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**Victoria leading the way with launch of state autism plan**

The Andrews Government today released a five-year *Victorian Autism Plan*, a move welcomed by autism peak body Amaze.

Currently the only state autism plan in Australia, the *Victorian Autism Plan* responds to the recommendations of the 2017 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder. It includes initiatives to drive change in areas of importance for autistic Victorians and their families, including mental health, education and employment.

Amaze CEO Fiona Sharkie says the organisation has been advocating for the development of a new five-year state autism plan for autistic Victorians across all life stages for more than five years.

“The number of Australians diagnosed with autism has increased 25 per cent since 2015, 85 per cent of Australians have a personal connection with an autistic person and a third of NDIS participants have a primary diagnosis of autism. However, the social and economic outcomes for autistic people are the lowest of people with a disability – the release of this Plan is not only timely, it’s much-needed”, Ms Sharkie said.

“The *Victorian Autism Plan* is an important show of leadership from the Andrews Government and a positive step toward understanding and supporting better life outcomes for autistic people,” Ms Sharkie added.

**Key initiatives in the *Victorian Autism Plan* include:**

* Improving timely access to diagnosis and adoption of the new National Guidelines for Autism Diagnosis.
* Improving the community’s understanding of autism through a comprehensive public education campaign.
* Building autism understanding and competency among staff and professionals in a range of sectors, including health, mental health and education.
* Piloting a program to reduce avoidable presentations and lengthy stays for autistic children in paediatric emergency departments.
* Advocating to the Federal Government for a stronger NDIS.
* Establishing twice yearly forums to enable autistic people and their supporters to advise government on emerging issues and policy needs, including for autistic people with complex needs, LGBTIQA+ communities, and culturally diverse communities.
* Developing specialist programs to make sport and recreation more accessible to autistic people.

 “Current funding is not where we need it to be to achieve meaningful change across the Plan’s identified life domains, but we are encouraged by the Victorian Government’s leadership in this space, and their commitment to securing further funding to create an inclusive Victoria," Ms Sharkie said.

“Critical to the success of the Plan will be working with autistic people and their families to establish meaningful indicators to monitor real change.

“The Government must work with autistic people and their supporters to ensure the Plan is implemented effectively and its impact measured. We need indicators that represent real world benefit for the autism community, including reduced waiting times for diagnosis, more autistic students achieving Year 12, more autistic adults in work and mental health practitioners skilled in treating autistic people,” Ms Sharkie said.

Amaze also welcomed the Government’s commitment to public annual reporting and a mid-Plan refresh.

“To achieve meaningful change in five years, bold and creative ideas driven by learnings from the Plan’s early implementation will be needed. Greater community engagement and reporting transparency are positive steps to ensure the Plan is driven by and accountable to the autism community from the outset.” Ms Sharkie concluded.

Amaze has been involved as a member of the Victorian Autism Plan Advisory Group, and will continue to advocate to the Victorian Government to ensure the Plan improves outcomes for autistic people and their families.

**-ENDS-**

For more information and requests for interviews, please contact:

Nicolette Roberts, P: 03 8628 9320 | M: 0438 143 342 | E: nicolette@royce.com.au

**About Amaze**

Amaze is the peak body for autistic people and their families in Victoria.

Amaze builds understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism, and influences positive systemic change to enable autistic people and their families to participate and contribute to society.

Amaze provides independent, credible information and resources to autistic people, families, professionals, government and the wider community.

The organisation was founded in 1967 by a group of parents who were struggling to find autism resources and set up the ‘Victorian Autistic Children’s and Adult’s Association’. It provided a central information source and supported individuals and their families. The organisation was renamed ‘Autism Victoria Inc’ in 1999 and again renamed Amaze in 2013.