

Call for Expressions of Interest

National Autism Strategy Oversight Council and Working Groups

Background

The Australian Government has committed to the co-design and development of a National Autism Strategy (Strategy). It will be grounded in evidence and informed by the experiences of autistic people, their families and carers, and those who work to support them.

The national consultation process and co-design of the Strategy will be guided by the National Autism Strategy Oversight Council and assisted by four Working Groups, considering:

1. Social Inclusion
2. Economic Inclusion
3. Diagnosis, Supports and Services
4. National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People.

The Commonwealth Minister for Social Services, The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP, has overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the National Autism Strategy.

The members of the Oversight Council and the first three Working Groups are to be appointed by the Minister for Social Services.

The National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People Working Group is being established by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the role of the Oversight Council?

The Oversight Council will inform and guide work to support the co-design, development and launch of the National Autism Strategy. The Oversight Council will play a significant role in informing and guiding the national consultation. It will also oversee the development of the draft National Autism Strategy, based on feedback received from the extensive consultations and various other government reviews and inquiries.

The Oversight Council will inform and report to the Minister for Social Services throughout the development, finalisation and implementation stages of the Strategy. The Minister for Social Services is the decision-maker for the development and implementation of the Strategy.

At its first meeting, the Oversight Council will agree on its draft Terms of Reference and a draft Work Program for the Oversight Council and Working Groups. These will be provided to the Minister for consideration.

The Oversight Council will operate throughout the development of the Strategy and its launch.

Who will be on the Oversight Council?

The exact size of the Oversight Council is yet to be determined but it is envisaged it will comprise:

- no less than eight (8) autistic and autism community members*;
- two (2) members from the research and professional community (eg, health, education, social work); and
- six (6) members from the government sector.

* Please note that, the number of autistic and autism community members may be more than indicated to achieve the desired mix of skills, experience and understanding on the Oversight Council.

Given the diversity of the autistic community, it is important that the Oversight Council bring experience and understanding of many individual perspectives. This includes an individual's background, identities and roles.

An individual member may bring experience from multiple perspectives. Please mention these in your Expression of Interest (EOI).

The Oversight Council will, as a collective, bring significant and contemporary experience, skills and understanding of the many strengths and challenges of the autistic community.

Government sector representatives will come from the Department of Social Services, the Department of Health and Aged Care, the Department of Education, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Oversight Council will be Co-chaired by one of its autistic members and the representative from the Department of Social Services.

The Oversight Council may invite advice from individuals from time-to-time who have particular expertise or experience relevant to the Oversight Council's current considerations. Please be sure to highlight any specific areas of expertise and interest, personally or professionally, in your Expression of Interest.

What are the four Working Groups?

Four Working Groups are to be formed. Each group will focus on a different outcome area. The groups are:

1. **Social Inclusion**, with outcome areas:
 - promote, uphold and protect safety, rights and justice
 - build inclusive communities
 - build understanding and acceptance of autism within wider community
 - access to personal and community services and supports
 - accessible information and communication systems
 - build capacity (autonomy) to exercise choice and control when accessing services
 - housing and accommodation.
2. **Economic Inclusion**, with outcome areas:
 - choice and opportunity in education and learning
 - improve transition from education to tertiary education and employment
 - increase employment and employment options
 - strengthen financial independence and security
 - accessible transport of choice
 - build capacity to exercise choice and control when accessing services.
3. **Diagnosis, Supports and Services**, with outcome areas:
 - adequacy of and access to services and supports
 - improve service integration, coordination and pathways

- build on research and data
- assessment and diagnosis
- early intervention supports
- advocacy services
- supporting families and carers
- inclusive and accessible housing and accommodation
- build capacity to exercise choice and control when accessing services
- research, data and measurement to support continuing improvement.

4. **National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People**, with outcome areas:

- best practice models of care
- support to navigate the health system
- education and training of health professionals
- improved coordination of health, mental health supports and other sectors
- research, data and measurement to support continuing improvement.

There may be other outcome areas relevant to Working Group considerations added to those identified above during the development of the Strategy.

What is the role of the Working Groups?

The Working Groups will consult and collaborate with each other. They will also engage with other relevant Commonwealth, state and territory government programs, policies, strategies, reviews and inquiries. Working Group members representing the Australian Government will consult and engage with their counterparts in state and territory governments and other Australian Government agencies, as appropriate.

Who will be on the Working Groups?

As a collective, the membership of the Working Groups will have significant and contemporary experience, skills and understanding of the Working Groups outcome areas.

The size of the Working Groups is yet to be determined. Membership will be flexible and may change over time as different issues and requirements arise, and varied skills and experience are needed.

The Working Groups may also invite advice from individuals from time-to-time who have particular expertise or experience relevant to the Group's current considerations. Please be sure to highlight any specific areas of expertise and interest, personally or professionally, in your Expression of Interest.

Who will decide who is on the Oversight Council and Working Groups?

The Minister for Social Services, The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP, will appoint the members of the Oversight Council and the Working Groups for Social Inclusion, Economic Inclusion, and Diagnosis, Supports and Services.

The Working Group for the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People is being formed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. It will work with the Oversight Council and other Working Groups. **This Working Group is not included in this call for Expressions of Interest.**

How will the Oversight Council and initial Working Groups be formed?

The Minister has asked the organisations listed below to seek Expressions of Interest from the autistic, autism, research and professional communities. This will assist the formation of the Oversight Council and the initial membership of the first three of the four Working Groups.

- The [Australian Autism Alliance](#), [Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia](#), the [Australian Federation of Disability Organisations](#), [First Peoples Disability Network Australia](#), the [National Ethnic Disability Alliance](#) and [Women With Disabilities Australia](#) for nominations from the autistic and autism community; and
- [Autism CRC](#) and the [Australasian Society for Autism Research](#) for nominations from the research and professional sector.

These organisations will call for Expressions of Interest from individuals and organisations in the autistic, autism, research and professional communities. They will use various channels to do this. Those receiving information about the Expressions of Interest may forward the opportunity to others in their communities. Expressions of Interest are being collated at a central point to ensure all nominations are captured.

Following the closure of the Expression of Interest period at **12.00pm (AEDT) on Monday, 27 March 2023**, those same organisations will review all applications and compile two lists of candidates with the experience, skills and understanding sought for the Oversight Council and the Working Groups. There will be one list from the autistic and autism community nominees and one from the research and professional community nominees.

The Minister will then make selections for membership and offer positions.

How often are the Oversight Council and the Working Groups likely to meet?

While timeframes are yet to be determined, the Oversight Council will likely meet every two months. Working Groups would likely meet with similar regularity. There may be some work to be undertaken outside of meeting times.

It is anticipated that meetings will be up to three hours and a half day preparation will be required. Suitable accommodations will be made to allow everyone to participant fully.

It is anticipated that the Oversight Council will first meet before the end of April 2023. Working Groups will meet after the Oversight Council first meets. The schedule of these meetings is yet to be determined.

Will the meetings be held face-to-face or online?

Meetings will be both face-to-face and online. The first meeting is expected to be face-to-face at a venue that is yet to be determined. The Oversight Council will decide which future meetings are to be held face-to-face or online.

Suitable accommodations will be made to allow everyone to participate fully. If you are selected as a member of the Oversight Council or a Working Group, you will be asked about your accessibility needs. This includes any communication, mobility and sensory needs.

Before each meeting, members will be provided with information to help them prepare and provide a degree of predictability. For example, this would include an agenda and, for face-to-face meetings, a description of the location and venue.

Will members be paid for their time?

Yes. Oversight Council and Working Group members will be paid if they meet the following requirements:

- they are not employees of the Australian Government; and
- they do not receive a salary from their usual place of employment while participating in Oversight Council and Working Group business.

Non-government Oversight Council and Working Group members will be remunerated for their time spent working on Oversight Council and Working Group business.

The Department of Social Services will arrange travel and accommodation for Oversight Council and Working Group members. The Department will pay costs directly related to attendance at face-to-face meetings, as required.

When will I find out if I'm chosen for the Oversight Council or a Working Group?

It is anticipated that the membership of the Oversight Council will be determined in April.

Initial membership of the Working Groups will be determined in time for the formation of the Working Groups ahead of their first meetings.

Will I have an opportunity to assist the development of the National Autism Strategy if I am not appointed to the Oversight Council or Working Groups?

Yes. The process for developing the National Autism Strategy will include comprehensive co-design and national consultation.

The specific timings for the national consultations are currently being considered. These will commence later in 2023. Some of the consultative approaches may include surveys, public community consultations, online forums, focus groups, individual and small group forums.

Consultation will ensure coverage of regional, rural and remote communities and will aim to engage hard-to-reach communities. This includes people whose main method of communication is not spoken language, people with intellectual disability, people with co-occurring conditions, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women and girls and the LGBTIQ+ community.

Consultations will be co-led and facilitated by autistic individuals and/or trusted organisations. First Nations consultation will be facilitated and led by a First Nations person and held on country. The process will be informed by the lessons learned through the consultation process for development of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31, the Supporting Autistic Children Guideline process and other recent Department of Social Services consultations.

Outcomes from the national consultation process will be provided to the Oversight Council and Working Groups, and will inform the co-design and development of the draft National Autism Strategy.

The Oversight Council and Working Groups may invite advice from individuals from time-to-time who have particular expertise or experience relevant to the Oversight Council's current considerations. Please be sure to highlight any specific areas of expertise and interest, personally or professionally, in your Expression of Interest.

Will state and territory governments be engaged in the development of the National Autism Strategy?

Yes. The Oversight Council will inform Disability Reform Ministers throughout the development, finalisation and implementation stages of the Strategy. The Oversight Council and Working Groups will engage with state and territory government departments as required.

The Oversight Council and Working Groups will also consider other Commonwealth, state and territory government strategies. These include the Victorian Government Autism Education Strategy and Victorian Autism Plan, and development of the South Australian Autism Strategy.

Will relevant information be provided to other reviews and enquiries be considered in the development of the National Autism Strategy, such as the Senate Select Committee on Autism enquiry?

Yes, where submissions have been made public.

What will happen with the information I provide in my EOI?

Autism CRC is assisting the community organisations with the EOI process. It is providing its information system for submission and receipt of expressions of interest.

Following the closing of the EOI period, all information submitted will be provided in two files. There will be one file for the EOIs received from the autistic and autism community and one for those received from the research and professional community. These will be provided to the organisations producing the lists of nominees for consideration by the Minister for Social Services. These organisations are described in relation to the Oversight Council and Working Group formation process above.

Both files will also be provided to the Minister for Social Services as a record of all expressions of interest received.

Once you submit your Expression of Interest you will receive an email confirming it has been received. This email will come from the organisations that sent out the call for Expressions of Interest. It will be sent out through the Autism CRC information system. The email will acknowledge and thank you for your submission and give you the contact details should you have any questions on the National Autism Strategy or Expression of Interest process.

The email will also ask if you wish to register to receive news and updates about the National Autism Strategy. These updates may come from the Department of Social Services and/or its communication partners. If you choose to register, then your details will be retained on a list of those wanting to receive updates.

The information you provide in your EOI will not be used for any other purposes.

How can I be assured that my EOI has been considered and not overlooked?

Expressions of Interest are being collated at a central point **to ensure all nominations are captured**. There will be points of verification during the process. A complete and unfiltered list of all Expression of Interest submissions, in all forms, will be provided to the Department of Social Services.

How can I express my interest in being involved in the Oversight Council or Working Groups?

There are a number of ways that you can express your interest. Please see the information in the following link <https://www.tfaforms.com/5050161>

What do I do if I have questions?

For more information about the:

- **Expression of Interest process for the autistic and autism community**, please email: chair@australianautismalliance.org.au
- **Expression of Interest process for the researcher and professional community**, please email: eoim@autismcra.com.au
- **National Autism Strategy**, go to the Department of Social Services website <https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/national-autism-strategy>

If you wish to be kept up to date with the National Autism Strategy development through the Department of Social Services, please email: autismpolicy@dss.gov.au