



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

# Health Roadmap Working Group Meetings 4 and 5

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 4 was held on 22 February 2024 and meeting 5 was held on 7 March 2024, these are the focus of this summary.

## Meeting 4 (22 February 2024)

### Introduction

The meeting was chaired by two of the Working Group deputy co-chairs. They opened the meeting by welcoming everyone all attendees and provided an acknowledgment of country.

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

### Housekeeping

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) noted some senior staffing changes at the department in 2024. As a result, the chair of the Working Group will be the Assistant Secretary of the Allied Health and Service Integration Branch, Amber Shuhyta.

The Autism CRC co-design project is in the final stages.

### The Department overview of 2024 Roadmap plans

The department presented an overview of the 2024 Roadmap plans.

The Working Group will meet regularly to discuss the findings of the co-design project and support the development of the Roadmap. The draft Roadmap will be released for public consultation once a draft has been completed and approved for public release by the Minister for Health and Aged Care.

After public consultation the Roadmap will be refined and reviewed by the Minister prior to publication.

## **Presentation of the co-design approach and overall findings**

The Autism CRC team discussed an overview of the approach and overall findings of the co-design project.

Co-design and community consultations were centred around ensuring safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and respecting the diversity of all stakeholders. A focus was placed on ensuring that engagement was conducted in partnership and in a psychologically safe manner.

Existing data sources were analysed to maximise knowledge including the National Autism Strategy consultation and many other studies.

A national community partner network was created by partnering with Autistic led organisations throughout the country, enabling access to a broad range of stakeholders. Where an identified group was underrepresented, the Autism CRC made efforts to seek out further representation from that group to address it.

Some of the findings presented included:

- An overview of the healthcare journey of an Autistic person,
- The barriers and challenges currently faced by Autistic people when they need care,
- An overview of the systemic issues around transitions between and within services and forms of care.

## **Next steps**

Following the meeting the department emailed presentations for meeting 4. The Working Group will reconvene on 7 March for a presentation and discussion of the Autism CRC co-design project.

## **Meeting 5 (7 March 2024)**

### **Introduction**

The meeting was chaired by the chair and one of the Working Group deputy co-chairs.

The meeting was opened by welcoming everyone to the meeting and provided an acknowledgment of country.

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

### **The Roadmap, the National Autism Strategy, and the co-design project**

The department answered questions from the Working Group about the progress of the National Autism Strategy and the co-design project.

The Roadmap is an associated plan to the National Autism Strategy. The Autism Roadmap is being led by the department; the Autism Strategy is being led by the Department of Social Services. The department engaged Autism CRC to conduct a co-design project to provide recommendations to the Working Group. The recommendations will be used by the Working Group to advise discussions and to inform the Roadmap.

## **Findings and Recommendations of the Autism CRC co-design project**

The Autism CRC presented the findings and recommendations of the co-design project which had been completed just before the meeting.

They gave an overview of the projects different workstreams and community engagement and discussed the challenges faced by Autistic people and potential solutions in relation to each of the Roadmap elements.

Each of the 25 recommendations from the report were read out and discussed. All the recommendations centre around neurodivergent affirming and collaboratively developed with Autistic individuals, the autistic community and healthcare providers. Some of the topics the recommendations covered include:

- Medical and allied health healthcare
- Accessible healthcare and improving navigation
- Healthcare at all levels of ability,
- Creating resources to increase practitioner and community awareness including best practice guidelines and
- Models of healthcare delivery such as multi-disciplinary healthcare hubs.

Autistic Working group members were pleased to hear that intersectionality, diagnostic overshadowing and differences in sensory profiles including pain reception and pain expression were covered. Working group members were given the opportunity to ask questions during the meeting, or to send in questions to the secretariat after the meeting.

## **Next step**

Following the meeting the department emailed presentations for meeting 5. The Working Group will reconvene on 26 March to discuss the development of the Roadmap, proposed outcomes, and the length of time for Roadmap actions.