

How can we support the healthcare needs of autistic adults without intellectual disability?

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Background

- Autism is lifelong and associated with social communication & social interaction differences, & restricted or repetitive behaviours & interests.
- Autism is diagnosed in 1/70 Australians¹ but underdiagnosed in adults, especially females².
- Co-occurring physical conditions such as: immune conditions, gastrointestinal & sleep disorders, seizure, obesity, dyslipidemia, hypertension & diabetes; & major psychiatric disorders including: depression, anxiety & suicide attempts are common in autistic adults³.
- We need to understand autism-specific barriers to healthcare in order to provide appropriate services.
- GPs & other doctors report low levels of confidence with caring for autistic adults & may benefit from autism-specific training⁴.

Project aim

To conduct a systematic review of the literature on the barriers & facilitators to healthcare for autistic adults without intellectual disability.

Method

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles about access to & provision of healthcare services to autistic adults without intellectual disability were included. Articles that only included autistic people under the age of 18 years or autistic adults with intellectual disability were excluded.

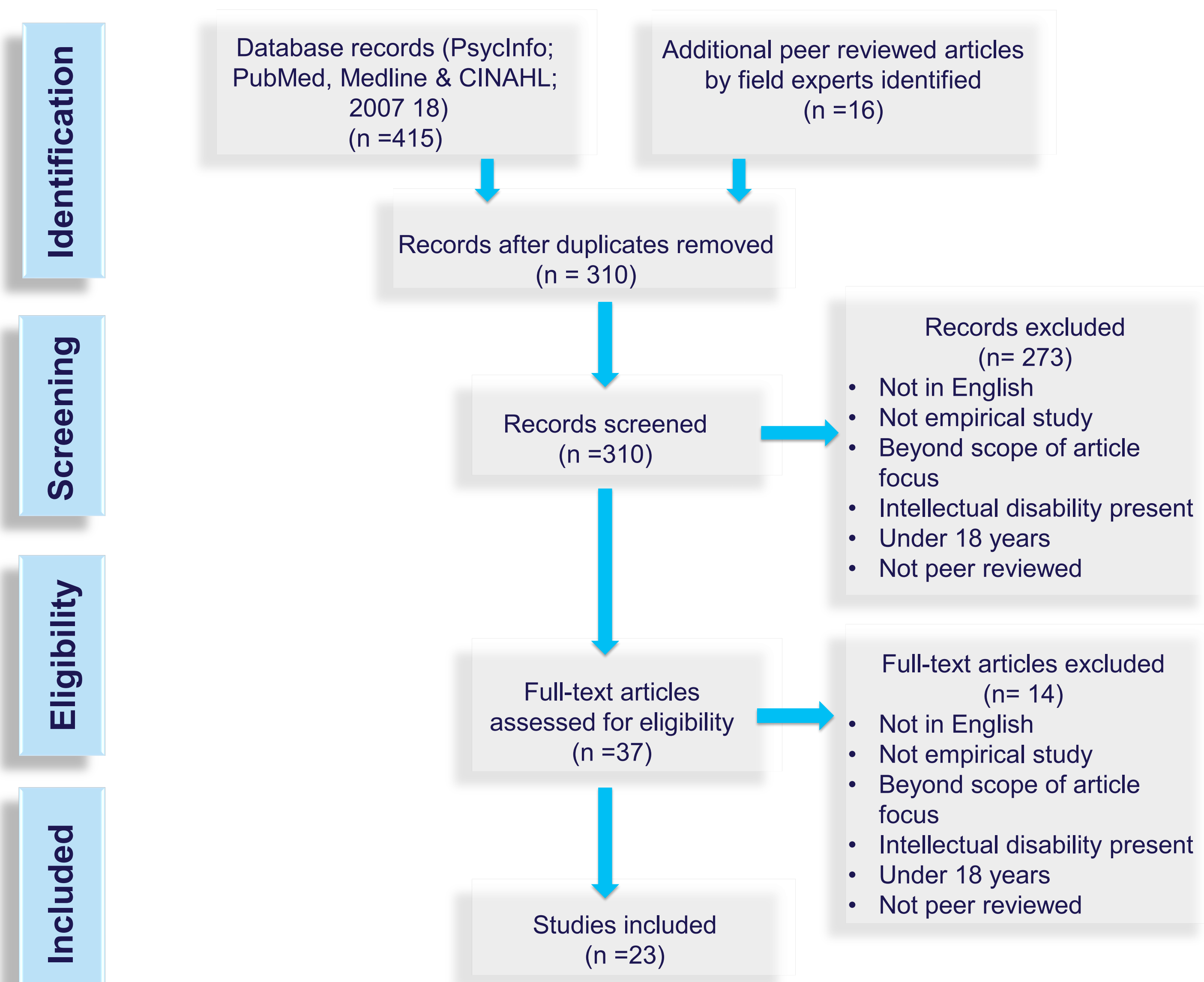


Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart illustrating study selection process

Results

We reviewed 23 studies that described a variety of factors that impacted access to healthcare for autistic adults. These factors were grouped into three categories:

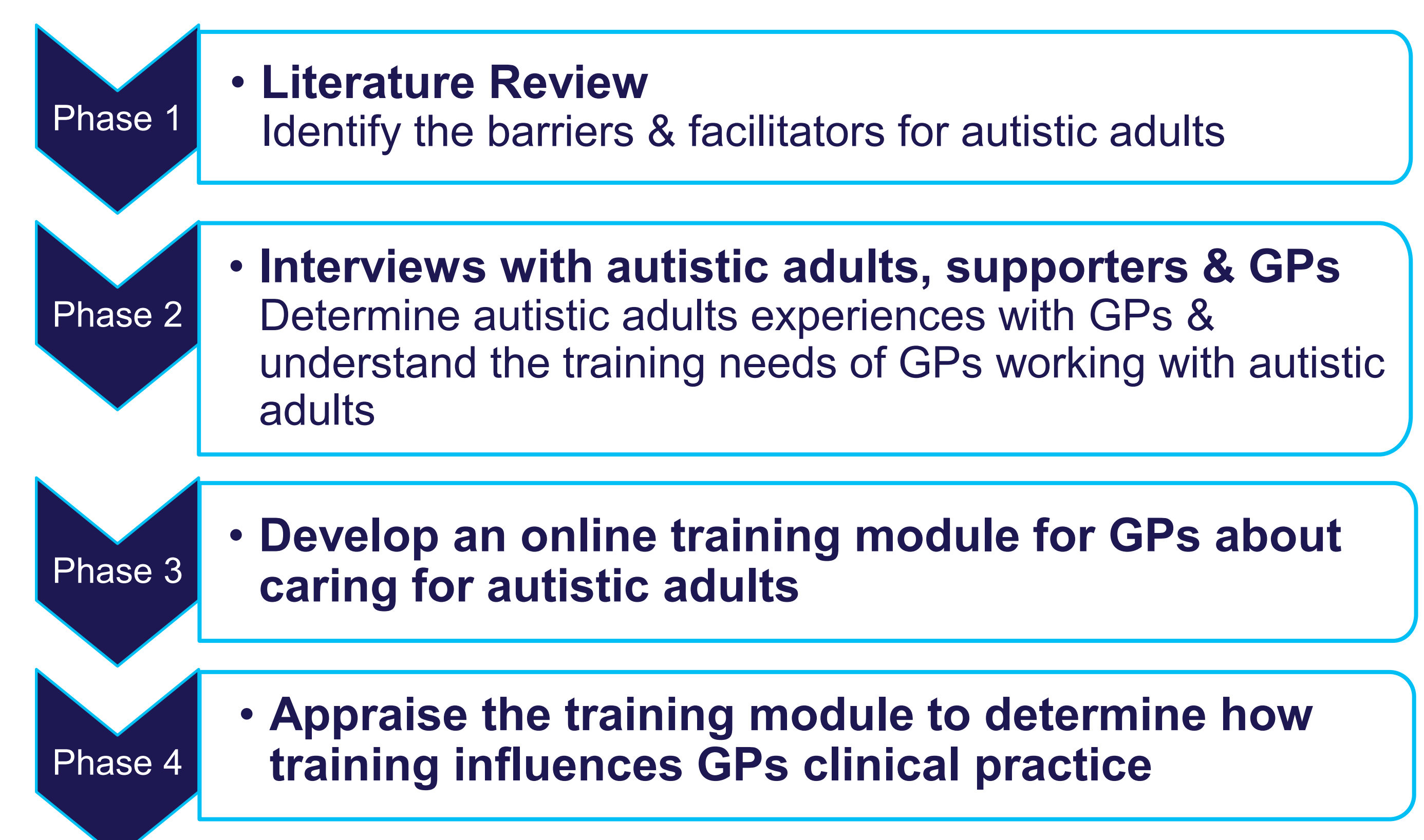


Recommendations

Based on the findings of the systematic review, we recommend the following strategies to improve access to healthcare for autistic adults:

1. The development of autism training and increased awareness for health professionals that focuses on strategies to manage communicative differences;
2. Changing practice environments to be more 'autism friendly';
3. Ensuring that health professionals attend to autistic people's sensory differences when they approach physical examinations & treatment, which should help facilitate access to, & engagement in, healthcare services for autistic adults;
4. Future research should focus on the evaluation of available health supports and the development of new health supports as required.

Next Steps



References

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For more information

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