

# Experiences of Pregnancy and Early Parenthood Among Autistic People in Australia

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## Background

- There is a growing focus on the antenatal and postnatal experiences of Autistic individuals, driven by evidence of significant healthcare barriers and aligned with research priorities identified by Autistic women and gender-diverse individuals.
- Autistic people have sensory, emotional and physical challenges distinct from their non-autistic peers.
- Existing research on Autistic pregnancy and parenthood is largely UK-based, limiting its generalizability to contexts like Australia, where unique healthcare factors—such as universal screening, private insurance uptake, midwifery services, and GP-shared care—shape experiences.

## Research Question

**What are the pregnancy and early parenthood experiences of Autistic people in Australia?** Data was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis.

## Method

19 Autistic individuals participated in the study.

- All resided in Australia and were currently pregnant or had been pregnant within the past 5 years.
- 15 identified as female and 4 as non-binary.
- Participants came from both rural and urban settings, had diverse ethnic backgrounds (60% White), and shared a range of pregnancy experiences including loss and premature birth.
- Participants could choose their preferred mode of interview (written, Zoom, or phone).



Importantly, the study was guided by input from an advisory team of 5 Autistic people with Lived Experience in pregnancy or delivering maternal care.

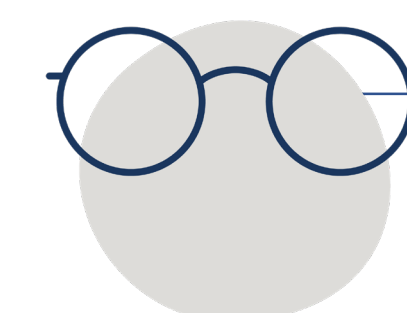
## Results

Four key themes were constructed from the data.



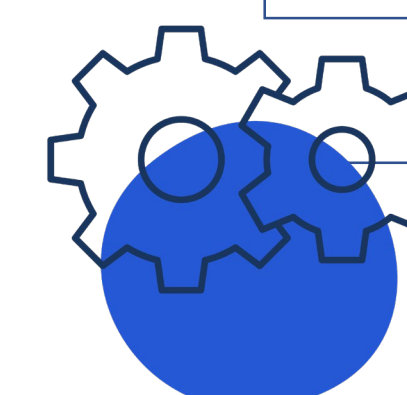
Pregnancy was good for me.

**Theme 1** reflected feelings of body positivity and empowerment during pregnancy.



“Hyperfocus is an understatement.”

**Theme 2** illustrated participants' intense desire to gather information on every aspect of pregnancy and parenthood, which both facilitated and hindered their wellbeing.



“Stuck in the system.”

**Theme 3** described the social drain caused by unpredictable healthcare interactions.



Making things work for me

**Theme 4** detailed the coping mechanisms and strategies participants used to manage the demands of pregnancy and early parenthood.

*“I think I found myself quite almost a more healthier myself than I'd been before. I felt purposeful.”*  
-Jordan

*Doctors “completely dismissed my disability needs and expressed fears”*  
-Sage

*“I also did lots of research before so I knew exactly what I might expect so nothing was something I didn't know they did.”*  
-Kimmi

## Recommendations for Healthcare Workers

1. Thoroughly review patient files to be well-informed about individual needs
2. Address sensory processing differences
3. Provide extra time and processing space
4. Recognize the inherent capabilities of Autistic people as parents
5. Document key points from appointments
6. Provide research-evidenced material
7. Promote continuity of care by fostering consistent provider relationships
8. Provide structure and predictability

## Conclusions

- Our findings amplify the stories of **competence** and **empowerment** among Autistic people during pregnancy and early parenthood, highlighting their resilience and agency in navigating these life transitions.
- Importantly, these findings have broader implications for improving healthcare in other areas where Autistic people face similar challenges, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and effective care to enhance quality of life.
- As an outcome of this research, our team developed an **Australia-first digital platform** offering resources for both Autistic women and the practitioners who support them. The platform was codeveloped and aims to increase the knowledge and confidence of Australian maternal healthcare professionals, while also offering Autistic people validation and shared experiences of pregnancy and early parenthood.

### Digital platform

[aspect.org.au/new-parents](https://aspect.org.au/new-parents)



### Poster



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