



Hon Curtis Pitt MP
Member for Mulgrave



**Queensland
Government**

Your reference: Petition 1754-11
Our reference: DIS/11/1084
COM 11188-2011

**Minister for Disability Services,
Mental Health and Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Partnerships**

22 SEP 2011

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

DEAR NEIL

I refer to your letter of 25 August 2011 attaching Petition 1754-11 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly concerning access to supports and services for children of all ages with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder over the past 15 years has grown significantly, resulting in increased demand for specialist services and early interventions. The Queensland Government is committed to meeting the increased needs of Queenslanders through early intervention and specialist disability supports designed to assist children with autism and their families to access the supports they need during this important stage in their lives.

This commitment is demonstrated through the Autism Early Intervention initiative which has grown from \$1.1 million in initial funding in 2005-06 to \$4.323 million in 2010-11. This funding supports 471 children with autism in a range of locations across Queensland, and includes centre-based services, therapy supports and outreach services to rural and remote areas of the State.

Disability and Community Care Services funds a range of Early Intervention supports that are targeted towards meeting the needs of children aged zero to six years with a disability, including children with autism and their families. The Autism Early Intervention initiative provides specialist therapy supports including speech and occupational services, outreach programs for families and important integration support for when children enter mainstream child care or prep education programs.

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Other supports available to children with a disability, including children with autism, can be accessed through the Support for Families initiative and the Family and Early Childhood Services (FECS) teams. The Support for Families initiative provides a range of supports to build the capacity of the family to remain in their caring role. Support for Families follows a holistic approach and places supports around the whole family, including children with a disability and/or autism. More than 2,000 families are supported through this initiative. Families can also access specialist therapy supports through the 15 FECS teams situated in 18 locations throughout Queensland. Of the 1,674 children who accessed the supports available through the FECS teams in 2010–11, approximately 250 had a diagnosis of autism.

In addition, Disability and Community Care Services funds over 140 funded non-government service providers to provide services that include early intervention, behavioural intervention therapy, family support and assistance planning, specialist and therapy services and respite supports that can be accessed by families with a child with autism.

Disability and Community Care Services is continuing to build upon existing early intervention supports to assist children with autism and their families. To this end under the *Building Bright Futures: an action plan for children with a disability—birth to eight years 2010–13*, the Queensland Government committed to developing a planning strategy to work towards statewide coverage of specialist autism services for children with autism aged up to six years.

Details about *Building Bright Futures* can be accessed at the website www.communities.qld.gov.au. I would encourage the petitioners to review this document which outlines the priorities for the department regarding early intervention strategies for children with a disability, including children with autism.

Also, as part of the Government's commitment under *Building Bright Futures*, Disability and Community Care Services is in the process of developing a statewide autism plan. This autism plan will inform future service development across the State to further support children with autism and their families, including a planning strategy to work towards statewide coverage of specialist autism services for children with autism up to six years.

If you require any further information or assistance in relation to this matter, please contact Ms Meg Frisby, Principal Advisor of my office on 323 54826.

I thank the petitioners for taking the time to make me aware of their concerns.

Yours sincerely



Curtis Pitt MP
Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
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