**MEDIA RELEASE**

**AUTISM COMMUNITY CALLS ON ANDREWS GOVERNMENT FOR AUTISM FUNDING**

The Victorian autism community is calling on the Andrews Labor Government to announce its commitment to support autistic Victorians, their families and carers if it is re-elected to govern Victoria. Disappointingly, the highly anticipated Victorian Autism Plan will not be released prior to the state election, despite three years of consultation and engagement with the Victorian autism community.

Victorian autism organisations Amaze, The I CAN Network, Yellow Ladybugs, Aspergers Victoria, Autism Family Support Association, Different Journeys and Spectrum Journeys – which represent around 55,000 autistic Victorians – are collectively calling for the Andrews Labor Government to act on autism.

Following the release of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Autism in mid-2017, which included 101 Recommendations to address the disadvantage and needs of autistic Victorians, the community welcomed the Government’s initial commitment of $22m whilst the Victorian Autism Plan was developed.

On 19 September, Opposition Leader Matthew Guy committed $50m to increase support and services for the autism community, including the establishment of a Premier’s Autism Advisory Council.

All autism organisations are calling for Mr Andrews to match or exceed Mr Guy’s commitment, with a funding commitment that would include, at least:

* $5m for a public education campaign on autism for the next three years
* Establishment of a Premier’s Autism Advisory Council
* An autism education strategy to increase the education achievements of autistic students
* Investment in autism organisations to continue and expand their work in supporting autistic people and their families

“All of our organisations have represented our communities, working in good faith with the Victorian Government to develop the Victorian Autism Plan, which was scheduled to be released by October 2018” said Amaze CEO, Fiona Sharkie.

“85% of Victorians have a personal connection with an autistic person and 72% agree autistic people should receive more support – autism is a key election issue”.

“Expectations are high in the autism community following three years of consultation. The time for action is now.”

Chris Varney, Chief Enabling Officer of The I CAN Network, said “We are looking to Daniel Andrews to meet or exceed Mr Guy’s commitment of $50m and establish a Premier’s Autism Advisory Council, which would include autistic people, to drive the implementation of the Victorian Autism Plan.”

Katie Koullas, Chief Inspiration Officer of Yellow Ladybugs, said “More autistic girls and women are being diagnosed but are not adequately supported due to lack of tailored resources for schools, workplaces and allied health professionals; urgent action and funding is needed”

Tamsin Jowett, President of Aspergers Victoria, said “The Inquiry into Autism made 101 recommendations in 2016 over 18 months ago and our community has waited long enough for action. Our schools are failing those with learning differences, and even more critical are the employment supports our adult community needs now. We need all parties and politicians to commit to action for autism and support the inclusion of neurodiversity now.”

Michael Tucker, President of the Autism Family Support Association, said “People with autism and their families need greater support and services now and into the future. People with autism have the same right to social inclusion and support as all other citizens.”

Mel Spencer, Founder of Different Journeys, said “For too long autism has not received the attention it deserved from governments, but over the past four years it has been elevated as an important political issue – we want that momentum to continue and grow in the next four years.”

Kate Johnson, Director of Spectrum Journeys said, “The opportunity to take action and support Autistic Victorians is now – the massive gaps in education opportunities are stark – and we are calling on all politicians to commit to changing this.

# ENDS #

**Background information**

**About autism**

* Autism is a neurodevelopmental lifelong condition, for which there is no cure.
* Over 1 in 100 Australians are autistic.
* Autism affects every person differently. Autism can look like:
  + Challenges with communication and interacting with others
  + Repetitive and different behaviours, moving in different ways
  + Strong interest in one topic or subject
  + Unusual reactions to what they see, hear, smell, touch or taste
  + Preference for routines and dislike change
* Currently 3 times as many males are diagnosed with autism than females, although female rates are rising.
* The unemployment rate for autistic adults (31.6%) is more than three times the rate for people with disability (10.0%) and almost six times the rate of people without disability (5.3%).
* 31% of participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme are autistic – the diagnostic group within the scheme.
* There is no known cause of autism, though research is ongoing to learn more about this. Currently, it is believed to result from changes to the development and growth of the brain, which may be caused by a combination of factors, including environmental and genetic ones. Autism is not caused by vaccination or other medical treatment.
* The Victorian Parliamentary Family and Community Development Committee undertook an wide-ranging and extensive Inquiry into Autism from 2015 – 2017. The Committee made 101 Recommendations to increase the support and service for autistic people across Victorian – there report is available here: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/fcdc/inquiries/58th/Autism/FCDC_58-03_Autism_report.pdf>