

- **What does a National Autism Strategy need to achieve?**

The National Autism Strategy should create practical guidelines for implementation of Autism-related supports at all levels: community, local government area, state level including schools and medical services and government organisations. Even more, an updated training on the diagnosis of Autism not only of children but of women should be a priority.

- **How can the Strategy support the rights, autonomy and diversity of the Autistic community?**

The rights of Autistic people are unfortunately being affected even by local government area councils who are uninterested in stepping up their supports in line with what has agreed with the NDIS when it was created 10 years ago.

For example, as a migrant Woman of colour from a Latin American country, I was gaslighted by several GPs, child nurses at local community health centre when I explained my concerns for my then 2 year old having meltdowns. Took a long time as a private patient to find available spots for a paediatrician, OT assessment and then Clinical Paediatric Psychologist as there are not enough appointments. Now I have been diagnosed as Autistic as well but even in my experience, the previous several GPs, the 3 previous psychologists and 1 Psychiatrist kept saying I am only an anxious person when in reality I am an Autistic Level 1 woman.

The diversity of the Autistic spectrum should be supported by having people with lived experience as the Subject Matter Experts. Then they allied health professionals and medical team as long as they remember they have to see Autism not only under a deficit based model.

- **What needs to improve so Autistic people are better supported across their whole life?**

Autistic individuals have to jump a lot of hoops just to be heard and to get a formal diagnosis. Once that happens, then not everyone is supported under the NDIS. There should be supports in the form of drop-in centres (like Headspace) for us Autistics, regardless of Level or NDIS access, to be able to get guidance on the spot.

It is absolutely disappointing that local councils and state government (schools) push Autistic individuals to get look for supports through NDIS rather than them directly facilitating our access to their facilities and services.

Those spaces could be audited for Autism-friendly benchmarks or some sort of certification that is implemented soon. That would be the starting point for real inclusion.

Autism is a dynamic disability hence a person's needs for supports fluctuate through the time (even on a daily basis). There is no certain stage of life that will be "easier" for Autistic individuals. Just for starters, the fact that someone is Autistic, already means that the level and type of friendships and relationships the person will develop will not be at the same level of those people who are non-Autistic. How then, the government assumes that we as Autistics can have support networks (friendships, families, community groups) to help us thrive?

For support of early childhood, the government should make it a priority to have an updated Autism screener done by GP just like the vaccination scheme. Otherwise, some parents do not notice the differences in their child or even more, deny there is any need for further assessment and in those cases, children get diagnosed once in school. Very valuable early intervention opportunities are lost by that time.

- **What can be done to better support autistic people from different population groups**

Include people from each of those priority groups in the Strategy by opening an online platform or website where we can submit our opinions and views.

For individuals of Diverse cultural backgrounds, start by organising information into different languages and creating an online portal with easy to understand and practical information that is worded in a positive way. That could help with the stigma attached to Autism in lots of multicultural communities.

- **What might help to improve people's understanding of Autism population groups?**

Government sector (local, state and national) organisations and services. Education sector (public and private at all levels including Childcares and preschools. Medical professionals (from admin staff, nurses, GPs, ED staff to specialists).

Lack of understanding means Autistic people keep being seen as badly behaved, rude, too much, stubborn or even worse, that we are saying we are Autistic because is trendy.