



National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People

Health Roadmap Working Group Meeting 3 (18 October 2023)

The Health Roadmap Working Group (the Working Group) was formed in May 2023 to provide expert advice and oversee development of a National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People (the Roadmap). Meeting 3 was held on 18 October 2023 and is the focus of this summary.

Introduction

The meeting was chaired by two of the Working Group deputy co-chairs. One of the meeting co-chairs, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the third meeting of the Health Roadmap Working group and provided an acknowledgment of country.

The meeting chair noted that the Working Group chair was unable to attend the meeting and sent his apologies.

Members were asked to declare any conflicts of interest that were not previously declared to the secretariat. None were declared.

Housekeeping

Since the last meeting four organisations have changed their representatives. The new representatives were introduced.

Since the last meeting five members (including two deputy co-chairs) have stepped back from the Working Group due to their roles as part of the co-design facilitation team. These members may be invited by the Chair to re-join the working group at the conclusion of the co-design consultations.

Autism Awareness

Three Autistic members of the Working Group presented on different aspects of Autistic communication, with the aim of educating non-Autistic working group members on how to better meet the needs of Autistic people.

The presentations delved into the possible differences in autistic communication styles when compared to non-autistic communication. Key points the presenters raised included:

- Willingness to accept that being autistic means different not less than.
- Equity to allow Autistic people equal opportunities in communication.
- Request for willingness of non-autistic people to learn and be respectful of autistic communication culture and meet in the middle, rather than the onus being placed solely on Autistic people to learn and assimilate into non-Autistic culture.
- Developing trust through mutual respect and understanding of differences in communication strategies.

- Avoiding communication misunderstandings by checking the intent behind emotions, gestures, tone etc.
- Understanding fundamental differences between autistic traits and non-autistic traits such as monotropism or hyperfocus being the natural way to be for most Autistic people compared to polytropic for some non-Autistic people.

Final Guiding Principles and Elements

After the second Working Group meeting, Working Group members were invited to submit feedback on the draft Guiding Principles and Elements, including via a survey.

The Department presented on the updates made from the feedback provided. The presentation highlighted the wording changes with a focus on how the feedback was used to make the Guiding Principles and Elements better representative of the needs of Autistic people and the autism community. Members were invited to provide additional feedback during or following the meeting. No substantial feedback was received.

Co-design facilitator (Autism CRC)

Following a procurement process that involved Autistic members of the Working Group, the Autism CRC had been selected as the co-design facilitators for the Roadmap. Autism CRC is a national independent collaborative research organisation focused on autism across the lifespan. Autism CRC presented a high-level summary of the design of the co-design project.

The project will consist of five workstreams, each of which will have two leads; including one Autistic lead. There will be community consultation including focus groups and interviews, a Stakeholder Reference Group, use of existing autism data sets and National Autism Strategy consultation findings. The project will conclude with a Summit and final report to the Roadmap Working Group in February 2024.

National Autism Strategy Update

The Department of Social Services provided an update on the progress of the National Autism Strategy. The presentation gave a high-level overview of the approach to community engagement and how this will guide the outcomes of the Strategy. Preliminary findings which will guide the drafting of the strategy were presented and discussed with Working Group members.

Next steps

Following the meeting the Department emailed presentations for meeting 3 and the meeting 1 and 2 summary to the Working Group. Members were invited to provide feedback on the co-design approach and the final Guiding Principles and Elements.

The Working Group will reconvene in February when Autism CRC has prepared its report from the targeted codesign engagements. Dates for future working groups will be determined and communicated to members.