

Media Release

JENNY MACKLIN MP

**Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs**

BILL SHORTEN MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services

MAXINE McKEW MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care

Early intervention learning centres for children with autism

The Australian Government today announced the successful applicants for the first of six groundbreaking Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres to be funded around Australia.

Funding of \$9.7 million over four years will be provided to establish the first three centres in Liverpool, South Western Sydney by KU Children's Services; in Bundoora, Melbourne by consortia led by La Trobe University and in Prospect, Adelaide by Anglicare SA.

The Victorian Government contributed \$500,000 towards building the La Trobe Centre.

Celebrating World Autism Awareness Day, the Minister for Families Jenny Macklin said the centres would draw together child care centres, universities and hospitals to develop best practice models of learning and intervention.

Each centre will provide a minimum of 20 child care places for children aged 0 to 6 with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). The centres will be staffed by a mix of early childhood education professionals and other specialists who may include psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

"The collaborative approach gives us an unprecedented opportunity to develop evidence based models, collect significant data and make a major contribution to understanding autism," Ms Macklin said.

"The centres will also provide support to families of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders who face many challenges raising their children.

"With early intervention and appropriate support, children with autism have a much greater chance of fulfilling their potential and participating more fully in the community."

The Government also launched the Early Days Workshop program with funding totalling \$6.6 million over two years as part of the \$190 million Helping Children with Autism Package.

The Early Days Workshops are for families and carers in the early days of autism assessment, and for families of children displaying autism like symptoms. Workshops will be held in every state and territory over the next few months.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services Bill Shorten said these workshops aimed to connect families and carers with each other and help them manage the many pressures involved with bringing up children with ASDs.

"They offer opportunities for families to create links within their local ASD community and provide relevant, evidence based research and information about ASD that will assist them to access early intervention and other services," Mr Shorten said.

"The centres, and the workshops, mean that children diagnosed on the autism spectrum will get a better chance in life. To date, over a 1000 children have received early intervention funding under the Helping Children with Autism package."

The Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care Maxine McKew said Australia's future would be shaped by the support we provide for our children's development today.

"Delivering the Autism Specific Learning and Care Centres is a priority for the Rudd Government. We recognise that across Australia there are communities with a need for high quality, affordable child care and we are acting to meet that need," Ms McKew said.

For more information about these initiatives see the FaHCSIA website www.fahcsia.gov.au/autism and for families interested in the Early Days Workshops see www.earlydays.net.au.

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