

# Why inclusion matters

Inclusive, evidence-informed services are vital for health, wellbeing, economic participation, and equity. Investing in inclusive classrooms, early diagnostic access, and well-funded supports can deliver measurable improvements in education outcomes, workforce participation, mental health, and life expectancy for Autistic Australians.

**Our purpose**  
**a different brilliant®**

Understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.



## Autism in Australia

- An estimated 1 in every 40 people in Australia is Autistic.<sup>1</sup>
- Boys are three to four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.<sup>2</sup>



## Autism and diagnosis

- In Australia, only about half of autistic children are diagnosed by age five, even though most parents had concerns well before then.<sup>3</sup>
- The average wait time for completed assessments in public services can be up to 3.5 years.<sup>4</sup>

## Autism and education

A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics survey<sup>5</sup> of parents and carers found:

- 45% of Autistic children attended a special class in a mainstream school or a special school.
- Just over two-thirds of Autistic students reported experiencing difficulty at their place of learning. The main problems were fitting in socially (53%), learning difficulties (44%) and communication difficulties (51%).
- Only 5% of Autistic people have a bachelor degree or higher, compared with 19% of those with disability and 35% of those without disability.

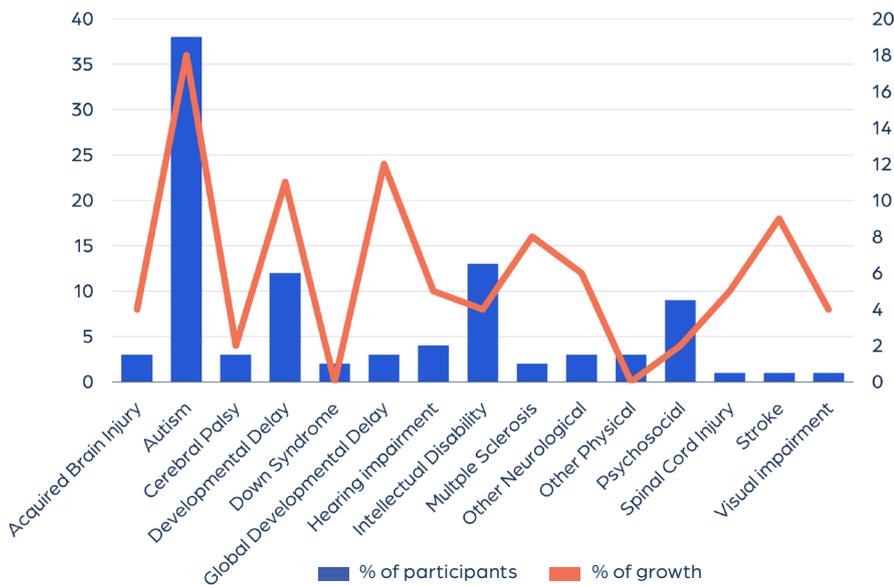
In NSW, the number of students identified with disability has grown by 30% since 2018 – today, they represent almost one in four public school enrolments.<sup>6</sup>

For students on the autism spectrum, the rates of non-attendance at school are three times higher than for their neurotypical peers.<sup>7</sup>



## Autism and the NDIS

- There are 274,360 participants in the NDIS on the autism spectrum.<sup>8</sup>
- 1 in 3 participants are on the autism spectrum.<sup>8</sup>
- Autistic participants showing highest annual growth rate (2025 vs 2024) at 18%.<sup>8</sup>



## Autism and unemployment

- The labour force participation rate for Autistic people of working age is 50%, compared with 61% of all working age people with disability and 85% of people without disability.<sup>5</sup>
- 40% of parents report their adult Autistic child is not working at all.<sup>3</sup>
- Even among those in employment, only 5% work full time.<sup>3</sup>
- Two-thirds of Autistic people struggle to cope in traditional workplaces and more than half cannot find jobs that align with their strengths.<sup>3</sup>
- 30% report no employer will give them a chance.<sup>3</sup>

## Autism and mental health

- Just over three-quarters of Autistic children have at least one mental health condition and nearly half have two or more mental health conditions.<sup>9</sup>
- The most commonly reported co-occurring mental health diagnoses among Autistic people across the lifespan are anxiety (20%), sleep-wake disorders (13%), depressive disorders (11%), obsessive-compulsive disorder (9%), bipolar disorders (5%) and schizophrenia spectrum disorders (4%).<sup>10</sup>
- Autistic adults are more likely to experience suicidal thoughts than the general population.<sup>11</sup>
- Autistic adults report higher levels of loneliness than non-autistic Adults.<sup>12</sup>



## References

<sup>1</sup> Aspect calculation based on prevalence studies conducted from 2019–23.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017), **Autism in Australia**.

<sup>3</sup> Boulton, K. A., Hodge, M. A., Jewell, A., Ong, N., Silove, N., & Guastella, A. J. (2023). **Diagnostic delay in children with neurodevelopmental conditions attending a publicly funded developmental assessment service: findings from the Sydney Child Neurodevelopment Research Registry**. *BMJ open*, 13(2), e069500. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069500>  
And Gibbs, V., Aldridge, F., Sburlati, E., Chandler, F., Smith, K., & Cheng, L. (2019). **Missed opportunities: An investigation of pathways to autism diagnosis in Australia**. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 57, 55–62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2018.10.005>

<sup>4</sup> Boulton, K. A., Hodge, M. A., Jewell, A., Ong, N., Silove, N., & Guastella, A. J. (2023). **Diagnostic delay in children with neurodevelopmental conditions attending a publicly funded developmental assessment service: findings from the Sydney Child Neurodevelopment Research Registry**. *BMJ open*, 13(2), e069500. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069500>

<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), **Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings**.

<sup>6</sup> Audit Office of NSW [www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/supporting-students-with-disability](http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/supporting-students-with-disability)

<sup>7</sup> Adams, D. (2022). **Child and parental mental health as correlates of school non-attendance and school refusal in children on the autism spectrum**. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 52(8), 3353–3365. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05211-5>

<sup>8</sup> NDIS quarterly data reports March 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Kerns, C.M., et al. (2021), **Prevalence and Correlates of Caregiver – Reported Mental Health Conditions in Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United States**. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*.

<sup>10</sup> Lai, M. C., Kassee, et al. (2019), **Prevalence of co-occurring mental health diagnoses in the autism population: a systematic review and meta-analysis**. *The Lancet, Psychiatry*.

<sup>11</sup> Cassidy, S., et al. (2018), **Risk markers for suicidality in Autistic adults**. *Molecular Autism*.

<sup>12</sup> Ee, D., Hwang, Y. I., Reppermund, S., Srasuebku, P., Trollor, J. N., Foley, K. R., & Arnold, S. R. (2019). **Loneliness in adults on the autism spectrum**. *Autism in Adulthood*, 1(3), 182–193. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2018.0038>  
And Love, A. M., Edwards, C., Dueber, D. M., Cai, R. Y., Grace, K., Toland, M. D., ... & Gibbs, V. (2025). **Measuring Loneliness in Autistic Adults: A Collaborative Approach to Refining the UCLA Loneliness Scale**. *Autism in Adulthood*. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2024.0258>

Based on the idea of a different **brilliant**<sup>®</sup>,  
Aspect's approach:

- Respects difference and diversity
- Builds a person's skills based on their strengths, interests, aspirations and support needs
- Develops autism-friendly environments
- Supports others to understand and embrace autism and to develop respectful supportive interactions.