

Getting autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand

What could we do in the future?

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Project aim

To understand perspectives of the autistic and autism community on the future of autism support in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Background

Aotearoa New Zealand is in a period of change regarding the provision of autism support. As such, it is an important time to understand community views on possible future approaches to best ensure inclusion and supports for autistic people.

Methods

We shared a survey through social media and relevant autism, health, and educational organisations. An Easy Read version was available.

Participants

- 1042 members of the autistic and autism community participated
- Participant gender: 82% female, 13% male and 4% non-binary
- Participant ethnicity: 85% New Zealand European, 12% Māori, 6% Asian, 4% Pacific Peoples, and 5% 'other'
- The most common age range was 35-44 years
- Participant relationship/s to autism are shown in Figure 1

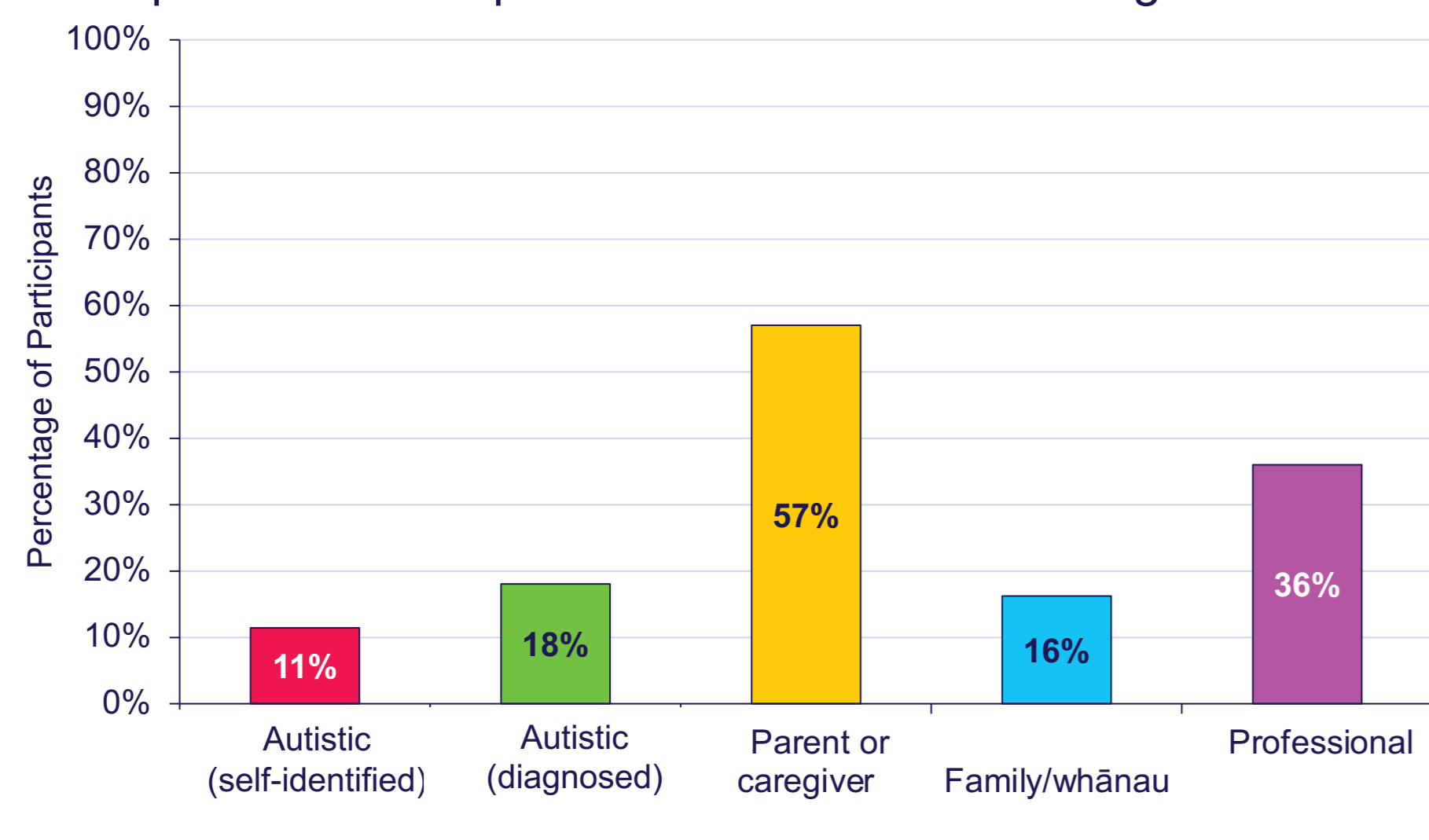


Figure 1. All participant relationship/s to autism (identities and roles) across groups.

Results

Neurodivergence and autism specific approaches were rated as significantly more helpful than the general disability approach.

Future autism support

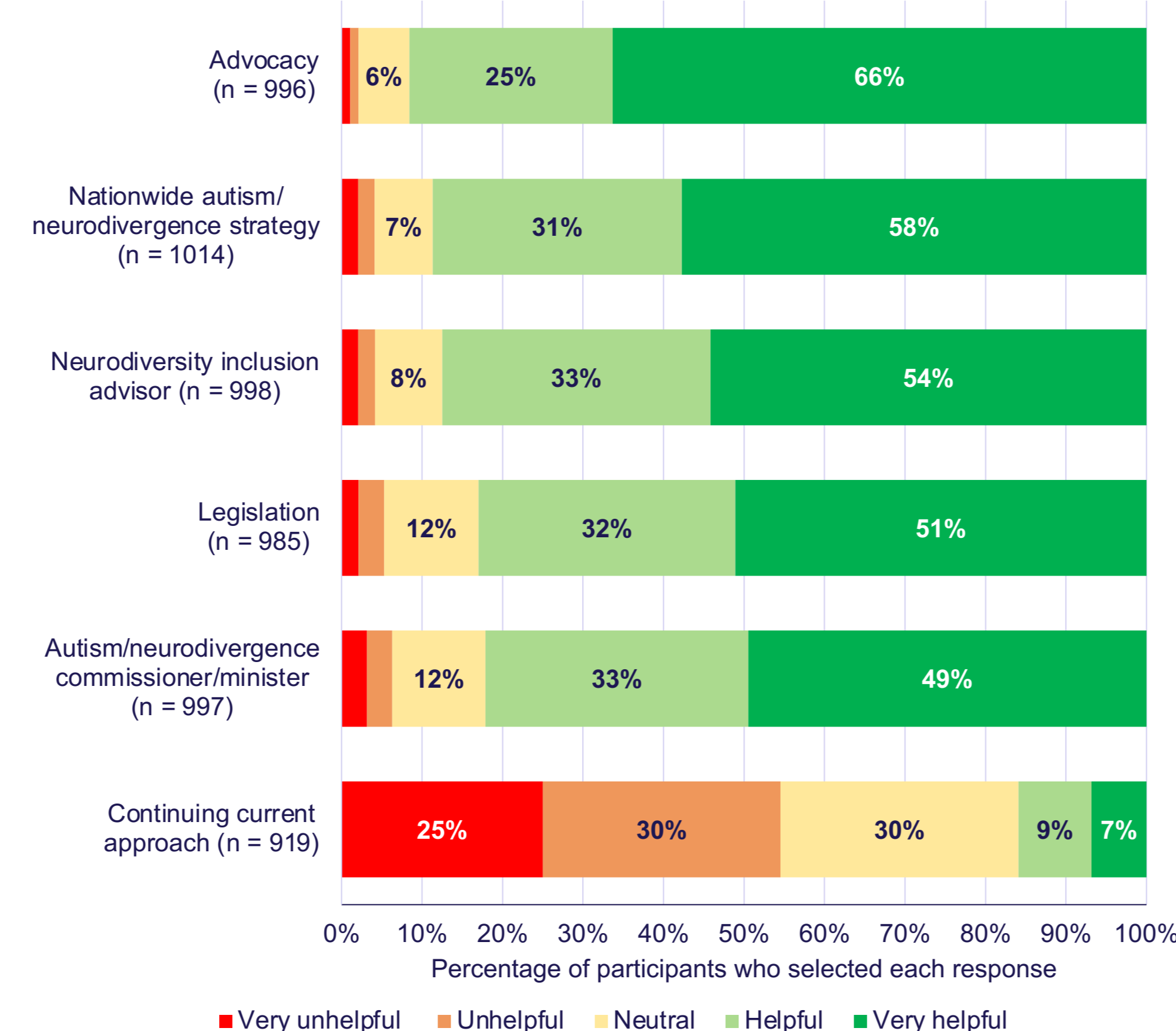


Figure 2: Helpfulness of potential future supports for autistic people

Advocacy was rated as significantly more helpful than all other future supports except a nationwide autism and neurodivergence strategy. Continuing with the current approach was rated as significantly less helpful than all other approaches.

Areas to address in future approaches

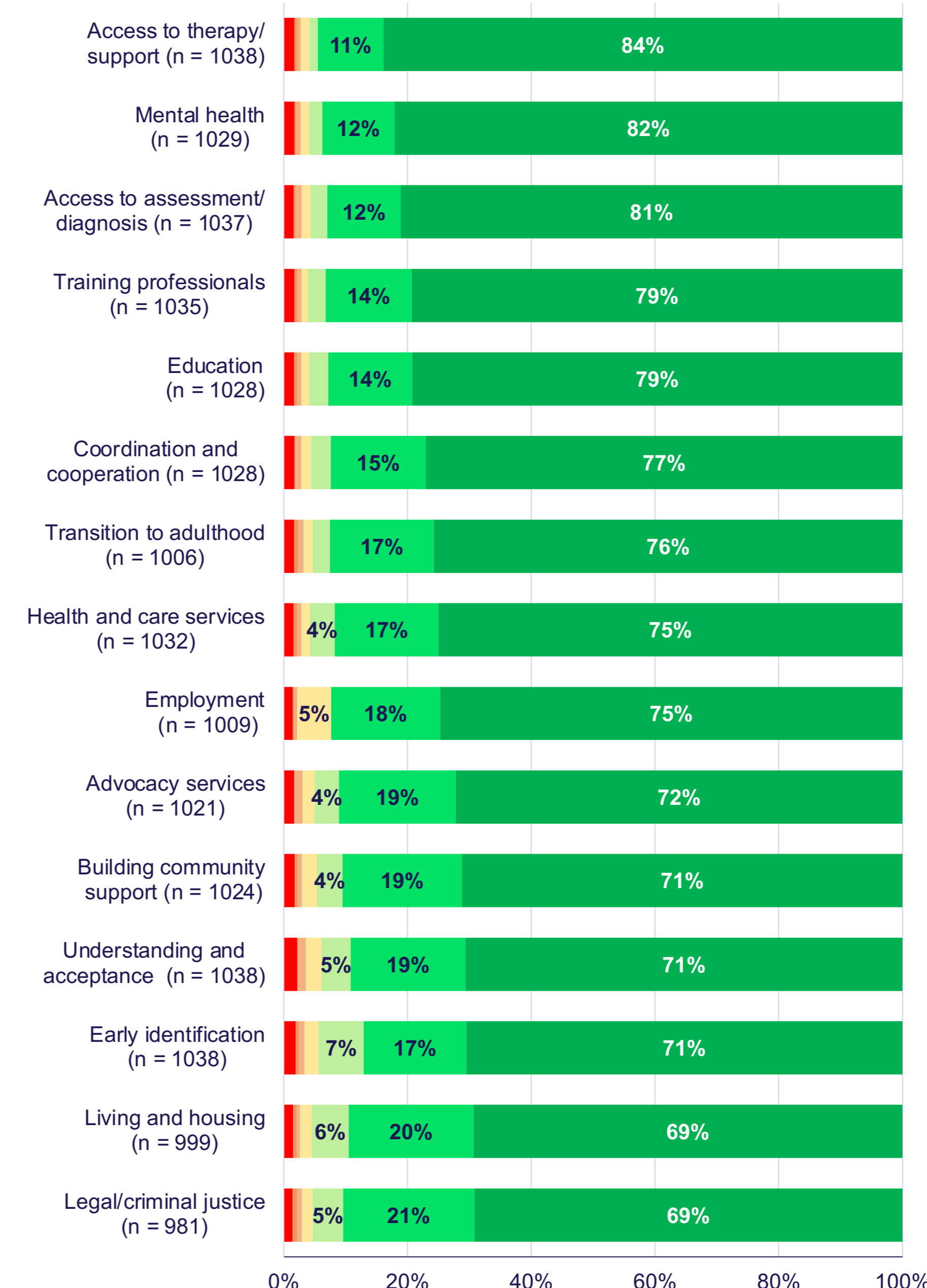


Figure 3: Importance of areas to address in future approaches to supporting autistic people

Access to therapy and support, mental health services/outcomes, access to assessment and diagnosis, training for professionals, and education/inclusion outcomes were significantly more important to address than early identification, living and housing, and support with the legal and criminal justice system.

People to include in future approaches

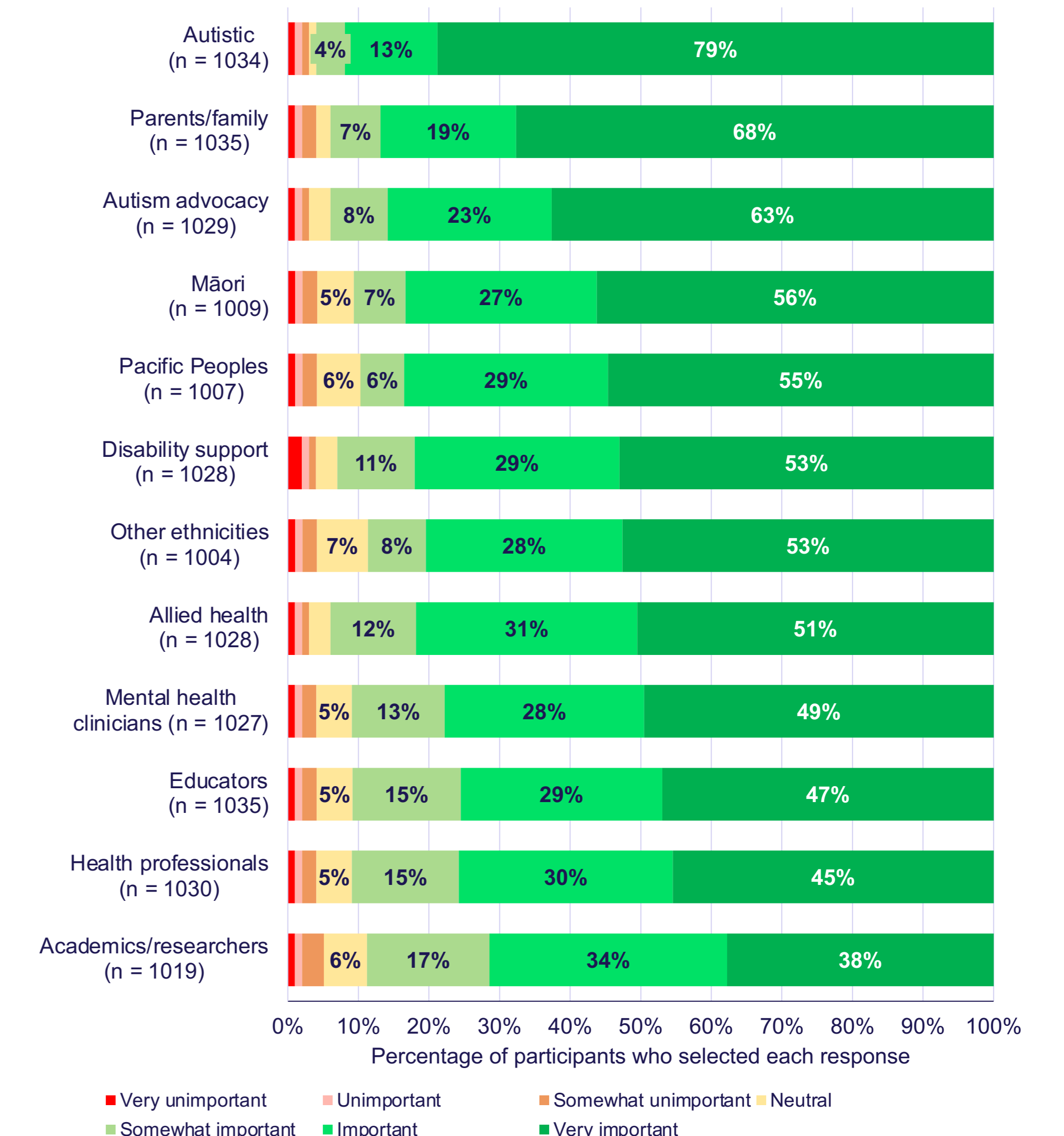


Figure 4: Importance of people to include in decision-making and developing future approaches.

Autistic people were rated as significantly more important to include than any other group, followed by parents/family, who were themselves significantly more important to include than remaining groups. Whilst still 'very important', academics and researchers were least important to include.

Conclusion

Results suggest a neurodivergence or autism specific approach encompassing advocacy services and a neurodivergence/autism strategy would suit the community in Aotearoa. Autistic people must be included in the development of any future approaches.

For more information

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