

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

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the aim?

To develop an evidence-based framework for assessing, differentiating, and reporting children's functional strengths and support needs.

Why has the work been commissioned?

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. 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.

Why is Autism CRC coordinating this work?

Autism CRC has a long history of cross-sector collaboration leading to the development of practical, evidence-based recommendations and resources that support sound decision-making and children's and families' access to safe, effective, and appropriate supports.

What questions will this project answer?

1. What principles should guide assessment, differentiation, and reporting of children's functional strengths and support needs, in the age range of 0-12 years?
2. How should children's functional strengths and support needs be assessed, differentiated, and reported?
 - a. What approach should be used?
 - b. What information is most critical?
 - c. What tools are available?
 - d. What competencies are required?
 - e. What safeguarding should occur?

Who will use the framework?

The framework will provide a common way for users to understand the individual strengths and support needs that a child and their family may have and, where necessary, support those needs in any service system – whether as a practitioner, NDIS planner, school principal, policy-maker or family member.

How will functional strengths and support needs be conceptualised?

Children's strengths and support needs will be conceptualised using the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF).

How will the questions be answered?

The project will broadly follow the same methodology used to address the questions set out in the two Autism CRC National Guidelines. This will involve an iterative, co-designed process of evidence gathering, evidence synthesis, and consensus building involving community, professional, and Government stakeholders. Key elements of the project will be a review of research evidence; a review of existing frameworks and tools used in Australia and abroad; community consultation; and co-production with community, professional, and Government organisations and agencies.

Who is doing this work?

The project will be co-led by A/Prof David Trembath and neurodivergent speech pathologist, Amy Fitzpatrick. They will bring together a team of people with diverse personal and professional backgrounds, including lived experience relevant to the project. The framework is being co-produced with the stakeholder community representing 24 community and professional organisations, associations, and societies across the health, disability and education sectors.

How have individuals and organisations been involved?

Earlier this year, we invited everyone in the community to share ideas on how the framework should work via a community consultation process. Using a co-designed process the project team will work with community, professional and government organisations and agencies to co-produce the framework.

What about diagnosis?

The framework will focus on assessment, differentiation, and reporting of children's functional strengths and support needs, irrespective of whether they have a diagnosed developmental condition or not, or whether they may receive a diagnosis in the future. This approach will emphasise the importance of understanding each child and family for who they are, and the context in which they live, and thus provide the most helpful information for planning supports, if a specific need is indicated.

What are the proposed outcomes?

The project will deliver an evidence-based national framework for assessment, decision-making and information sharing; along with supporting documents detailing the aims, methods, inputs and outcomes process through which the framework was developed.

What is the proposed timeline?

It is anticipated that the framework and report will be delivered in the second half of 2024.