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Autism Victoria Professional Advisory Panel

Position statement on:

Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia

Considering recent prevalence studies and prevalence reviews for the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) or the individual diagnoses Autistic Disorder (autism), Asperger's Disorder (or syndrome) and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS) reveals some consensus on the prevalence of autism and across the three ASDs, but less certainty about Asperger's Disorder or PDDNOS individually. This is because few studies have looked just at the prevalence of these latter two disorders.

All recent studies support a rise in the prevalence of Autistic Disorder and the combined ASDs over time, especially since the 1990s and this is most likely due to a combination of changing diagnostic criteria and increased public and professional awareness of autism. There are no reliable Australian data on the prevalence of the individual disorders. However the recent report by MacDermott¹ and colleagues in early 2007 supports what is probably the most authoritative current overseas estimate by Fombonne² (2005) that is, the current prevalence of ASDs within Australia is estimated to be

¹ MacDermott, S., Williams, K., Ridley, G., Glasson, E., & Wray, J. (2007). *The prevalence of autism in Australia. Can it be established from existing data?* Report for the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

² Fombonne, E. (2005). The changing epidemiology of autism. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 18, 281-294.

1:160 children. Overseas data indicate that within the ASDs Autistic Disorder is likely to be the most common diagnosis given, while Asperger's Disorder may be the least common. However given the current controversy over whether Asperger's Disorder is indeed different from Autistic Disorder and that all children on the autism spectrum are significantly affected in their development, it is more useful to consider the 1:160 figure for the ASDs for service planning within Victoria.
