

Friday, 30 April 2021

## Autism public education campaign urges Victorians to *Change their Reactions*

- Amaze, peak body for autistic people and their families, and the Victorian Government launch 2021 autism education campaign
- April is Autism Acceptance Month
- After the first Change Your Reactions campaign in 2020, almost 1 in 5 autistic people and their families noticed a positive change in the way they were treated.
- Autism diagnoses are rising with the latest ABS data revealing that 205,200 Australians are autistic, a 25.1 per cent increase from the 164,000 in 2015.

More than half of autistic Australians and their families experience significant social isolation, with 40 per cent revealing they sometimes struggle to leave the house out of concern of being subjected to discrimination or negative behaviours in the community.

Research found that 85 per cent of Australians know someone with autism, but only 29 per cent reported they felt they know how to support an autistic person, revealing a significant gap between the community being aware of autism and creating an autism-friendly community. In addition:

- 53 per cent of autistic Australians said they have been described as 'naughty'.
- 81 per cent of autistic Australians have reported being stared at by people in public.
- 64 per cent of autistic Australians say people actively avoid them.
- 59 per cent of autistic Australians have reported being described as 'weird'.

*Change Your Reactions* is an Australian-first public education campaign which launched in 2020, and now again today by Victorian autism peak body **Amaze** and the **Victorian Government** to bridge the gap between awareness and acceptance of autism. The campaign, featuring autistic actors, consists of television, print, and social media advertising across metropolitan and regional Victoria over the next month.

*Change Your Reactions* urges Victorians to take steps to build a more inclusive community that understands, accepts, and positively engages with autistic people.

The 2021 campaign will seek to emulate the success of last year's launch which saw almost 1 in 5 autistic people and their families notice a change in the way they were treated. Of those who saw the 2020 campaign:

- 90 per cent felt concerned about how autistic people were treated;
- 85 per cent intended to refrain from being judgmental;
- 81 per cent were made to stop and think; and
- 68 per cent reported having a better understanding of autism.

**Fiona Sharkie, CEO of Amaze**, said the Change Your Reactions campaign was crucial in changing the worrying statistic of only 4 per cent of the autistic community felt the broader community knew how to support them.

"Many autistic people feel they are treated harshly and judged unfairly by the community, particularly in the way they are described and how people react to them," Ms Sharkie said.

## MEDIA RELEASE

“Amaze has undertaken extensive research about what autistic people, their families and carers want the community to know about autism. The insights of this research – as well as extensive consultation with the autistic community – informed the *Change Your Reactions* Campaign which also features autistic actors.

“As a community, we need to be aware, understand, and accept autistic people and demonstrate that acceptance through our actions and reactions.

“It is important for Victorians to remind themselves that autistic people are not disabled by their autism but mostly by how others respond to it. Our aim is for a better understanding and acceptance of how autistic people experience autism, so others are less judgemental. It’s about being curious, not critical,” Ms Sharkie said.

Victorians can learn more about how they can change their reactions and pledge to support autistic people and their families at [www.changeyourreactions.com](http://www.changeyourreactions.com)

For further information, help and support, Victorians are encouraged to call or email **Autism Connect**: Australia’s first national autism helpline.

Phone: 1300 308 699

Email: [info@autismconnect.org.au](mailto:info@autismconnect.org.au)

Webchat: [www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect/](http://www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect/)

*Open from 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday.*

-ENDS-

**For more information and requests for interviews, please contact:**

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### About Amaze

Founded in 1967 by a group of parents who were struggling to find autism resources, Amaze is the peak body for autistic people and their families in Victoria.

Amaze builds understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism, and influences positive systemic change to enable autistic people and their families to participate and contribute to society. The organisation provides independent, credible information and resources to autistic people, families, professionals, government and the wider community.

