



Inquiry into ACT Budget 2021–22
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Elizabeth Kikkert: To ask the Minister for Early Childhood Development

Ref: Early Childhood Development, Budget Statement G, p. 21, output class CSD 2.2 Child Development Services

In relation to: Autism Assessments

1. When did Child Development Services (CDS) commence trying to recruit a full-time psychologist for the purpose of performing autism assessments?
2. How has this attempted recruitment been carried out?
3. How many hours in total did the contracted psychologists at CDS engage in autism assessments in 2020–21?
4. How many autism assessments were completed by contracted psychologists at CDS during 2020–21?
5. It was stated in the hearing that families seeking autism assessments may be ‘funnelled’ into the private sector by CDS.
 - a. What criteria determine whether a family may be urged to seek an autism assessment from a private provider?
 - b. How is this ‘funnelling’ carried out?
 - c. During 2020–21, how many families who presented to CDS for an autism assessment were urged to seek assessment from a private provider instead?
 - d. During 2020–21, how many total families who presented to CDS for an autism assessment ended up not pursuing an assessment from CDS?
6. What was the average cost of an autism assessment completed by contracted psychologists at CDS during 2020–21?
7. Medicare provides rebates for the assessment of autism before a child reaches the age of 13.
 - a. Are the autism assessments provided through the CDS subsidised through Medicare (or any other Commonwealth scheme) in any way?
 - b. If so, what is the subsidy, who receives it, and how is the scheme applied?
8. Does the ACT Government have access to data on how many families in the ACT seek an autism assessment for a child over the age of 12? If so, what were those figures in 2019–20 and 2020–21?
9. Does the ACT Government have access to data on how many autism assessments are completed by private providers in the ACT? If so, what were those figures in 2019–20 and 2020–21?
10. Does the ACT Government have data on how many school students above the age of 12 provide a new diagnosis of autism to their schools? If so, what were those figures in 2019–20 and 2020–21?
11. According to internal data, which specific populations, schools, and/or suburbs in the ACT are likely to experience late diagnosis of autism (i.e., after the age of 12), and what strategies are being used to target those populations?

12. What systems and processes are in place in ACT primary and secondary schools to detect potential autism and refer families to CDS?
13. Besides schools and Child and Family Centres, what other government services help to detect potential autism and refer families to the CDS for assessment?

YVETTE BERRY MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. The Child Development Service (CDS) was formed in 2016 as a collaboration between the Community Services, Health and Education Directorates. Since its establishment, the CDS has been working hard to recruit full-time psychologists to deliver Autism Assessment Disorder (ASD) assessments for the ACT community.
2. The CDS has pursued several strategies to bring forward appointments and mitigate wait times. Actions have included regularly advertising the positions and upgrading the positions from Health Professional 3 to Health Professional 4 level. Following these strategies, a combination of approaches has been utilised to address the workforce issues including:
 - procurement of private psychologists to deliver assessments where possible;
 - employment of casual contracted psychologists; and
 - embedding telehealth platforms as an option for the delivery of assessments.
3. CDS has contracts and procurement arrangements with five private psychologists, and one organisation for telehealth ASD assessments. Arrangements vary considerably across the service. The information requested in this question is not collected, however the information in question 4 below addresses quantum.
4. Autism assessments completed by contracted psychologists as follows:
 - a. Procurement of private psychologists resulted in 27 assessments completed in 2020-21.
 - b. Employment of casual contracted psychologists has resulted in resulted in six assessments completed in 2020-21.
 - c. Provision of telehealth platforms as an option for the delivery of assessments resulted in 100 assessments completed in 2020-21.
5. Families are provided with the most appropriate available pathway following assessment of their needs:
 - a. The CDS refers children 12 years and older to private psychologists. For children aged 0-12 the CDS provides information about private providers where families choose this pathway.
 - b. CDS assesses children's needs and identifies the most appropriate ASD assessment pathway. The majority of children are suitable for a telehealth assessment.
 - c. CDS does not 'urge' families to seek an assessment privately. CDS provides families with information about the service system relevant to that family's individual needs.
 - d. CDS does not have a number for this, however the experience of CDS is that very few families refuse an assessment date once offered.
6. An average cost of an ASD assessment is between \$1,900-\$2,200.
7. No – CDS ASD assessments are free of charge.

8. No, the ACT Government does not have access to data on how many families in the ACT seek an autism assessment for a child over the age of 12 years.
9. No, the ACT Government does not have data on how many autism assessments are completed by private providers in the ACT.
10. No, the ACT Government does not have access to data on how many school students above the age of 12 provide a new diagnosis of autism to their schools.
11. The ACT Government does not have access to data on which specific populations, schools, and/or suburbs in the ACT are likely to experience late diagnosis of autism.
12. School psychologists are well placed to explore developmental difficulties for children in ACT Public Schools. Referral processes are the same for any concerns raised to school psychologists within ACT Public Schools. There is a positive working alliance with Child Development Service (CDS) and referrals from school psychologists are promptly initiated where there are concerns raised. School psychologists are able to undertake cognitive assessments prior to an autism assessment as required by CDS.
13. Paediatricians and MACH nursing staff are key government agencies that help detect potential autism and may refer families to the CDS for assessment. Other government agencies that have concerns will suggest families attend allied health drop-in clinics or their GP to discuss their development concerns.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Signature:

Date: 01/11/21

By the Minister for Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry MLA