



# Helping Children with Autism Initiative

## Information Sheet No 1

11<sup>th</sup> July 2008

### **New Medicare items for the diagnosis and early intervention treatment for children with autism or any other pervasive developmental disorder.**

The following initiative is provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

While all care has been taken by Autism Victoria to provide accurate and up to date information, this is a new initiative from the government and some areas are still being fine tuned. Please go to the web address below for further information on the governments' initiative.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-autism>

### **Diagnosis and Treatment**

As from the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008, Children from 0 – 13 are eligible to access new Medicare items.

#### **Assessment**

Families now have the option of using the Medicare rebate system to help pay for private assessments. The family's paediatrician can diagnose the child with autism, in collaboration with a private speech therapist, an occupational therapist and a psychologist. The rebate allows a total of 4 services with these professionals. (Together not each)

It is important to have assessments with the other professionals as they can provide valuable insight into your child's needs as well as having a more specialised understanding of the specific areas of your child's development.

#### **Treatment**

The paediatrician and family should make a treatment plan together, which involves 20 services in total per child from a speech therapist, occupational therapist and psychologist. The 20 services can be used by one professional such as speech, or as a combination of all three. This treatment plan is a once in a lifetime option, unlike the Enhanced Primary Care plan which can be accessed each year.

Written reports are an essential part of assessment in preparation for treatment. Ask your clinician to provide you with a written report after your session has taken place.

The rebate system is consistent across the Medical Benefits Rebate System but individual clinicians may vary their charges. It's a good idea when choosing a clinician to work with your child, to ask them *how much you will be paying out of pocket* and use this quote to compare prices.

## Frequently Asked Questions

***Q. My child has already been diagnosed. Can I access the 20 services for treatment without accessing the diagnosis part?***

A. Absolutely!

***Q. My child has been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome. Can we access the services?***

A. Absolutely. Helping Children with Autism is for any child who has an Autism Spectrum Disorder. That includes Aspergers Syndrome as well as PDD-NOS, Rett's Disorder, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder.

***Q. My child can talk. Do I really need to see a speech pathologist?***

A. As autism is a communication disorder, it's a really good idea to have a speech therapy assessment. Even if your child has great language skills, a speech therapist can help with working on your child's pitch, your child's conversation skills, and your child's use and understanding of body language. There is much more to speech therapy than just using your words.

***Q. How can an Occupational Therapist help my Child?***

A. Occupational Therapy can play a valuable role in helping children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Occupational Therapy is therapy to help improve any activity that occupies your child's time. This could be sitting comfortably on a chair for those children who squirm a lot in their seats. It could be to help your child with handwriting, for those children who find it a difficult or painful activity to do. Occupational therapists can also help with sensory problems. If your child is a particularly fussy eater, has difficulty in shopping centres or with loud noises such as vacuum cleaners, can't attend to the classroom teacher or has trouble starting and finishing work activities, it may be due to sensory processing difficulties. Cue the Occupational Therapist.

***Q. My child is under 10 years old. Isn't this too young to need a psychologist?***

A. A psychologist is trained in early childhood development. They may work directly with your child, and also may work directly with you by observing your child and listening to you. This way they will be able to help you to work out the reason behind your child's behaviours. Once we know what our child is trying to communicate through their behaviour, we can try to start to teach them an alternative way to let us know what they are feeling or thinking.

**Q. My child has turned 13 already. Can I access any of the above?**

A. There has been some conflicting information in regards to this question. However, a page from the Department of Health and Ageing website states clearly that a child must be under 13 years for diagnosis, and under 15 for treatment. To see this page, please go to: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/autism-children-factsheet>

**Q. Should I use any professional?**

A. No. It's very important when working with any professional for your child, that they have knowledge and experience of Autism Spectrum Disorders. The more they have the better. We know that raising children with Autism can sometimes be hard, and treatments can be expensive. You want to get the best for your money and the best for your child.

Autism Victoria has a data base of professionals who have knowledge and experience with autism. Some parents want a caring professional, some parents want a professional will get to the point quickly. Because we all want different things, we can't recommend any one professional, but most times we can offer more than one option for you to choose from.

Autism Victoria Infoline: 1300 308 699.

**Q. Can I access the Enhanced Primary Care Plan and the Mental Health Care Plan as well as the new Medicare items?**

A. Yes. However, the E.P.C and the M.H.C.P can be accessed every year. The new Medicare items for diagnosis and early intervention treatment for children with autism can only be accessed once in the child's lifetime.

**If you have any other questions about Helping Children with Autism, you can call the Helping Children with Autism Enquiry Line: 1800 289 177**

**If you need further help, you can contact the Autism Victoria Infoline: 1300 308 699 or if you live outside Victoria call 03) 9885 0533 or email [info@autismvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@autismvictoria.org.au)**