

Prepared by the Autism Advisor
team, Autism Victoria, trading as



The Helping Children with Autism Package

A guide for Victorian families

Welcome



Dear Parent/Carer,

Thank you for taking the important step of applying for the Helping Children with Autism funding

package, which we hope will assist you in providing early intervention therapy for your child.

The Autism Advisor team at Autism Victoria, trading as Amaze has developed this resource in response to the hundreds of parents who have spoken about how difficult it is to navigate the service system after their child receives a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

We have heard many stories from families who have told us that once they finally receive a diagnosis, usually after months (or even years) of trying to get to the bottom of their child's difficulties, they then begin this new journey of trying to gather information about the services, funding and support they can access for their child and family.

Even those families who spend hundreds of hours on the internet trying to learn about what they can access say that it is difficult to find the information you need if you don't even know what to look for.

This booklet is designed as a resource to help you navigate the services and supports available to families of children with ASD. It aims to provide you with information about all elements of the Helping Children with Autism package as well as related initiatives. It also contains information about what you can access after the FaHCSIA funding runs out, so it is a handy resource to refer back to even after your child's funding has ended.

Along with the support of your Autism Advisor, we hope you find this booklet a useful tool to refer to throughout your journey through the Helping Children with Autism funding package and beyond.

L. Castorina

Lia Castorina

Manager: Autism Advisor Service

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What is the Helping Children with Autism Package?

The Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package is an Australian Government initiative providing support for children aged 0 - 6 years with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), their families and carers. The package was introduced by the Federal Government in October 2008 and has a number of components:

Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package




\$12,000 of early intervention therapy and services for children with ASD until their 7th birthday. This is also referred to as Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) funding, or FaHCSIA funding




Medicare items for assessment and treatment for children with ASD, to be written before the child's 13th birthday.

[See page 14](#)




A national ASD website providing evidence-based information and advice for parents of young children with ASDs.

[See page 11](#)




PlayConnect Playgroups for children aged 0-6 with ASD and ASD-like symptoms

[See page 19](#)



Early Days workshops for parents and carers of children aged 0-6

[See page 19](#)



Positive Partnerships Workshops for parents and teachers of school-aged children

[See page 19](#)

Each state also has an Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (ASELCC) to provide an ASD-specific early learning program and long day care. The centre in Victoria is located at the Margot Prior Wing at La Trobe University, Bundoora. There are limited places available. To enquire, call 03 9479 2122 or email j.reynolds@latrobe.edu.au

About the \$12,000 Funding Component



The funding component of the Helping Children with Autism package is managed by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). Because of this, the funding is often referred to as **FaHCSIA funding**, or **Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) funding**.



Each state and territory has an Autism Advisor service to facilitate the package and to assist families to access the funding. In Victoria, the Autism Advisor team is based at Autism Victoria, trading as Amaze, in Carlton, Melbourne.



In total, you have a maximum of \$12,000 to spend on early intervention services. You cannot spend more than \$6,000 in any financial year (from 1 July to 30 June each year). You have access to the funding until the day before your child's seventh birthday, unless you spend your funding before then.



You can only use the funding with speech pathologists, occupational therapists and psychologists (and sometimes specialist teachers or intervention workers) who have been approved by FaHCSIA. You will find a list of providers for each region as an insert to this booklet. A link can be found on FaHCSIA's website www.fahcsia.gov.au/autism by clicking the *Early Intervention Service Providers* link about halfway down the page.



If you are currently working with a therapist, ask them if they are a member of FaHCSIA's panel. The list is constantly being updated, so sometimes your provider's name may not be on the list even though they offer services through the FaHCSIA funding.



Your Autism Advisor is your point of contact for any questions you have about the funding for the entire time you have access to the package. You can call or email your Autism Advisor at any time with any questions you have about the funding. Your Autism Advisor's details are on the Letter of Introduction that was sent to you.



You will receive a monthly statement (called a Family Activity Statement) so you can keep track of how much of your funding you have spent and how much you have remaining. If you have provided an email address, this will automatically be emailed to you, otherwise FaHCSIA will post it to your mailing address.



If your provider feels that a particular piece of equipment or a resource is important to your child's therapy, they can purchase this equipment using your child's funding if you agree. You can spend up to 35% of the funding in this way. It is important to remember that you can only spend your funding on equipment if your provider feels it is integral to the therapy goals.

FaHCSIA Funding: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I need to use the funding within two years?

A: Usually not, although it depends on the age of your child. Because you can spend up to \$6,000 in any financial year (July to June) and there is a maximum of \$12,000 to spend, many people mistakenly believe that they need to spend the full \$12,000 within two financial years. You can spread the funding over as many financial years as it takes before your child turns seven.

The exception to this is if your child turns seven within the first two financial years of your funding, then this would mean that you have limited time to use your funding and any funding that remains after your child's seventh birthday will be forfeited.



Contact your Autism Advisor if you want clarification on how long you have to access the funding in your particular circumstance.

Q: What happens if I spend over \$6000 in a financial year?

A: If you reach your \$6,000 limit before the end of the financial year, you will be required to pay for any additional therapy out of your own pocket or you will need to stop therapy until the next financial year begins. There is no way that you can borrow money from a previous or the next financial year to pay for therapy, even if your child is about to turn seven and you won't be able to access the remainder of your funding in the following financial year.

Q: My child is at school. Are we still able to use the funding?

A: Yes. You have access to the funding until your child turns seven (unless you spend the full \$12,000

before then). Some providers are able to travel to schools to deliver a session of therapy or to provide suggestions to the teacher on how to best meet the needs of your child. A number of providers offer school holiday programs or sessions after school or on weekends. Speak to your Autism Advisor for more information about providers in your area who may offer these services.

Q: My child is already involved in the Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS). How is this package different?

A: The ECIS program is a state-funded program for preschool aged children in Victoria with disabilities or developmental delays (for more information, see page 11). Your child might be enrolled in ECIS or you might be on the waiting list with Central Intake in your region. Your child might be receiving services at a centre

or you might have an early intervention worker come to your home on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

The HCWA funding is designed to be used in addition to your child's ECIS service, so if you are involved with ECIS you can access both packages at the same time.

The HCWA funding is a Commonwealth-funded program. Rather than being assigned a worker, families choose service providers (speech pathologists, occupational therapists, or psychologists) from the list approved by the government to provide therapy to your child.

Some ECIS centres are registered under both packages, so in addition to your ECIS service from your regular ECIS worker, you might also choose to enrol in a HCWA funded program at the same centre (e.g. a social skills group or extra therapy sessions to be paid for from your FaHCSIA funding). Although the service may operate under both packages, they must keep these different funding streams very

FaHCSIA Funding: Frequently Asked Questions

separate. For example, you cannot pay your ECIS term fees using your FaHCSIA funding.

Q: Can I use my funding with more than one provider?

A: Yes you can. The funding can be used with as many providers as you wish, as long as they are on FaHCSIA's provider panel. You may choose to do individual speech therapy with one provider, enrol in a social skills group with another provider, and complete a parent training program with a third provider, for example. Each provider will ask for a copy of your letter so make sure you bring it to your first appointment.

Q: Can I use the funding and the Medicare rebates at the same time?

A: Yes. There are a number of circumstances where you can be accessing the FaHCSIA funding and the Medicare rebates at the same time (see page 14 for information on the Medicare rebates that are available).

An example is if you are using a therapist who is not on FaHCSIA's panel but is registered with Medicare. You could use your Medicare rebates with this therapist, saving your FaHCSIA funding for use with a therapist who is registered for the HCWA program.

If you find that your funding does not spread across the entire financial year, you can also switch to using the Medicare rebates if you have spent your \$6,000 allocation, as long as your therapist is registered with Medicare. Speak to your provider about this when you are nearing the end of your funding.

Some parents choose to pay for some sessions each year, and claim the Medicare rebates for these sessions, to help spread their funding out over a longer period of time. Speak to your provider if this is something you would like to do.

You cannot ask the therapist to bill Medicare and then pay the gap using your FaHCSIA funding.

Q: My child really benefits from swimming lessons. Can I use the funding for this?

A: No. The funding only covers services by speech therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists who have been approved by the government. Whilst swimming can be of benefit to many children with ASDs, it is not considered a therapy and is therefore not approved under the funding.

Sometimes an occupational therapist might conduct sessions in a therapy pool. This is called Aquatic Occupational Therapy (see page 9). A provider in Victoria may choose to offer this therapy through the FaHCSIA funding because, unlike swimming lessons, it is run by a qualified occupational therapist for therapy purposes.

Q: Can I use this funding to purchase equipment? How do I go about doing this?

A: You can use up to 35% of your funding (a maximum of \$2,100 per financial year, and \$4,200 in total) on equipment and resources for therapeutic purposes. Keep in mind any amount you spend on equipment is coming out of your child's funding, so it means less to spend on therapy. ►



FaHCSIA Funding: Frequently Asked Questions

Equipment must be recommended and approved by your FaHCSIA provider as an important part of the therapy. If your therapist does not believe that the equipment or resource is of direct benefit to your child, they are under no obligation to purchase it.

It is up to your therapist what equipment they order and how they order it. Some will source the equipment themselves. Be aware that they may charge an additional administration fee, so make sure you ask about any additional charges before agreeing to the purchase. Other providers may ask you to purchase the equipment and then they will reimburse you through the FaHCSIA funding. It is important that you do not purchase any equipment without first checking with your provider.

Q: My child was seeing a FaHCSIA-approved therapist before we had the funding. Now that we have the funding, they are charging us more for the same service. Why is this?

A: FaHCSIA has allowed therapists to charge more to cover administration costs. This is to cover the additional time it takes to bill through FaHCSIA's online financial management system, employ additional staff to process these claims, and complete related paperwork. There are no rules about how much providers can add to their usual fees, but if you feel your provider is charging more than what you feel is reasonable, you can get clarification from them or contact your Autism Advisor.

Q: I've heard about families who get an extra \$2,000 on top of their funding. How does someone qualify for this?

The Outer Regional and Remote Payment of \$2,000 is for families of eligible children who live in outer regional, remote or very remote locations of Australia in recognition of the additional difficulties they face in accessing services generally, not just ASD or

other early intervention services. This payment is in addition to the Helping Children with Autism early intervention funding package of up to \$12,000.

Eligibility for the Outer Regional and Remote Payment under the Helping Children with Autism package is based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia+ (ARIA+) classification. ARIA+ is the recommended classification tool of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and is used widely across government funding programs.

You do not need to apply for this payment. Autism Advisors enter clients' details into the FaHCSIA Online Funding Management System (FOFMS) which then alerts the Advisor as to whether their address meets ARIA+ criteria. If the address qualifies, then the Autism Advisor will then let the family know that they are eligible to receive this payment, and organise for the payment to be made.

ARIA+ is widely accepted as Australia's most authoritative measure of geographical remoteness and is used by FaHCSIA to determine eligibility for this payment. As such, FaHCSIA representatives and Autism Advisors are unable to make individual allowances for families who are found to be ineligible.



More questions?



autism
advisorline
1300 424 499



Our Story: Emma

Emma was diagnosed with Autism at the age of two. That was 5 years ago. I didn't know where to turn or what to do, and was dealing with the grief while trying to get help for my baby.

We started at an early intervention centre, where I was advised that she would probably need extra speech therapy and occupational therapy. So off I went to find someone appropriate, and to see how I could get some assistance to help us financially. I was absolutely stunned to find that although the early intervention services were funded for 2 ½ hours a week, there was no other funding available to get the other services that Emma needed. If I wanted her to get the therapy, I had to pay for it out of my own pocket.

We did that for 2 years – struggling to save every cent so that she could get speech therapy, but not having the money to pay for OT, except for an occasional block of sessions to help deal with extreme issues like difficulties with hair washing. The stress on our family from this extra financial

burden, not only affected my husband and myself, but also Emma's siblings. There was no money for extras for anyone!

Three years ago, the FaHCSIA funding started, and we applied straight away. \$12,000 for therapy – I thought I must have been dreaming! It was such a relief to finally have some assistance to get the services that Emma needed, without having to give up so much. We were able to get weekly OT and Speech, without the financial burden that we had experienced for the previous 2 years.

We were also able to speak with an Autism Advisor, who was able to help us with any questions that we had.

Emma is at school now, and our funding package has finished, but the assistance that it has provided for my family is immeasurable!

Marie – Mother of Emma (7)

What programs and therapies might be covered by the FaHCSIA funding?

There are a number of different treatments and therapies for children with ASD that are offered by therapists approved for the FaHCSIA funding. Here is a brief description of a few of the more common ones that you might come across. There is no one treatment that will work for all children with ASDs and for all families. For more detailed information on these and other therapies and treatments, please see the Guide to Therapies on the Raising Children Network website available at www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism.

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

Applied Behaviour Analysis is a set of principles for encouraging positive behaviour and decreasing inappropriate behaviour.

This theory is used as the basis for techniques used to teach children with ASD new skills. Teaching techniques based on ABA principles include Discrete Trial Training (DTT) and Pivotal Response Training (PRT).

DTT usually involves breaking complex behaviours down into smaller steps and teaching them using lots of rewards and repetition. PRT aims to teach children in key areas of development to enable them to learn more complex skills. Ivor Lovaas was one of the first researchers to use ABA principles to treat children with autism, in the early 1980s.

The Lovaas Program involves very intensive (40 hours a week) ABA-based treatment for young children with ASD over two to three years. Although not all ABA programs are this intensive, many ABA therapists recommend at least 20 hours a week of therapy. ABA-based treatments are therefore often very expensive.

Behaviour Management

Behaviour management is not a specific treatment, but is a general term for treatment that aims to increase appropriate or positive behaviour and decrease inappropriate or negative behaviour. Psychologists will often work with children and their parents to manage behaviour.

Behaviour management usually includes rewarding or reinforcing appropriate behaviour. Psychologists usually avoid using punishment for inappropriate behaviour. Instead, they will try to work out what triggers the unwanted or negative behaviour and find ways to avoid these triggers.

They will also look at what purpose the behaviour serves and try to teach the child a better way of expressing needs or wants.

For example, if a child has a tantrum when he or she is feeling overwhelmed, it might be better to teach the child how to let someone know that he or she needs a break before reaching the point of being overwhelmed. Behaviour management often requires parents to keep records of when the behaviour occurs, so that the psychologist can work out any patterns in behaviour and see whether any treatment is working.

Social Skills Groups

Many FaHCSIA-Approved Providers offer social skills groups. Social skills groups are not a specific treatment program, but they can be a way of allowing children with ASD to learn and practise social and communication skills in a supportive setting. The groups may be run by speech pathologists, occupational therapists or psychologists.

These groups may be most suitable for children who have some speech, but struggle with social aspects of communication. Some children may need individual therapy as well as a social skills group. Social skills groups may be most successful if children of similar ages and abilities are grouped together.

DIR® Floortime™

DIR® stands for Developmental, Individual difference, Relationship-based. Floortime™ is the interaction between the parent/caregiver and child, based on the DIR® principles, including getting down on the floor and playing with the child. DIR® Floortime™ involves teaching parents how to interact with their children in a way that develops the skills and stages of social communication and interaction that most children who do not have ASDs develop naturally, but that children with ASDs often need to be taught.

Parents are expected to use the Floortime™ techniques in everyday interaction with their children. DIR® Floortime™ may be conducted by psychologists, speech pathologists or occupational therapists, but all professionals conducting DIR® Floortime™ must be trained and certified by the Interdisciplinary Council of Developmental and Learning Disorders (ICDL) in the US.

What programs and therapies might be covered by the FaHCSIA funding?

The Hanen Program®: More Than Words®

More Than Words® was developed by the Hanen Centre in Canada. The Hanen Centre website, www.hanen.org, describes the program:

The More Than Words Program was designed specifically for parents of children ages 5 and under on the autism spectrum. Addressing the unique needs of these children, the program provides parents with the tools, strategies and support they need to help their children reach their full communication potential.

More Than Words does this by empowering you to help your child reach the following three goals:

- 1.Improved social skills
- 2.The ability to engage in back-and-forth interactions
- 3.Improved understanding of language

More Than Words® can only be delivered by speech pathologists who have completed specialised training from the Hanen Centre. It involves eight sessions for parents in small groups and three individual sessions, including video-taped interactions between the parents and children.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)

Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) is a general term for methods of communication for individuals who have difficulty with spoken language. Speech pathologists are usually the therapists who help parents to use AAC with their children. AAC may involve photos or symbols such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Boardmaker, or it may include gestures and signing, such as Key Word Signing (formerly called Makaton).

It may also involve devices that allow an adult to record phrases that the child can use to communicate. The aim of AAC is not necessarily to replace spoken language. It is often used to give children a way of communicating their needs and wants and understanding other people when they are not yet able to use or understand speech effectively.

Some parents worry that if their children learn another method of communication they will not learn to talk. However, giving children a simple way of communicating

reduces their frustration and teaches them the value of communication. This may actually help them to develop speech, and children often naturally stop using the pictures or signs as their speech starts to develop.

Early Start Denver Model

The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) is a developmental, naturalistic and play based treatment approach intended for very young children with ASD. ESDM is usually delivered by a team of therapists, and is supported by professionals such as a psychologist, speech therapist, occupation therapist, and behaviour analyst. Parents are critical to the treatment team and are often taught how to interact with their children in a way that encourages communication and social interaction.

ESDM may also be delivered in the home, a centre, for example at the Margot Prior Wing Autism Specific Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ASELCC), or in a mainstream early care setting. ESDM aims to keep interaction between the adults and children as naturalistic as possible and the focus of the intervention is on communication, social interaction, imitation, joint attention and play skills.

If a child is not responding to this naturalistic interaction, a guide is provided on what other evidence based approaches to use for specified periods of time (e.g., a more structured approach such as ABA DTT techniques, or PECS).

Information provided by Dr Cynthia Zierhut, Clinical Manager: Margot Prior Wing

Aquatic Occupational Therapy (OT)

Occupational therapists (OTs) may sometimes conduct therapy in a specially heated and buoyant pool. Some children with ASD have fears or sensory issues around water, for example they may become very distressed if their hair or faces get wet. This can make it very hard for parents to shower or bathe their children. Other children may be distressed by the sounds, smells and lights at a swimming pool.

Aquatic OT can help children to overcome these fears, and can also be helpful for some children in developing body awareness and motor skills. The aim of aquatic OT is not to teach children to swim, but it may make it easier for some children to learn to swim.



Assisting families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds

The Helping Children with Autism package is available to Australian Citizens and Permanent Residents of Australia.

Many of the families registered for the funding are from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and there are a number of ways these families can access information about the package.

Many families ask a friend, family member, or case worker to contact the Autism Advisor team on their behalf to apply for the funding or to help them access the package.

The Autism Advisor team is able to speak to families through the use of interpreters (either over the phone or in person) to discuss the funding and answer any questions they may have.

Families can let their Autism Advisor know that they would like to use an interpreter by calling us on 1300 424 499. They will need to give us their name and phone number in English, as well as the language they speak.

Families are also able to access an interpreter for their HCWA therapy sessions. This can be arranged by the service provider. The cost of the interpreter is covered by FaHCSIA and will not come out of the child's funding. Families should ask their service provider or Autism Advisor for any additional information.

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze has a number of resources available in a range of other languages. Please ask your Autism Advisor for more information on these resources.



The Autism Advisor team can access interpreters to communicate with you. You will need to provide your **NAME, PHONE NUMBER** and **LANGUAGE**.

What is the Early Childhood Intervention Service?

The Early Childhood Intervention Service (ECIS) supports children with a disability or developmental delay from birth to school entry.

ECIS provide a range of services for families designed to promote children's functioning in everyday situations. Special educators and therapists provide supports as agreed with families, and practitioners work collaboratively with parents to support their children.

Depending on need, support services are arranged individually or in a group. Sessions can be conducted at the location most suitable for purpose - at home, at childcare/ kindergarten, in a community setting or in an ECIS centre.

Parents may refer their child to ECIS or, with parent or guardian consent, a range of professionals including paediatricians, general practitioners, maternal and child health nurses, child care professionals and kindergarten teachers may also make referrals.

ECIS is a state funded service and is separate to the HCWA funding; the two are designed to be used in conjunction with each other.

Your child may already be receiving services from ECIS, or you might be on a waiting list.

Families are encouraged to contact their local intake worker on the number below to determine eligibility:

Central Intake Numbers

Northern Metropolitan Region **03 9304 0775**

Southern Metropolitan Region **1300 720 151**

Eastern Metropolitan Region **1300 662 655**

Western Metropolitan Region **03 9275 7500**

Barwon Region **1800 354 605**

Gippsland region **1800 33 60 10**

Grampians Region **03 5330 8608**

Hume Region **1800 627 391**

Loddon Mallee Region **1300 363 514**



The Raising Children Network Autism Website www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism

The Raising Children Network website is a Government initiative and contains resources and information for families on all parenting issues. As part of the Helping Children with Autism package, an entire section of the website is devoted to parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The website contains lots of information about raising children with ASDs, with fact sheets on issues that many parents face, including sleeping difficulties, toilet training, and supporting siblings. There are lots of stories from other parents and short videos of parents sharing their experiences.

There is also a useful guide to therapies which gives information on the various therapies you might hear about in Autism, and what we know so far about the evidence for their effectiveness. Another feature of the website is a parent forum where you can log in and post questions and answer questions from other parents who are also raising a child with an ASD.



Our Story: Tom

The FaHCSIA funding has helped our family so much. Tom was 3 when he was diagnosed with high functioning autism. When we got the diagnosis, our paediatrician advised us to call Autism Victoria (trading as Amaze) to talk to an Autism Advisor.

We were so anxious to do the right thing for our son, that we called an Autism Advisor from the car in the hospital carpark! The Advisor we spoke to was so lovely and helpful and explained everything to us so that we could understand exactly what the process was to get the funding for Tom. It sounds dramatic, but words can't express how reassuring this was for us at a time when we felt our world was crashing down.

After waiting so long for a diagnosis, being placed on endless waiting lists and being shoved from professional to professional, we couldn't believe when we got a call back from our Advisor only two weeks later to tell us that Tom's application had been approved.

Our Autism Advisor was really helpful. We had some ideas on how to spend our funding, but

our Advisor gave us added confidence in the decisions we made, and she was able to fill in the gaps we had with our understanding of the package. She was really compassionate and supportive, and was able to help us with any questions we had along the way, or to steer us in the right direction if she was unable to help us herself. It is so comforting to know that she is only ever a phone call away if we needed some assistance with the funding.

As for the funding – I can't imagine how we would have been able to manage paying for therapy sessions ourselves without the help of the FaHCSIA money. Although it is not paying for all of Tom's therapy, and we are contributing some of our own money, it certainly takes the pressure off our family.

We have also been able to purchase some therapy equipment to assist with Tom's speech therapy, which has been great. To be able to use this money in a flexible way by getting equipment as well as therapy really makes sense.

Eric and Susan – Parents of Tom (4 ½)

The importance of Autism Research

Autism Spectrum Disorder attracts research interest around the world and there are several journals devoted to publishing research findings. In Victoria, there is a lot of research being done by students and clinicians interested in ASDs. ASD researchers aim to find out more about the disorder in order to provide improved understanding and to develop effective therapies to help individuals affected by the condition.

Research projects can focus on medical issues, education, causes, interventions and other areas related to child and family needs and functioning. Projects may be large-scale, seeking to establish a cause, locate a gene, or trial a specific treatment, or they may be smaller-scale studies examining local issues, or anywhere in between.

Become a Research Participant

In order to carry out their studies, researchers often need family members and/or individuals with an ASD to participate in their research. This might involve being interviewed or surveyed, completing a set of activities, undertaking some form of assessment, or being involved in an intervention study or group program. Your involvement could be for one single

session or you may be asked to complete tasks over several time points.

Without the assistance of research participants, researchers would not be able to conduct their valuable work, which can help lead to breakthroughs in intervention and treatment programs, or bring us one step closer to establishing possible causes of ASDs.



At Autism Victoria trading as Amaze, we maintain a database of individuals and families living with ASDs who are willing to assist researchers.

If you are interested in learning more about participating in research studies, sign up to the Research Participant Database at the website indicated below.

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze will forward you details of relevant studies on behalf of researchers. You can then contact the researcher directly if you are interested in participating in or receiving further information about the study so you can decide whether you want to participate. If you do decide to participate in any research, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time.

This register is maintained securely by Autism Victoria trading as Amaze and is not issued to any third party. Please note that you can be taken off the research register at any time by contacting us.

www.amaze.org.au/research

Join our Research Participant Register to be added to our database. We will then send you information about studies recruiting participants that match the information you have given us. If a study interests you, you can contact the researchers directly for more information. You can sign up to our register by downloading the form at the link above.



Assisting with the cost of therapy: Medicare rebates

There are a number of Medicare rebates available for therapy. These rebates do not cover the entire fee, and usually you will be required to pay the full amount then make a claim to Medicare for the rebate. The Medicare items can be used while you have access to the FaHCSIA funding (e.g. if your preferred therapist is not a member of FaHCSIA's panel, or if you run out of funding for the financial year and need to pay out of your own pocket until the next financial year kicks in). They are also options that are available to you after you have finished the funding. The three options are outlined below.

Chronic Disease Management Plan

Previously called the Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) plan, this item is available to individuals in the community with a chronic condition. Individuals with ASD are eligible for this item because it is a life-long condition.

This item provides:

- **Five sessions with an Allied Health Professional per calendar year.** Examples of Allied Health Professionals this item can be used with are:
 - *Aboriginal Health Workers*
 - *Audiologists*
 - *Chiropractors*
 - *Diabetes Educators*
 - *Dietitians*
 - *Exercise Physiologists*
 - *Mental Health Nurses*
 - *Occupational Therapists*
 - *Osteopaths*
 - *Physiotherapists*
 - *Podiatrists*
 - *Psychologists*
 - *Speech Pathologists*
- **\$4,250 worth of dental treatment** if the doctor writing the referral feels that the chronic condition (ASD) is causing the dental problems. Problems such as teeth grinding, eating inedible items, refusing to brush teeth etc. could be attributed to the child's ASD. The total payment is available across two consecutive years, and only covers treatment in a dental chair (i.e. it does not cover procedures given under general anaesthetic). Make sure your dentist accepts CDM referrals as not all dentists do.

The CDM Plan can be written by your GP and people with ASDs are eligible for five sessions every calendar year.

Better Access to Mental Health Plan

Also known as Mental Health Care Plan, this plan provides:

- **Six sessions of individual therapy with a Psychologist, Occupational Therapist or Social Worker.** An additional four sessions are available (i.e. a maximum of 10 sessions per calendar year, although six more services may be provided under "exceptional circumstances" between 1 March and 31 December 2012).
- **10 Group Sessions of therapy with a Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, or Social Worker.**

The Better Access to Mental Health Care plan is an option available for anybody (individuals with an ASD, parents, siblings, carers etc.) who feels that their overall wellbeing and mental health is affected.

Mental illness is common; around one in five Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives. Your mental health can be affected by a number of things; physical problems such as chemical imbalances in the brain and infections, as well as non-physical problems such as exposure to trauma, family environments, cumulative stress and difficult life events.

We know that having a child with an ASD can be difficult. Any members of the family who are feeling sad, confused, depressed or anxious about the person in the family who has an Autism Spectrum Disorder should see their GP to discuss other professionals who may be able to support them, such as social workers or counsellors.

People who have ASDs can also have mental health difficulties. They may be anxious about the environments around them; they may be depressed because they are having difficulty forming relationships with other people. There are many reasons why they would be eligible to access the Better Access to Mental Health Care Plan, and they should be encouraged to seek support from the appropriate professionals. Group sessions can be used for social skills groups, play therapy groups, anxiety groups, or any group that



is run by the above listed professionals and is working towards building the confidence, self esteem and ability of the person with an autism spectrum disorder.

People are eligible for 10 sessions under the Better Access to Mental Health plan every calendar year. You can get a referral from your GP. Make sure you book a long consultation with your doctor to allow you and your doctor enough time to prepare a GP Mental Health Care Plan and discuss your treatment options. A Psychiatrist or Paediatrician can also write this referral.

The Helping Children with Autism Access to Diagnosis and Treatment Plan

This item (referred to as Item 135) provides:

- **Four Appointments for Private Diagnosis** referred by a Paediatrician or Psychiatrist to a Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Audiologist, Optometrist, Orthoptist or Physiotherapist. This is called the 'Helping Children with Autism Increased Access To Diagnosis'
- **20 Sessions with a Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist,** Audiologist, Optometrist, Orthoptist or Physiotherapist. This is called the 'Helping Children With Autism Treatment Plan'

You may have already used the four sessions for diagnosis. Even if you didn't, now that you have your diagnosis you have access to 20 sessions of therapy with one of the above listed allied health professionals. Your paediatrician or psychiatrist will develop a treatment plan for your child with you. These rebates can only be used once in the child's life time, they must be written by their 13th birthday, and used by their 15th birthday.

It is important to see professionals who have knowledge and understanding of ASDs. Please call Autism Victoria trading as Amaze for contact details of professionals who have knowledge of ASDs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Can I use all these at the same time?

A. Yes!

Q. Can I use the 20 Sessions more than once?

A. No. The 20 sessions can be used only once.

Q. Who can write the referrals?

A. The Helping Children with Autism referrals need to be written by a paediatrician or psychiatrist. The Better

Access to Mental Health referral can also be written by a paediatrician or psychiatrist, but are more commonly written by a GP. The Chronic Disease Management referrals can only be written by your GP.

Q. Are these sessions free of cost?

A. No – you will receive a rebate from Medicare – this rebate does not cover the total cost of the service. Please check with Medicare the amount you will receive.

Q. Can an Allied Health Professional who is seeing my child for some or all of the 20 HCWA Medicare sessions also work with my child through the FaHCSIA-funded HCWA initiative for early intervention?

A. If the therapist is on the FaHCSIA approved panel you may use this therapist. If the therapist is not on the approved panel you will need to source a service provider that is approved by FaHCSIA.

The table below is a handy guide to the Medicare options available, and shows your entitlements under each initiative. You can contact your Autism Advisor, or call Medicare on 132 011 for more information.

	CDM ¹	BAMH ²	HCWA ³
How many sessions?	5 + Dental	10 Ind + 10 Group	20
How often?	Each Calendar Year	Each Calendar Year	One-off Item ⁴
Speech Therapist	✓	✗	✓
Psychologist	✓	✓	✓
Occ. Therapist	✓	✓	✓
Social Worker	✓	✓	✗
Audiologist	✓	✗	✓
Optometrist	✗	✗	✓
Orthoptist	✗	✗	✓
Physiotherapist	✓	✗	✓
Group Sessions	✗	✓	✗
GPs write referral	✓	✓	✗
Paediatricians write referral	✗	✓	✓
Psychiatrists write referral	✗	✓	✓
Adults Eligible	✓	✓	✗

1. Chronic Disease Management Plan

2. Better Access to Mental Health Plan

3. Helping Children with Autism Access to Treatment

4. Paediatrician must write referral by child's 13th birthday; sessions must be used by 15th birthday

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze: Your organisation

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze does a lot more than administer the Helping Children with Autism package in Victoria. We are the peak body for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Victoria, and our organisation represents around 55,000 people in the state who are affected by Autism Spectrum Disorders as well as many more who work with people on the autism spectrum. Here are a list of some of the services we offer.



InfoLine

1300 308 699
03 9657 1600
www.amaze.org.au/infoline
info@amaze.org.au

The InfoLine is the number to call for individuals, parents, families and the general public. It is available from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday (except public holidays). Our Information Officers are here to answer your questions about ASD and to help you find out who to go to for further assistance.

The Information Team is made up of people with a broad range of experience of ASDs. If they cannot immediately find an answer to your questions, they will find out and get back to you. Sometimes the InfoLine is very busy: if you don't get an answer straight away, leave a message and one of our officers will return your call.



Directory of Services

1300 308 699
03 9657 1600
www.amaze.org.au/dos
info@amaze.org.au

Our Information team maintains a Directory of Services that lists individuals across a range of professions who have indicated they are ASD aware. This list includes therapists and medical professionals, as well as other professionals like hairdressers and dentists.



Membership

1300 308 699
03 9657 1600
www.amaze.org.au/member
info@amaze.org.au

Membership of Autism Victoria trading as Amaze provides a whole range of benefits: by joining, you are showing your support of the organisation,

joining an important community, and providing strength in numbers to enable us to lobby at government level for improved supports and services for the entire autism community. In addition, you are entitled to a number of additional benefits as a member of Autism Victoria trading as Amaze:

- Free attendance at Autism Information Sessions
- Three free sessions with a Family Counsellor
- Member discount on attending conferences and events run by Autism Victoria trading as Amaze
- The Spectrum quarterly magazine
- Access to our Autism Library
- Regular member offers
- Member discounts on products
- Voting rights at the AGM

All members receive a membership card with their details, giving them access to our Autism Library and other offers. A membership form is available at the back of this booklet.



Family Counselling

1300 308 699
03 9657 1616
www.amaze.org.au/infoline
counsellor2@amaze.org.au

We have a number of family counsellors at Autism Victoria trading as Amaze, and each is experienced in working with individuals and families with ASD. The family counsellors are able to provide assistance on such issues as coping with the diagnosis, dealing with related emotional difficulties, or getting strategies for managing challenging behaviours in individuals with ASD. Phone and face-to-face sessions are available, and the service provides short-term (up to three sessions) assistance with the aim of referring on and linking individuals to community and other supports. Our family counsellors do their best to prioritise calls according to need. Please leave a message and one of our family counsellors will return your call as soon as possible.

Amaze: Your organisation

Please note that we do not provide a Crisis Service or Help Line. If you need urgent assistance:

Parentline 13 22 89

Lifeline 13 11 14



Family Info Sessions

1300 308 699

03 9657 1616

www.amaze.org.au/familyinfo
counsellor2@amaze.org.au

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze offers a host of information sessions that are designed to support families throughout their journey. The information sessions provide an opportunity for parents and carers to gain a further understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders and learn about practical strategies that can be used in any setting.

Examples of sessions provided include dealing with anxiety, puberty, mental health, schooling and siblings. Sessions are free for members or \$20 for non-members. Bookings are required to attend these sessions and can be made by calling 9657 1616 or by emailing counsellor2@amaze.org.au



Autism Library

03 9657 1601

03 9657 1636

www.amaze.org.au/library
library@amaze.org.au

Our specialist ASD library allows members to browse through hundreds of books, magazines, DVDs and other useful ASD-specific resources.

Located at our premises in Carlton, members can choose to come in and visit the library or access the online catalogue via our website.

For members who find it difficult to come to visit the library in person, our librarian can arrange to post items to you. Your membership card acts as your library card. Members of the Autism Library can borrow up to four items for a period of three weeks. New items are being purchased all the time, and information on some of our newest additions are provided in our quarterly magazine, *The Spectrum*.



The Spectrum Magazine

1300 308 699

03 9657 1600

www.amaze.org.au/spectrum
editor@amaze.org.au

The Spectrum magazine is our quarterly member magazine. It provides information about the organisation, as well as all things ASD that are happening across the state. Each issue is based on a theme (e.g. support for carers, arts and self-expression, sport and leisure, communication, sensory issues) with helpful feature articles, reader stories, resources, and information on services and equipment that you might find useful as well as updates on current research into ASD and events that are happening locally and globally.



Amaze Website

1300 308 699

03 9657 1600

www.amaze.org.au
marketing@amaze.org.au

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze launched our new website late 2011. It contains all the important information from our old site but has been updated and refreshed! You can visit our website to access a wide range of information on ASDs, including funding and supports available, news stories, and access to our Online Events Calendar that contains information on upcoming workshops, programs, conferences and information sessions being held across the state. There are also a number of fact sheets to download on lots of important issues from early childhood to adulthood, including transition to school and educational options, strategies to manage behavioural difficulties, funding options and lots more. Visit our website today.



Amaze: Your organisation



Keep in Touch!

1300 308 699

www.amaze.org.au/espectrum

www.amaze.org.au/autism-advisor

www.facebook.com/autismvictoria

www.twitter.com/autismvictoria

Finding it too hard to keep up with all the ASD-related information you need to be aware of? Want to know about research, workshops, information sessions, movies, awareness-raising and fundraising activities that are being conducted around the state? There are a number of ways you can receive our updates and stay informed of news relevant to the autism community.

eSpectrum

eSpectrum is the official electronic newsletter of Autism Victoria trading as Amaze. It goes out once or twice a month to over 8,000 subscribers. eSpectrum provides information about the organisation, our position on government policy, coming events, research projects needing participants and other important topics of interest to the autism community. If you supplied a valid email address when you submitted your application for the Helping Children with Autism package, your Autism Advisor has signed you up to receive these updates (unless you chose not to be subscribed).

If you are not receiving these updates, you can sign up at the website listed above.

Autism Advisor Update

The Autism Advisor Update is a quarterly eNewsletter sent to families accessing the Helping Children with Autism package. The newsletter provides updates on any changes to the funding package as well as information from the Autism Advisor team on various topics.

Again, you are automatically signed up for these updates if you provided an email address. If you are not registered, you can sign up at the website listed above.

Facebook

We have over 2000 people following the organisation! Our Facebook page is a great place to find out about the latest ASD news both locally and globally. You can also hear about what others think about specific topics, raise issues, or just ask a question. You can find us here:
www.facebook.com/autismvictoria

Twitter

We are on Twitter too! Our followers are growing, and we'd love for you to follow us:
www.twitter.com/autismvictoria



Early Days

www.amaze.org.au/earlydays

1300 307 909

The Early Days program is a series of free workshops for families funded under the Helping Children with Autism Package. Early Days aims to assist parents and carers of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder by providing workshops on a range of topics such as introductory workshops for families of newly-diagnosed children, and skills-based workshops to provide families and carers with practical strategies on topics such as behaviour management strategies, promoting positive development in your child, or supporting siblings.

To register your interest in attending an Early Days workshop call 1300 307 909 or visit www.amaze.org.au/earlydays. Early Days also have a Facebook page that you can follow to receive up-to-date information about upcoming workshops in your area. Visit www.facebook.com/earlydaysworkshops.

Other Government Programs



PlayConnect
www.playconnect.com.au
T: 1800 790 335

Playconnect playgroups are autism-specific playgroups for children with an ASD or ASD-like symptoms. Playconnect aims to promote learning through play and are based in locations all around the state. Sessions usually run for two hours once a week and are run by a playgroup facilitator. Playconnect is funded through the Helping Children with Autism Package so there is no cost for families to attend.

Autism Victoria trading as Amaze in partnership with Playgroup Australia is proud to launch a new resource for families of young children with an ASD.

The resource entitled 'Nurturing Children with Autism' is an interactive USB specifically designed to educate parents of young children with an ASD and ASD-like behaviours with useful information and ideas for play. The tool features animations and instructional video clips on available support services, explains the main principles of ASD and models play strategies to enrich each child's daily experiences.

To find out more about this resource, please contact Emma Godsil on (03) 9657 1617 or emma.godsil@amaze.org.au



MyTime MyTime
supporting parents of children with disabilities
www.mytime.net.au
T: 1800 889 997

My Time support groups are for parents, grandparents and carers of children with a disability or chronic illness (not specific to ASD). The groups provide parents and carers with an opportunity to socialise and meet other families, to share ideas and thoughts on their journey so far. Children are welcome to attend.

For more information about My Time support groups or to find your nearest group, visit their website on the details above or call 1800 889 997.



Positive Partnerships
www.positivepartnerships.org.au
T: 1800 881 971

Positive Partnerships are a national series of workshops specifically for parents and teachers of school-aged students with an ASD. The aim of the workshops is to provide families and teachers with practical strategies to improve the educational outcomes for school aged students with ASD.

In addition to face-to-face workshops to commence in 2012, there are a number of online modules that can be completed. For more information about Positive Partnerships, visit www.positivepartnerships.org.au or phone 1300 881 971.



The FaHCSIA funding is over . . . what now?

Coming to the end of your FaHCSIA funding can be a daunting time for many families. Some families say that they miss the support of their Autism Advisor who has been available to guide them during the time they had the funding. Others talk about the financial burden now that they no longer have access to the package. In addition, the end of the funding usually signals other important changes for the family including the end of early intervention programs and the transition to primary school.

Whether you have run out of funding because you have spent your whole allocation, or because your child has turned 7, there are a number of supports available to you after the funding.

Funding Assistance

Medicare

If you get a referral from your GP or paediatrician, you can access therapy and claim rebates from Medicare. Unlike your FaHCSIA funding, this rebate does not cover the entire fee, so there will be some out of pocket expense. You can claim rebates with a number of professionals (including psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists). In some circumstances you may be able to claim for group sessions in addition to individual sessions (for example for social skills groups). You can read more about the Medicare rebates on page 14.

Private Health Cover

Some private health insurance providers offer rebates for therapy. Check your policy to see if you are covered for your child's therapy.

Service Clubs, Charities and Foundations

Service organisations such as your local Lions, Rotary or Apex Club can sometimes provide assistance for families who are struggling to make ends meet. The Variety Club is a not-for-profit organisation that offers services and equipment through a grant application process to families experiencing disability or disadvantage. Visit www.varietyvic.org.au for more information.

Centrelink

You may be eligible for financial assistance from Centrelink. This includes the Carer Allowance (Child), which your doctor will help you access. There is also an annual lump sum payment for people who receive the Carer Allowance, called the Child Disability Assistance Payment. These payments are not means tested.

If you cannot support yourself through paid employment due to the demands of your caring role, you may be eligible for the Carer Payment (Child). This payment is income and assets tested, and takes into account family income. For more information, visit centrelink.gov.au or phone 132 717.

Health Care Card

If you are receiving the Carer Allowance, your child will have a Health Care Card. If you are on other benefits you may also hold a Health Care Card in your name. The Health Care Card allows you access to cheaper medicines and other concessions such as discounted public transport for some cardholders, bulk billing by selected doctors, and higher refunds through the Medicare safety net.

Victorian Carer Card

The Victorian Carer Card gives unpaid primary carers discounts on a number of government and community services, including discounts at some businesses, free travel on public transport on Sundays and travel vouchers. Phone 1800 901 958 or visit www.carercard.vic.gov.au.



The FaHCSIA funding is over . . . what now?

Disability Services

Disability Intake and Response Service through Department of Human Services (DHS)

Your regional Disability Intake and Response Service provides information about community supports and services for people with a disability, their families and carers. Contact your regional Disability Intake and Response Service for information about services you may be able to access in your local area.

For children who have ongoing disability support needs you can apply to DHS for ongoing support via the Disability Support Register (DSR). The DSR registers the individual's current level of need. One outcome of registering on the DSR can be an Individual Support Package of funds allocated to a person to meet their disability related support needs. For more information phone your regional Disability Intake and Response Service on 1800 783 783.

Association for Children with a Disability

The Association for Children with a Disability (ACD) is an information, support and advocacy organisation for children with a disability and their families in Victoria. It is run by parents of children with disabilities, and their Parent Support Workers providing information and advice over the telephone. They can be reached on (03) 9818 2000 or 1800 654 013.

The ACD publish a booklet called Through the Maze. This excellent resource helps families of children with disabilities navigate the various supports available to families of children with disabilities. It provides information on funding, respite services, support agencies, advocacy, disability services, aids and equipment, housing and accommodation, legal services, recreation and more.

You can download this resource here: www.acd.org.au/information/ttm.htm

Support for Families

Amaze

Your Autism Advisor's role is to work with you while your child has access to the FaHCSIA funding, however when your funding stops there are still many ways Autism Victoria trading as Amaze can assist you.

Our services are outlined in the previous pages and include our InfoLine, access to our service directory of autism friendly professionals, information sessions and workshops, access to family counsellors, our ASD-specific library, and our quarterly magazine, The Spectrum, which is free to members.

Family support groups

Many family members find support groups to be a valuable resource. They provide a friendly space for parents of children with ASD (or disability in general) to share stories and ideas, and support each other through the joys and challenges of raising a child with ASD. Support groups can also work on other levels, such as helping to create a sense of community and lessening feelings of isolation.

Some groups are specifically for parents of children with ASD, some include families of children with other disabilities. There are also support groups for partners of adults with ASD, or groups for grandparents, fathers, or siblings.



Autism Victoria trading as Amaze has information on a number of support groups. A list of these is available on our website at www.amaze.org.au/support, or you can call our InfoLine on 1300 308 699 for more information.

Respite Options

There are a number of respite options available to families of children with a disability. Using respite provides families and carers with a well-deserved break. Examples of respite care include in-home respite where a paid carer comes into your home, or out-of-home respite where your child attends a service and participates in activities outside your home under the supervision of a paid carer. ►

The Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre is the main point of contact for families searching for respite options in their local area. These centres provide information and referral to respite services including emergency and after-hours care.

For more information about what respite options are available to you please call 1800 052 222 or visit www.commcarelink.gov.au. You can also contact your local council as they may also provide some respite options (see below).

Your Local Council

Local councils and shires provide a range of child and family services including the Home and Community Care (HACC) program (respite care), libraries and toy libraries, school holiday programs, and child care options. Contact your local council or shire to see what assistance they can offer.

Raising Children Network

The national ASD website, the Raising Children Network (see page 11) offers valuable information for families of children with ASD on a number of topics. See their useful Guide to Therapies section, read helpful articles on managing difficult behaviours (such as toilet training or sleep difficulties), watch video clips of other parents telling their stories, or participate in the online forums to ask questions or share advice with other parents.

Positive Partnerships

Positive Partnerships are a national series of workshops specifically for parents and teachers of school-aged students with an ASD. The aim of the workshops is to provide families and teachers with practical strategies to improve the educational outcomes for school aged students with ASD. See page 19 for more details.

Schooling Options

How do I choose a school that is right for my child?

Choosing the right school is a difficult decision for any parent, and as the parent of a child with a disability there are even more things to consider. Two of the big decisions to make include whether to send your child to a government school or a private (Catholic or independent) school, and whether they attend a mainstream or specialist setting.

Government vs Non-Government

Some children with ASD receive funding support at school, but many do not. The funding criteria and the amount of funding the school receives for children with disabilities differs between government, Catholic and independent schools, which is often a consideration for parents. Children who attend government schools and meet eligibility requirements for funding will attract a higher level of funding than children in Catholic or Independent schools. This shouldn't be the only consideration for parents, however. In selecting a school, families report that they also consider such things as the level of pastoral care, specialist programs, class sizes or school facilities when deciding on the right school for their child.

Mainstream vs Specialist

The question of a mainstream versus specialist schooling can be another concern for parents. All children are entitled to attend their local (mainstream) primary school. Parents should never feel pressured to send their child to a specialist school if they believe that a mainstream setting is the best option for their child. Many parents see benefits to their child attending the same school as their siblings, and feel that attending school with typically-developing peers helps them prepare for the future. Aside from this, the reality is that for many children with ASD, a mainstream school is the only option, as they may not qualify for entry into a specialist setting. In government schools, eligibility criteria for funding (both for assistance at mainstream school and for entry into specialist settings) is set by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

In Victoria, there are three kinds of specialist schools: Special Developmental Schools (for children with moderate to profound intellectual disability); Special Schools (for children with mild intellectual disability); and Autism-specific schools (for children who qualify for funding for an ASD under DEECD criteria). Specialist schools have smaller class sizes,

additional classroom support, and generally work from a heavily modified curriculum with a focus on teaching basic life skills. They also tend to have more specialist support from professionals such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

While no one can make the decision for you, Autism Victoria trading as Amaze has developed information sheets on a number of education topics, such as schooling options for students with ASD, and a list of questions to ask when choosing a school for your child. These information sheets and more are available at www.amaze.org.au/primary, or you can call our InfoLine on 1300 308 699 to discuss your options.



What is the Program for Students with Disabilities?

In government schools, some students with ASD are eligible to apply for funding from the DEECD. This is state funding, and eligibility for this is determined through an application to the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD). This program supports students in government schools with a range of disabilities that affect their learning at school, including such difficulties as hearing and vision impairment, and physical disability.

Criteria for funding at school are different to that set by the federal government for the Helping Children with Autism package, so many children who were eligible for FaHCSIA funding will not qualify for DEECD funding. Students with ASD who do qualify for PSD funding usually meet criteria under either the Intellectual Disability category (if they have an intellectual disability in addition to their autism), or the Autism Spectrum Disorder category. On some occasions, the school may apply under the Severe Behaviour Disorder criteria if the child did not

receive funding for an Intellectual Disability or an ASD and their behaviour has become too challenging to manage in a traditional classroom.

If a student receives PSD funding for an Intellectual Disability, they are eligible to attend either a Special School or a Special Developmental School, depending on the level of their intellectual disability. They are also able to attend a mainstream school, and the school will receive funding to support the child's learning needs. A student who receives funding under the Autism Spectrum Disorder category is eligible to attend an Autism Specific School. Again, they are also able to attend a mainstream school, and the school will receive funding to support the child's learning needs. The mainstream school will also receive funding for a student who meets criteria under the Severe Behaviour Disorder category to support the educational needs of the student.

How do we apply for school funding?

It is recommended that you share your child's diagnosis with the school as soon as possible so that the Principal can organise any necessary assessments to determine whether your child will be eligible to apply for PSD funding. Your Principal will guide you through the process and determine whether or not your child meets eligibility criteria. This may involve the school reading assessment reports that you provide them about your child, and may require some new assessments with your child, and interviews with you or other professionals such as your child's therapists or kindergarten teacher.

If the Principal feels that your child fits criteria to apply for funding, they will organise a meeting with you to fill in the necessary paperwork. This meeting will involve a number of key people (e.g. the Principal or Assistant Principal, the Prep teacher if this is ►



Schooling Options

known, an integration aide, the school psychologist etc.) who form part of your child's Student Support Group. This group is a cooperative partnership between parents/carers, school representatives, and other professionals. The Student Support Group should meet once per term to discuss your child's progress and learning goals to ensure the best educational outcomes. These meetings to support your child's educational needs should occur even if the PSD funding application is unsuccessful.



During this meeting the Student Support Group will complete the DEECD's Education Needs Questionnaire (ENQ) to assess your child's abilities in a number of different areas. The scores on this measure will determine the amount of funding your child will receive should the application be successful. Parents are often asked to imagine their child at their very worst when answering these questions to ensure they receive an adequate level of funding to support their educational needs.

Once this process is completed, the school will submit the application to the DEECD. This can happen towards the end of the year before your child starts Prep (which is preferable, as if found eligible, funding will be in place ready for their first day at school), or into the first few weeks of term of their Prep year.



The process for Catholic and Independent schools is slightly different. Speak to the Principal for information on the process for applying for funding.

How is the funding used and what is it used for?

The school will be notified of the outcome of the funding application and will contact you to let you know if the application has been successful, and if so, what amount of funding was granted. Together, you and the school will decide how to best spend that funding to support your child's educational needs. Usually, this will be an aide in the classroom for a certain number of hours per week to work to support your child. There are other ways the funding can be used, however, such as speech therapy sessions, assistance in the playground, special training for teachers, or resources or equipment to assist with your child's learning.

If your child's application for funding is not successful, you can talk to the school about how they plan to support your child. Many schools have excellent programs in place so that children with additional needs can receive assistance even if they do not have funding. You should continue to have regular Student Support Group meetings to ensure that your child's educational goals are being met.

Useful websites and resources

[Program for Students with Disabilities Handbook](#)

Download the PSD handbook:

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/

[Independent Schools Website](#)

For more information visit: www.ais.vic.edu.au.

[Catholic Education Office](#)

Click on the link that says "Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs" under Student Services on the left-hand side of the © for funding information: www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au/office-services/student-services/

[Amaze Fact Sheets](#)

Information and fact sheets dedicated to the primary school years: www.amaze.org.au/primary

Useful Websites

A number of websites have been listed throughout this book. We list some of the important ones here, along with some other resources that might be of interest.

Video on the Helping Children with Autism Package and the role of the Autism Advisors

www.amaze.org.au/hcwa

The Autism Advisor team at Autism Victoria have put together this video presentation as an introduction to the Helping Children with Autism package. It can be found under the Resources tab.

FaHCSIA's Authorised Provider Panel

www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/helping-children-with-autism/early-intervention-service-providers/victoria

FaHCSIA's official listing of therapists on their Authorised Provider Panel. This list is to be used in conjunction with the information provided by your Autism Advisor.

Raising Children Network

www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism

The national ASD website.

PlayConnect Playgroups

www.playconnect.com.au

Autism specific playgroups for preschool aged children with ASDs or ASD-like symptoms. Visit the website or phone 1800 790 335.

Early Days Workshops

www.amaze.org.au/earlydays

A national series of workshops for parents of preschool aged children with ASDs. Visit the website or phone 1300 307 909.

Positive Partnerships

www.positivepartnerships.org.au

A national series of workshops for parents and teachers of school aged children with ASDs. Visit the website or phone 1300 881 971.

My Time Support Groups

www.mytime.net.au

Groups for mothers, fathers, and carers of children with a disability (not specific to ASD),

developmental delay or chronic medical condition. Visit their website or call 1800 889 997.

Association for Children with a Disability

www.acd.org.au

An organisation, run by parents, that provides information, support and advocacy for families who have a child or young adult with a disability or developmental delay across Victoria. Visit their website or phone (03) 9818 2000.

Through the Maze resource

www.acd.org.au/information/ttm.htm

The Association for Children with a Disability publish this excellent resource that helps families of children with disabilities navigate the various supports available to families of children with disabilities.

Carers Victoria

www.carersvic.org.au

This organisation offers advice and information, counselling and links to respite opportunities for carers of people with disabilities in Victoria. Visit their website or call 1800 242 636.

Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre

www.commcarelink.gov.au

The Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre is the main point of contact for families searching for respite options in their local area.

Amaze

www.amaze.org.au

The peak body for Autism in Victoria. Visit our website to learn more about Autism Spectrum Disorders and find information workshops, events and training being conducted across the state.





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