



## National Autism Strategy Reference Group Meeting Summary

### Canberra, 23 February 2026

The first meeting of the National Autism Strategy Reference Group (the Reference Group) was held in Canberra on 23 February 2026. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr Chris Varney, CEO, I CAN Network, and Mr Ross Schafer, First Assistant Secretary, Carers, Autism, Markets and Safeguards Division of the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. The meeting brought together Reference Group members from the Autistic and autism community, including the research and professional sectors, and representatives from relevant Australian Government departments.

The meeting commenced with introductions and consideration of the Group's Terms of Reference.

The Reference Group received updates on progress of implementation of the National Autism Strategy 2025-31 (the Strategy) and the accompanying First Action Plan 2025-26 (First Action Plan). Members noted ongoing work aligned with the key outcome areas under the Strategy, including social inclusion; economic inclusion; diagnosis, services and supports; and enabling actions including evidence and evaluation and research.

The implementation update highlighted early achievements under the First Action Plan and outlined areas requiring continued focus throughout 2026, where Reference Group members will inform implementation.

Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, attended the meeting and spoke with Reference Group members. Minister McAllister emphasised the importance of the Group's contribution and guidance in shaping effective policy, implementation and priorities to improve life outcomes for Autistic people.

Members discussed and provided comments on the proposed forward work plan for the Reference Group and opportunities for collaboration and consultation across government, the Autistic and autism community, and the broader disability community.

Discussion also focused on enhancing engagement with stakeholders and ensuring that implementation of the Strategy and First Action Plan continues to reflect the views and experiences of Autistic people and their families and carers.

Further information about the appointment of the Reference Group is available here:

[Community representatives appointed to the National Autism Strategy Reference Group | Health, Disability and Ageing Ministers.](#)

An [infographic highlighting key Strategy and First Action Plan implementation](#) activity to date is available.

Further information about the Strategy, First Action Plan and the Reference Group is available here: [National Autism Strategy | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#).

