

National Autism Strategy Reference Group Terms of Reference

Purpose of the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference set out the objectives, scope of work and operational arrangements of the National Autism Strategy Reference Group (Reference Group) and the responsibilities of those associated with the Reference Group.

Status of Terms of Reference

The final Terms of Reference will be developed in consultation with the Reference Group and are subject to approval by the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Minister) or the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (department).

Reference Group members must comply with the Terms of Reference.

Establishment of the Reference Group

The Reference Group was established in December 2025 and will operate until the end of 2026, unless the Minister or the department determines a different date (including an earlier date).

The Reference Group is a non-statutory, advisory body that was not established by legislation. It has no independent legal personality and was established by the Minister to provide advice and input on relevant matters.

While the Reference Group itself does not have legal personality, members are nonetheless required to comply with all relevant legislation, including any applicable duties, obligations, and codes of conduct.

Purpose of the Reference Group

The Reference Group will support the implementation of Australia's National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 (Strategy) and the First Action Plan 2025-2026 (Action Plan) including supporting the implementation of the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People 2025-2035 (Roadmap). The Reference Group is expected to provide the Minister and the department with strategic advice to inform:

- implementation of actions under the Action Plan
- development of an evidence and evaluation framework incorporating the Strategy and the Roadmap.
- monitoring of evaluation processes including reporting on implementation of the Action Plan
- development of future actions beyond the Action Plan.

The Reference Group will support the Minister to consult and inform other government Ministers throughout the implementation stages of the Strategy, as appropriate.

The Reference Group will engage with relevant Australian Government departments, the Autistic and autism community and sector and the broader disability sector, as required.

The Reference Group may also work with the time-limited Working Groups.

Priorities and work program

The Reference Group will:

- provide overarching and strategic guidance for implementation of the Roadmap, the Strategy and development of future Action Plans
- report to the department on matters concerning all four outcome areas of the Strategy: social inclusion; economic inclusion; diagnosis, services and supports, and health and mental health
- have the responsibility of monitoring and providing advice on past, recent and upcoming research and evaluation, including how it may impact the development of future actions and strategies, and the implementation of existing commitments and actions.

Working with Vulnerable People

As part of the Reference Group function and role, Reference Group work includes engagement with vulnerable people, which may include children.

Committee members are expected to understand the additional requirements in engaging with vulnerable people, including mandatory reporting obligations, and to hold a current Working with Vulnerable People registration or equivalent (as applicable in the jurisdiction in which the member resides) at their own cost.

Timeframe

A person appointed as a Reference Group member holds the position for the period specified in their letter of appointment.

Co-chairs

The co-chairs have a key role in ensuring the Reference Group effectively fulfills its purpose. Co-chairs will be responsible for, in consultation with the Reference Group secretariat:

- a) being the primary point of contact between the Reference Group and the Minister
- b) ensuring the Reference Group adheres to the Terms of Reference
- c) preparing the agenda for meetings
- d) convening meetings, including the number, time and place
- e) ensuring meetings are advertised in a timely fashion and the agenda and papers are distributed to members in advance of meetings
- f) ensuring that adequate time is allowed for the discussion of agenda items and opportunity is available for the contribution of all members
- g) verifying the accuracy of minutes prior to publication and distribution.

Membership

The Minister will appoint the Reference Group members. The Reference Group will consist of at least 14 members comprising:

Six senior Australian Government members at the Senior Executive Service (SES) Band 1 or SES Band 2 level, with one member from each of the following relevant departments:

- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (co-chair)
- The Treasury
- Australian Public Service Commission
- Department of Education
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department - Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts

At least six members from the Autistic and autism community, including Autistic individuals and parents of Autistic children (including an Autistic co-chair).

At least two research and professional sector members, who may also be members of the Autistic and autism community.

The majority of members will identify as Autistic.

Guest Speakers

The co-chairs may invite advisors, experts or representatives from the Autistic and autism community to participate in discussions for specific agenda items, as appropriate.

Meeting frequency, format and quorum

The Reference Group will meet up to four times per year.

A quorum will be considered reached if the number of attendees (including the co-chairs) reaches ten members, providing at least six members are representative of the Autistic and autism community.

Meetings will be conducted face-to-face or through Microsoft Teams.

The secretariat will circulate meeting agendas and papers to Reference Group members one week before the Reference Group meeting.

National Autism Strategy Reference Group Secretariat

The secretariat function will be provided by the department's Autism Policy Team.

The secretariat will provide administrative and policy support to the Reference Group by:

- preparing meeting agendas and agenda papers in consultation with the Reference Group and its working groups, and relevant Australian, state and territory government departments, as required
- assist the Reference Group and working groups to progress items out-of-session where appropriate
- manage membership matters including remuneration, payment of invoices, reimbursement of member expenses, booking and paying for accommodation and travel requirements associated with meeting participation (including expenses for support people), resignation, conflict of interest and confidentiality.
- Document minutes and action items and circulate these to members.

Remuneration for time spent on Reference Group business

Reference Group members are entitled to payment in relation to the performance of work as a Reference Group member in accordance with the terms of their appointment.

Under the Australian Government's Remuneration Tribunal (*Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-time Public Office*) Determination 2025 (Determination), the Autistic community members of the Reference Group will be entitled payments for time spent on working on Reference Group work, including pre-meeting preparation, providing the member is not representing an organisation in the Group. Sitting fees for meeting attendance will be paid at the rates set out in the Determination of \$631 (Chair) and \$476 (Member).

Conflict of interest

Members of the Reference Group must comply with the Conflict-of-Interest Declaration and Undertaking entered into on their appointment.

Under the Conflict-of-Interest Declaration and Undertaking, Reference Group members have (among other things) an ongoing obligation to disclose all interests, financial or otherwise, that may affect the impartial performance of their functions.

Confidentiality

Reference Group members may receive confidential material that has privacy or security implications.

Members must comply with the Confidentiality Deed entered into upon their appointment. Members have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality of all information that is not in the public domain, including but not limited to deliberations of the Reference Group.

Reference Group members may seek advice from the secretariat where they have queries about confidential information and circumstances in which it may be shared beyond the Reference Group.

Privacy

As part of the Reference Group function and role, the Reference Group may have access to personal information as defined in the *Privacy Act 1988* (Privacy Act).

As set out in the Confidentiality Deed entered into on their appointment, Reference Group members must abide by the provisions of the Privacy Act, including the Australian Privacy Principles set out in the Privacy Act. A Reference Group member must not do an act, or engage in a practice, that would breach an Australian Privacy Principle if done or engaged in by the department.

The Australian Privacy Principles are available on the Australian Government Office of the Australian Information Commissioner website at www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/australian-privacy-principles/read-the-australian-privacy-principles.

Resignation

You may resign by giving written notice to the co-chairs. The resignation takes effect on the day it is received by the co-chairs, or if a later day is specified in the resignation, on that later day.

When a Reference Group member resigns, the co-chairs, with the assistance of the secretariat, must notify the Minister.

Termination

The Minister may terminate your appointment without cause by providing no less than seven days' written notice of termination.

The Minister may terminate your appointment immediately if:

- a. in the Minister's opinion, you have not met the Reference Group's standard of conduct or performed your role to the required standard
- b. the Minister holds a reasonable belief that you are unable to perform your duties due to change of circumstances or capacity to commit time to Reference Group work
- c. you:
 - a. become bankrupt
 - b. take steps to take the benefit of any law for the relief of bankrupt or insolvent debtors
 - c. compound with one or more of your creditors
 - d. make an assignment of your remuneration for the benefit of one or more of your creditors
- d. you are absent, except on leave of absence, from three consecutive meetings of the Committee
- e. you have a real or perceived conflict that in the Minister's opinion, interferes or could be perceived to interfere with the proper performance of your role.