

# Autism sector's election call: Stand with Autistic people and commit to Autistic leadership and inclusion



Victorian autism sector organisations Amaze, Aspergers Victoria, Different Journeys, I CAN Network, Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre and Yellow Ladybugs are calling on candidates in the lead up to the Victorian State election to stand with Autistic people and commit to Autistic leadership and inclusion.

Our organisations strive to represent the diverse interests of all Autistic Victorians and create autism inclusive communities. With the election drawing near, we have reflected on the nation leading reforms implemented by the Victorian Government since Victoria's 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into Services for Autistic people. These have included:

- ✓ Development of a **Victorian Autism Plan**
- ✓ Implementation of **Victoria's Autism Education Strategy**
- ✓ Rolling out Victoria's **Disability Inclusion Program** in schools
- ✓ Expanding **I CAN Network's mentoring programs** across more metropolitan and regional schools
- ✓ Investing in the **'Change Your Reactions'** public awareness campaign
- ✓ Maternal and Child Health Nurse **training on early signs of autism**

We congratulate the Victorian Government on these reforms, with many driven by the Inquiry's recommendations. However, more needs to be done. With many of the recommendations still outstanding, and the proposed implementation and refresh of Victoria's Autism Plan now overdue, it's time for the next Victorian Government to stand with Autistic people and commit to renewed action.

United, we call on **all Victorian election candidates** to commit to:

1. Supports and services for all Autistic Victorians and their families.
2. The swift delivery of a revised, Autistic-led and accountable Victorian Autism Plan.
3. Autistic-led inclusion across Victorian schools, workplaces, services and communities.

**"We've come a long way, but have much, much further to go."**

*- Autistic respondent, Autism Inclusion Monitor*

# United, we call on the incoming Victorian government to:

## 1. Invest in support for Autistic Victorians

- Guarantee Victorians of all ages **free and timely** access to state-wide assessment and diagnostic services, including through Victoria's new Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs for Young People and Adults.

**Infant, Child, Family Health and Wellbeing Hubs** are a good example of how this can be done. These hubs will provide a one-stop-shop for quicker and comprehensive assessment and diagnosis of children aged 0-11.

- Ensure all Autistic Victorians, regardless of whether they are NDIS participants, can access the supports and services they need, when they need them.
- Co-design a Victorian roadmap to **address the health and mental health of Autistic people**.

Through the **Mindful program**, autism awareness and understanding of the Child and Adult Mental Health Services is increasing. By delivering training, workshops and resources to clinicians, the Mindful approach has improved autism identification and assessment, as well as life outcomes for Autistic people. A co-ordinated approach to building autism responsive mental health services is urgently needed.

- Continue to build inclusive schools by measuring the impact of Victoria's Autism Education Strategy, **committing to I CAN Network's ongoing expansion** across all schools and making the Disability Inclusion process more accessible for students and families.
- Embrace the **employment aspirations of Autistic Victorians**, including funding Jobs Victoria to take an Autistic-led approach to supporting employment and building careers.

We've seen great success through programs like the **Rise program** – an initiative by the Victorian Government and Specialisterne Australia. To date, the Rise program has opened up career opportunities for over 30 Autistic people, with many remaining employed in government careers. We'd like to see more programs like this introduced.

**“Autistic people have unique skills that can benefit any workplace if employers know how to apply them.”**

*– Autistic respondent, Autism Inclusion Monitor*

## 2. Lead an autism-inclusive Victoria

- Co-produce with Autistic people a **revised Victorian Autism Plan** with clear targets, timeframes, and reporting obligations.
- Prioritise implementation of the Victorian Autism Plan, including funding a **dedicated resource within the Office of Disability**.
- Ensure all policies and initiatives **reflect and support all Autistic people**, including those with complex support needs, from CALD communities, First Nations people, LGBTQI+ people and women and girls.

## 3. Empower and listen to the autism community

- Access the skills and knowledge of Autistic people, their families and Autistic-led organisations to build autism expertise across sectors and grow inclusive communities.
- **Support inclusive workplaces**, learning from Autistic-led organisations and other organisations that employ Autistic people.
- Invest in the evaluation of Autistic-led peer support programs across Victoria.
- **Fund Autistic-led organisations** to build autism pride, advocacy skills and social opportunities for young Autistic people and adults.

With the right settings and supports, there is a huge opportunity to improve outcomes for Victoria's sizeable autism community and unlock the breadth of talent, ambition, and skills of Autistic Victorians.

While recognising and celebrating the advances Victoria has made in policy and program settings for Autistic people and their families over recent years, there is still much more to do. We believe the actions above are all possible and achievable and will see Victoria leading the way nationally in creating autism-inclusive communities.

