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Position Statement

National Guideline for the Assessment and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Australia

NBPSA

The Neurodevelopmental and Behavioural Paediatric Society of Australasia (NBPSA) comprises a majority of paediatricians with specialist clinical expertise in neurodevelopmental and behavioural concerns in children and young adults.

Position

Over 10,000 children under 12 years of age were newly diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder across Australia in 2015. Paediatricians assessed and diagnosed 97 per cent of these children.

As key experts in this field, the NBPSA supports continued efforts to improve consistency in neurodevelopmental and behavioural assessment for children.

The new National Guideline is a great first step as it describes a process to follow in order to understand the level of functioning, care needs and potential diagnoses for an individual with neurodevelopmental and behavioural challenges. To maximise the effectiveness of the Guideline it will be important to ensure that clinicians have the right level of knowledge and understanding for implementation, and that agreement is reached on the criteria for access to support services being used by NDIS planners and by funders across health, education and disability services.

The New Guideline:

- Emphasises the need to undertake any assessment of Autism concerns within the context of a broader neurodevelopmental and behavioural assessment.
- Supports a more consistent approach to neurodevelopmental and behavioural assessment
- Supports assessment of neurodevelopmental and behavioural problems on the basis of fairness, equity, and respect for individual needs and variations as well as a strengths-based approach and partnerships with the individual, parents, and other professionals.
- Clarifies that functional and care needs of a child, not a diagnosis, should be the primary determining factor for gaining access to support services.

It is particularly important that further action is taken to ensure the Guidelines can achieve real benefits for children and young people. The Society is keen to contribute to achievement of these benefits.

Further Actions

- Description of the knowledge, skills and competencies required of the clinicians involved in assessments, particularly in assessments for children (to be done with relevant professional bodies).
- Development of a framework for greater consistency in the assessment of functional ability and care needs in order to inform support (using an assessment of functioning that has broad application across a range of concerns, rather than diagnosis specific assessment tools).
- Creation of a shared, standardised language to help families and professionals to maintain effective lines of communication when deciding on eligibility for support, establishing care plans and evaluating their effectiveness.
- Development of a clear implementation evaluation strategy to contribute evidence towards understanding the effectiveness of the Guideline (especially important given that the Guideline is informed by consensus-based recommendations, rather than empirical evidence).