

# MINUTE

## Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs



MaPS.Net PDR Id	MN11-002488
Due Date	14 November 2011
Critical Date	N/A
Consultation	Media Yes
	Group Manager Yes
	Deputy Secretary No
	State Manager No

**To the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers**  
For decision

cc: the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

**Subject: UPDATED - Acceptance of the Final Report on the Review of Early Intervention Therapies (the Report) for the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) Package.**

**Purpose:** The Autism and Early Intervention Branch is seeking your acceptance of the Review Report and your agreement to the planned implementation of relevant recommendations.

**Issue:** The Final Report on the Review of Early Intervention Therapies, by the Australasian Autism Research Collaboration (AARC), was received by the Department on 11 August 2011 – see **Attachment A**. The Report includes a review of existing and proposed autism interventions and an evaluation of the assessment processes used by FaHCSIA in the Early Intervention Services component of the HCWA Package. Background information to the development of the Report, AARC, and stakeholder management issues are in **Additional Information**.

Overall, the authors provided deliverables as outlined in the terms of reference. They were responsive to changes and additional requests made during the development of the Report and have provided a document that largely meets the needs of the Autism and Early Intervention Branch. The Report includes an updated list of eligible interventions - see Table 6 tab in **Attachment A** - and makes recommendations on how FaHCSIA can improve the policies and processes of the Early Intervention Services component of the HCWA Package – see Review Recommendations tab in **Attachment A**.

The authors identified nine areas that need to be improved, with five other issues identified without clear recommendations being provided. FaHCSIA supports recommended actions in eight of the nine areas, and proposes action on four of the five additional identified issues. Supported actions can be grouped into key areas: Updating and improving the HCWA Early Intervention Operational Guidelines and the HCWA Service Provider Application Form; promotion of the Report findings and associated changes to documents; updating the HCWA Communication Plan; development and implementation of a HCWA Monitoring Framework; development of a plan for ongoing review of therapies; and encouraging flexible service delivery.

The actions that FaHCSIA does not support at this time are expanding the role of Autism Advisors to include brokerage advice and case management, and changes to the funding level and age criteria for eligible children. These issues will be given further consideration in the broader context of the HCWA Evaluation which will be finalised in December 2011.

The Table at **Attachment B** includes the recommendations of the Report in identified areas, the suggested Government response to the Report, as well as actions and timing.

**Attachment C** provides a communication strategy specific to the Review, a handling strategy for addressing the removal of ineligible therapies from the HCWA Service Provider Panel and an indication of relationship between the Review findings and recommendations and those from the broader HCWA

Evaluation process so far. The Review finds no evidence for the effectiveness of 16 therapies. Nine of these are currently offered by 24 HCWA Panel providers. These will be phased out by the end of March 2012

There is substantial interest by stakeholders in the findings of the Review. It is proposed that an Executive Summary be released initially with a modified version of the Report, in the form of an Occasional Paper, to be developed and published on the FaHCSIA website in early 2012.

**Media Release:** A series of media releases will be prepared from December 2011.

**Recommendations:**

That you:

1. Accept the Final Report on the Review of Early Intervention Therapies by AARC, at **Attachment A**. Accepted / Not Accepted
2. Approve the proposed Government response to recommendations in the Report at **Attachment B**. Approved / Not Approved
3. Note the Communication Strategy specific to this Review which includes a handling strategy for addressing the removal of 9 ineligible therapies from the HCWA Service Provider Panel as outlined in **Attachment C**. Noted / Please Discuss
4. Approve release of an executive summary of the Review and preparation of an Occasional Paper, based on the Review. Approved / Not Approved  
s47F - personal privacy

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Position: Branch Manager  
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Phone/Mobile: s47F - personal privacy

Date: 9/11/11

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**Comments (MO use)**

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Signature: Jan M. Lucas

Date: 11-11-11

**ADVISER TO ACTION:**

Local Member Advised	State Member Advised
Yes / No	Yes / No
Name of Member	Name of Member

Rating	Quality	Timeliness
Unsatisfactory		
Satisfactory		
Good		



## **Additional Information**

### **Background to the Review of Early Intervention Therapies**

Through the HCWA Package, an early intervention panel of providers was established in 2008 to deliver therapies that were identified as evidence based practice in 2006 by Jacqueline Roberts and Margot Prior in a report completed for the Department of Health and Ageing.

In October 2010, the Autism section undertook a stocktake of all interventions listed on panel provider schedules published on the FaHCSIA website. This process identified a large variation in the nature and description of interventions listed.

As new research on best practice interventions had been developed since 2006 and FaHCSIA had over two years of functional experience, feedback from service providers and families, and results of the stock-take of interventions from panel provider schedules, it was decided to seek updated expert advice on the evidence base for autism specific early interventions.

### **Australasian Autism Research Collaboration**

In 2009 the Australasian Autism Research Collaboration (AARC) was established, bringing together Australia's most eminent clinicians and researchers working with children and adults with autism and their families. The aims of the AARC include establishing practice guidelines in education, treatment and diagnosis and fostering evidence-based practice in the delivery of services to the ASD community.

In March 2011, FaHCSIA contracted AARC to conduct a review of early intervention therapies, with the review to be conducted by an AARC working group of Margot Prior, Jacqueline Roberts, Sylvia Rodger and Katrina Williams.

### **Stakeholder Issues**

Following the stocktake at the end of 2010, service providers that had interventions identified as having little to no evidence of effectiveness were notified of FaHCSIA's intention to remove those interventions from the fee schedule on the HCWA web pages, on the FaHCSIA website, until further evidence was available. The Autism and Early Intervention Branch has been receiving enquiries regarding the timing of a decision on these interventions.

AARC consulted widely with stakeholders during the Review and there is extensive interest in the findings, particularly in the list of evidence-based interventions and the process of identifying these. As the Report also includes a review of FaHCSIA processes in assessing service provider applications, it is proposed that an Occasional Paper be prepared (by the Autism and Early Intervention Branch in partnership with the Research and Analysis Branch) that includes information most appropriate to external stakeholders.