

## Supporting the Mental Health Needs of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders through Education, Disability and Health Partnerships

At least one percent of the population is diagnosed with Autism. Up to 70% of children with Autism also experience mental illnesses including anxiety and depression, equating to 100,000 people in Australia. In addition to the impact of Autism on children, the mental illnesses they suffer from are of at least the same severity as that of their disability. However, unlike Autism, mental health problems are reversible and preventable.

There is increased recognition of the need to provide appropriate mental health support for children with Autism across education, disability, and health sectors. For example, there is a focus on mental health and well-being in the Aspect Comprehensive Approach to Education. In public health services, the mental health problems of those with Autism and intellectual disability contribute to one quarter of the child mental health burden, resulting in efforts to increase professional expertise and service structures for children with Autism and co-occurring mental health disorders.

The increased recognition of the mental health needs of children with Autism has led to growing partnerships between education, disability and health sectors. These partnerships aim to improve the mental health of children with Autism by improving parent and professional skills and expertise, enhancing service coordination, reducing mental health disorder treatment costs, and building a sustainable workforce. This presentation will describe a number of innovative partnership projects to address the mental health needs of children with Autism: (i) the Children's Hospital at Westmead and Aspect Mental Health and Well-being School Clinic, (ii) Emotion-based Social Skills Training in Aspect: a pilot study, and (iii) Professional Training to meet the Mental Health Needs of Children with Autism in Health and Education Sectors.