

A multistate trial of an early surveillance program for autism within General Practices in Australia



Early Years



Background

We know that children on the autism spectrum can be identified and diagnosed as early as 18 months of age, but the average age of diagnosis in Australia is 4 years. This means that many children and families may miss out on the early support and services they need.



Aim

Our foremost objective was to promote the early identification of children on the autism spectrum by training community service providers so that the majority of children are diagnosed prior to 3-years of age.



Who took part

122

Children aged 18-24 months and their families.

60

GP clinics in NSW and Victoria (30 in each state).



How we did the research



Half of the GP clinics in each state used the new autism identification pathway.

Parents/caregivers completed questionnaires about their child's development and behaviour while waiting to see the GP.

During the appointment, the GP completed an assessment of the child's behaviour.

The other clinics were asked to do their usual practice and let us know what they did.



Children from both arms of the study who were identified by their GP as having a 'high likelihood' of being on the autism spectrum had an autism assessment by University researchers at 24 months.



At 30 months of age, parents/caregivers completed questionnaires on their child's behaviour and development.



Some GPs and parents/caregivers were interviewed about their experiences with GP appointments, child developmental assessments, accessing services and supports, and their experiences in the study.

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What we found

The autism identification pathway was more accurate in identifying children who had a 'high likelihood' of being on the autism spectrum compared to GPs' usual practice.

Parents/caregivers and GPs who used the autism identification pathway said that:



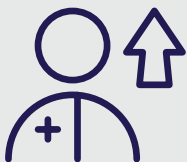
It was simple and easy to complete.



There needs to be Medicare funding for specific child development screening appointments.



There needs to be greater community awareness about autism and the importance of developmental screening, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.



Increased access to early autism and child development training for GPs and access to professionals who can complete autism assessments is also needed.



Who did the research



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY



Olga Tennison
Autism Research Centre



UNSW
SYDNEY

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the children, families, GPs, and clinic staff who participated in this study.

Find out more

Download the final report and executive summary on the Autism CRC website:

autismcrc.com.au/reports/early-identification-in-general-practices

