



Helping children with Autism

DIAGNOSIS AND EARLY INTERVENTION TREATMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND ANY OTHER PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER (PDD)

Affordable access to accurate and early diagnosis and early intervention treatment is important for children with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders (PDD). The Australian Government recognises this need and is funding new Medicare items for diagnosis and treatment services for children with PDD from 1 July 2008.

The Medicare items will be available through the \$190 million *Helping Children with Autism Package* for children aged under 13 years (for diagnosis and treatment planning) and under 15 years (for treatment).

A number of non-Medicare programs will also be funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to be progressively rolled out from 1 July 2008.

I think my child may have autism or another pervasive developmental disorder – what should I do?

It is important that you take your child to see your general practitioner (GP). Your GP will consider your child's condition and decide whether to refer your child to a psychiatrist or paediatrician, or to other services provided for children with PDD. If your child is seen by one of these practitioners, they will assess your child's condition, develop an accurate diagnosis, and create a treatment and management plan if appropriate.

Only one treatment and management plan for PDD, with either a psychiatrist or a paediatrician, can be rebated by Medicare. However, after the plan is created, your child can still be seen by a psychiatrist or paediatrician and the services for their treatment claimed from Medicare.

The psychiatrist or paediatrician may need to see your child more than once, and may decide to seek assistance with either diagnosis or the treatment of your child. Under Medicare this may involve a consultation with one or more psychologists, speech pathologists or occupational therapists (allied health professionals).

Medicare provides rebates for up to four (4) allied health diagnostic services and for up to twenty (20) allied health treatment services per child in total with any of these allied health professionals.

How can I access non-Medicare early intervention services for my child?

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) offers a number of programs to assist children and families of children with autism and any other PDD (also known as Autism Spectrum Disorders or ASD).

FaHCSIA funded programs include:

- A national program of autism advisory services to assist families and carers of children who are diagnosed with ASDs by providing specific information and referrals to the most appropriate early intervention services. The advisors will provide a link between the clinical diagnosis and access to early intervention programs, support services and subsidies;

- A national program of workshops to deliver flexible and targeted support for families and carers of children with ASDs, including those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and those living in rural and remote areas. The workshops will assist families and carers to better support their children following diagnosis and to undertake effective early intervention activities in the home;
- An ASD website that offers information, online resources and interactive functions to support parents, carers and professionals. The site will provide impartial and evidence based information about ASDs and early intervention approaches. It will also include the locations and contact details of the advisory services and approved early intervention services (searchable by postcode and shown on maps). You can access the web site at http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/services-help_child_autism.htm; and
- Targeted playgroups across Australia. These playgroups will offer play based learning opportunities for children and social support networks for their families and carers.

Further information on the Medicare items can be obtained by calling the Department of Health and Ageing on (02) 6289 4297, or the Medicare Australia Patient Enquiry Line on 13 20 11.

Inquiries can also be made via email at epc.items@health.gov.au or by accessing the allied health services webpage at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/autism-children>

Information on FaHCSIA programs is available from the *Helping Children With Autism* Inquiry line - 1800 289 177, via email at asd@fahcsia.gov.au or at: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/services-help_child_autism.htm

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