treatment of people with disability".

It goes on to talk about "developing a Primary Health Care Plan (10 Year Plan) to make the primary health care system more integrated, accessible and equitable for all Australian". Notice that this "development" process did not

involve consultation with autistic people, people who are frequently excluded from the existing system - as is shown in evidence provided to the Disability Royal Commission. The development process for Health's plan does not recognise the existing exclusion of autistic people from many health services and does not take any steps to address the issues. The first step to finding solutions is to recognise the problem, and the Health Department has not yet made the first step in relation to autistic Australians. When they say "all Australians" they exclude autistic Australians.

The response goes on to talk about "The National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for People with Intellectual Disability (the Roadmap)". We understand from this that Health officials believe their "Roadmap" for Intellectual Disability somehow addresses autism. It does not. Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability are very different things; it is extremely concerning that Health officials do not know this.

The Roadmap does not once mention autism.

They say, "The Roadmap is underpinned by an inclusive approach ...". Clearly it is not.

They say, "The Roadmap is underpinned by an inclusive approach, to meet the needs of all people with intellectual disability, including those who have autism". We understand that many health officials believe around 70% of autistic people have an intellectual disability. Research suggests that just 30-50% (at most half) of autistic people *apparently* have ID. So, the ID category does not even include *most* autistic people.

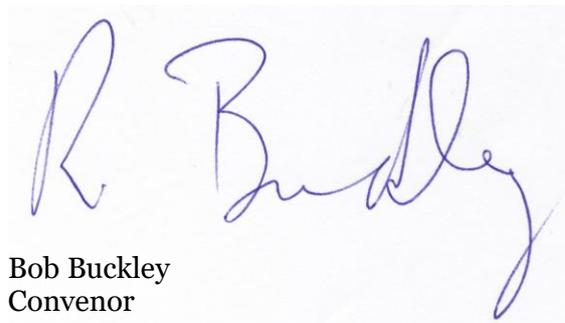
The DSM-5 and the ICD-11 both regard ASD as the primary disability and intellectual disability as an additional diagnosis; addressing ID does not address their support needs due to their ASD.

Health officials have a completely inadequate understanding of autism.

They have a chronic lack of autism awareness showing that Health officials cannot develop meaningful policy for autistic Australians. Refusal to recognise autism as a distinct disability with distinct needs.

We hope that you care enough about autistic people to respond yourself to this complaint about the Health Department's complete failure to address the issues we raised in our 29/10/2020 letter.

Yours sincerely



Bob Buckley
Convenor

5/1/2021