



AADDM

Australian Association of
Developmental Disability Medicine

**The diagnostic process for children, adolescents and adults referred for
assessment of autism spectrum disorder in Australia:
National guideline draft for community consultation.
AADDM Submission. October 2017**

The Australian Association of Developmental Disability Medicine (AADDM) welcomes the opportunity to comment on *The diagnostic process for children, adolescents and adults referred for assessment of autism spectrum disorder in Australia: National guideline draft for community consultation*. AADDM is an organisation of medical and other health professionals who work with children, adolescents and adults with intellectual disability, and their families, to improve their health and wellbeing. Through professional development and advocacy, AADDM aims to improve the health and wellbeing of over 500 000 Australians with intellectual disability.

AADDM supports elements of the Guidelines, but holds significant concerns about important aspects. Key elements of the *guideline* we support include:

- the importance of function and support needs for people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Recognition of the importance of the person and the family's experience of the assessment process and the need to be supported through it;
- The pragmatic 2 tiered approach to diagnosing ASD,
- The importance of working collaboratively across disciplines.

However, AADDM holds significant concerns in relation to several important professional and service implications of these Guidelines. These *draft guidelines* introduce a range of complex and intricate new requirements for involved professionals and the diagnostic process which will be unlikely to address inconsistencies in current approaches to diagnosis and will introduce new issues with uncertain impact. Furthermore, the resource implications of these guidelines can be expected to be substantial, and warrants serious consideration. This must include all aspects of proposed modifications to service delivery, training and monitoring.

AADDM acknowledges that the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is important for understanding the types of interventions that may be helpful for the person, however, a precise categorical diagnostic approach for ASD may not be feasible for a particular individual given inherent complexities of the condition. We strongly support a diagnostic formulation that focusses on developmental/functional skills as the foundation and ensures that appropriate support and intervention are provided to the person, and their family, irrespective of the specific diagnosis. These are not clearly apparent in these Guidelines. We believe that some of the recommendations are unlikely to be workable or in the best interests of the person suspected to have ASD.

We strongly recommend that the inclusion of speech therapists and occupational therapists as diagnosticians be reviewed. AADDM recognises their importance to the diagnostic process and to intervention, but contends that diagnosis requires extensive professional training to integrate a complex array of health and other clinical information. For this reason, AADDM does not support speech therapists and occupational therapists being a sole/primary diagnostician.

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We also recommend that:

- ASD specific diagnostic processes are effectively integrated into existing services, especially those for detecting and diagnosing developmental delay/disability.
- Irrespective of the outcome of an ASD diagnostic assessment the goal is to provide assistance to the person and their family in relation to their concerns.
- Guiding principles should include a statement that diagnosis should consider issues from a lifespan perspective.
- The extensive requirements for ASD specific training is not feasible for most medical specialists, eg paediatricians and psychiatrists.
- Specific recommendations in relation to allied health professionals such as psychologists must be in line with APS and psychology college recommendations.
- Significant costs are likely to be incurred by families in order to meet the assessment/diagnosis requirements and this needs to be considered and acknowledged.

AADDM is aware that several of our members are also contributing to the submissions of other professional organisations and commend those submissions to you. We look forward to reviewing the next draft of the Guidelines.

Dr Jacqueline Small
President

And

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