

Media Release

National autism group applauds Tasmanian policy

The Tasmanian Liberal Party's autism policy has been praised by the peak body, Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia.

“The Liberal Party in Tasmania is the first political party in Australia with a policy to deliver ‘best practice’ for young children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The Liberal’s policy could meet the Commonwealth Government’s 2006 ‘guidelines for best practice’ for children with autism” according to Bob Buckley, Convenor of Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4), the national grassroots advocacy group for people with autism spectrum disorders.

The policy says a Liberal Government in Tasmania will introduce:

- screening for better and earlier detection of autism spectrum disorders
- enhanced diagnostic services
treatment centres for autism spectrum disorders.

This policy extends plans of Tasmania’s Liberals to improve services and support for school students with autism spectrum disorders.

Mr Buckley suggests “Politicians and bureaucrats in Australia have struggled to develop policies that promote ‘best practice’ for people with autism spectrum disorders. Currently Australia does not have enough trained specialist clinicians and allied health professionals with the experience needed to provide clients with appropriate ASD-specific treatment, rehabilitation, services and support using cost effective programs.

The Commonwealth Government advises that children with autism spectrum disorders need at least 20 hours per week or 1000 hours per year for several years of intensive, ASD-specific early intervention. The cost of 1000 hours of early intervention under the Commonwealth Government’s *Helping Children with Autism* model exceeds \$120,000 per child per year, of which the Commonwealth Government contributes \$6,000 per year for two years.

According to Mr Buckley “best practice early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders can be provided for around \$50K-\$60K per child per year. Australian Governments should create centres that offer ‘best practice’ early intervention that families can afford, and fund training of specialised clinical staff in sufficient numbers. Savings for governments and the community from effective early intervention are enormous. Benefits for the families involved are invaluable.”

The policy of the Tasmania's Liberals addresses these issues. This important step adds to existing Liberal policy supporting A-Teams in education (see <http://tasliberal.com.au/policy/supporting-students-with-autism>).

The number of people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders has grown enormously. 1-in-25,000 children were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders in 1980. Today that rate has grown to 1-in-91: over 1% of children are now diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. As a result, the US government has dramatically increased research funding to better understand autism spectrum disorders.

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References: attached policy from Tasmania
Health Department Guidelines from
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-child-autbro-toc~mental-child-autbro-best>