Partner with us to strengthen autism inclusion, access and participation.

Priorities for the next Victorian Government.

September 2026

amaze

yellow LADYBUGS

I CAN

different journeys
Empowering Autism

AUTISM VALUED

Who we are

We are a coalition of leading autism organisations – **Amaze, Different Journeys, I CAN Network, Yellow Ladybugs and Autism Valued** – working together to ensure all government policy, across all sectors, is informed by autism lived experience and expertise.

We have a long-standing history of advocacy, service delivery and deep sector engagement, built upon established relationships within governments and the community. We support governments by:

- offering policy insights and advice
- sharing lived-experience insights and connecting government to Autistic people, families, and carers
- providing trusted, evidence-informed advice and support
- delivering access to autism-led peer support for Autistic people and their families
- improving accessibility and inclusion in workplaces, schools, and communities
- partnering for capacity-building and resource development.

Our Autistic community

More than 75,000 Victorians are Autistic, according to the 2022 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers. With many Autistic people undiagnosed, the actual prevalence is expected to be much higher.

All Autistic people are different, with a diversity of strengths and support needs. Some Autistic people require 24/7 support. Many experience intersecting forms of disadvantage. These groups include First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities; culturally and racially marginalised groups; women, girls and gender-diverse people; LGBTQIA+ people; and those living in rural and remote areas. There is also a higher prevalence of co-occurring disability, health and/or mental health conditions among Autistic people, including a higher risk of intellectual disability, epilepsy, obsessive compulsive and related disorders, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.

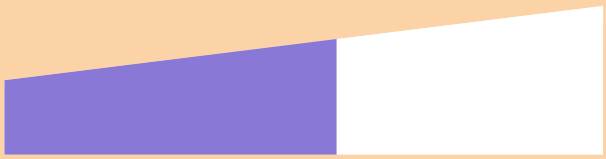
Autistic people face significant barriers across all parts of daily life and throughout their lifespan. Most systems, services, and environments are not designed with Autistic people in mind, and securing even basic adjustments is often difficult. These barriers compound when Autistic people are required to navigate multiple service systems that frequently lack coordination, accessibility, or inclusivity. As a result, Autistic people experience preventable disadvantage and consistently poorer outcomes in education, employment, health, and wellbeing.



Only 39%
of Autistic Victorian adults have completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared to 49% of all Victorian adults with disability and 77% of Victorians without disability.



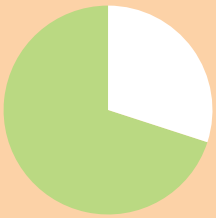
Only 23.5%
of Autistic Victorian adults have completed any post-secondary education, compared to 51% of all people with disability and 52% of people without disability.



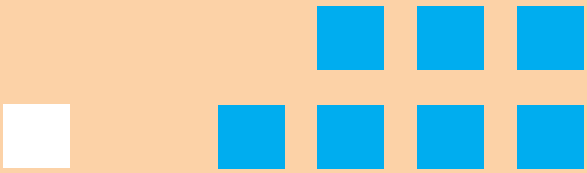
More than half (56%) of Autistic Victorians report having at least **one unmet need for assistance.**



18.2%
of Autistic people (aged 15 years+) **are unemployed, more than double** the rate for all people with disability (7.5%) and **almost 6 times** the rate of people without disability.



Around 70%
of Autistic Australians **have at least one co-occurring mental health or psychiatric condition,** compared with approximately 43% of all Australians.



Autistic people have a higher risk of premature death and are **up to 7 times more likely** to die by suicide than non-Autistic people.

Partner with Us to Deliver Lasting Change for Autistic Victorians



As Victoria approaches the 2026 election, all parties and candidates have an opportunity to commit to building a more autism-inclusive state. The next Victorian Government will play a critical role in shaping the policies, services and systems that affect the lives of Autistic people and their families and carers.

The Victorian Government has been a national leader in delivering community led autism policy with initiatives such as the Victorian Autism Plan and the Autism Education Strategy. These initiatives, and the partnerships built through them, have reinforced public confidence, strengthened evidence- and lived experience- informed policymaking and delivered meaningful, measurable reform.

However, significant challenges remain. Autistic people continue to face barriers across education, employment, health, housing, justice and community participation, while many supports and services remain fragmented, difficult to navigate and poorly coordinated. As a coalition of leading autism organisations, we stand ready to partner with the next Victorian Government to co-design practical, evidence-informed and lived experience-led solutions. This document outlines our priorities for the next Victorian Government and the actions needed to deliver them. We invite all parties and candidates to partner with us to deliver these priorities and build a more autism-inclusive Victoria.

Priorities for the next Victorian government:

1. **A new Victorian Autism Plan** – embedded in a Victorian Autism Act – with innovative, funded actions that strengthen and integrate services, improve navigation and access, and ensure Autistic people and their families receive the right support at the right time.
2. **A renewed Autism Education Strategy**, reversal of recent changes to the Disabilty Inclusion Program in Victorian government schools and a dedicated School Can't Action Plan.
3. **A cohesive Foundational Supports system,** supported by immediate and comprehensive investment in an autism-capable, neuro-affirming workforce to deliver Thriving Kids.
4. **A Victorian roadmap to improve the physical and mental health** of Autistic Victorians, and pilot autism-accessible healthcare clinics commencing in regional and rural areas.
5. **Initiatives that build employer capability** to harness Autistic talent and ensure timely, accessible workplace adjustments across Victoria.

1

A new Victorian Autism Plan – embedded in a Victorian Autism Act – with innovative, funded actions that strengthen and integrate services, improve navigation and access, and ensure Autistic people and their families receive the right support at the right time.

Why it matters

The Victorian Autism Plan has delivered important progress. Yet Autistic people and their families and carers continue to face unique and complex barriers across almost every aspect of their lives, including education, employment, health, housing, justice and social participation. These challenges are compounded by fragmented systems, long waits, and difficulties navigating uncoordinated services, particularly in times of crisis.

With the current Plan expiring in mid-2027, the next Victorian Government has a timely opportunity to review what has been achieved and strengthen its commitments. We welcomed the recent community consultation on the next Plan and were pleased to contribute to its development. Broader disability policy does not always meet the specific needs of Autistic people and their families and carers, and tailored, evidence informed, lived experience led solutions remain essential. Without a robust new Autism Plan, Victoria risks losing hard earned momentum and leaving Autistic people behind.

A new rigorous, co-designed plan is needed to build on current achievements, embed stronger inclusion and accountability across government and community, drive better service integration and clearer pathways, improve service navigation and access to peer support, and ensure Autistic people and their families can fully participate in Victorian life.



Our call to action

We call on the next Victorian Government to deliver a new Victorian Autism Plan (2027–2032) that drives inclusion and accountability across all portfolios. The new plan must drive:

- **Genuine partnerships** with Autistic people, their families and carers and autism organisations across all government sectors to drive autism-informed policy, connected and navigable services and systems, and better outcomes.
- **A whole-of-government commitment to coordinated autism policy and implementation**, including funded system navigation and access to peer support across services, clear and connected pathways, early intervention supports, shared accountability across portfolios, and mechanisms to integrate fragmented services.
- **Tailored, measurable, and funded actions** that are evidence-informed and improve access to quality, inclusive education; timely and accurate assessment and diagnosis; autism-informed health and mental healthcare; meaningful employment; safe and accessible housing; fair and accessible justice and policing; and genuine access to community and civic participation for all Autistic people.
- **A plan that meets the needs of all Autistic Victorians**, including those experiencing intersectional disadvantage and/or requiring 24/7 care.
- **Outcome measures that track what matters** to Autistic people and their families and carers, including wellbeing, participation, quality of life, workforce sustainability and social connection.
- **Introduction of a Victorian Autism Act** to embed the plan in legislation, ensuring sustained commitment, accountability and delivery of long-term outcomes for Autistic people. This reform would secure a lasting legacy for decisive, innovative leadership in Victoria and it would stand alongside other similar state-based initiatives, such as South Australia's Assistant Minister for Autism.

Impact

A community-led and tailored plan can deliver a more inclusive Victoria, enabling Autistic people and their families to thrive. It can reduce long-term costs by addressing barriers early, preventing crisis and crisis escalation, increasing access to peer connections, strengthening and connecting service systems, and making them easier to navigate for better outcomes. Better coordination across government could ease pressure on Autistic people and their families and carers, support timely access to the right services, and improve their health and wellbeing. This is Victoria's opportunity to reaffirm its leadership in equity and human rights and set the national standard for autism inclusion and Autistic pride.

2

A renewed Autism Education Strategy, reversal of recent changes to the Disability Inclusion Program in Victorian government schools and a dedicated School Can't Action Plan.

Why it matters

Victoria has been a national leader in autism-inclusive education, and the Autism Education Strategy has delivered tangible progress as a system-facing strategy. However, Autistic learners and their families continue to face barriers, including inadequate adjustments and supports, and the Strategy's impact on educational outcomes remains unclear. Recent changes to the Disability Inclusion Program will reduce access to funding and supports in Victorian Government schools, and undermine progress in inclusive education. Autistic students with complex communication support needs still face inconsistent access to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools and strategies, leaving many without a functional communication system during or post school. Many families feel disconnected from their child's learning and struggle to access peer support. A renewed Strategy must build on the progress of the Disability Inclusion reform package and operate as a school-facing strategy capable of improving the educational outcomes for all Autistic students.

Within this context, school can't – where sensory, emotional or environmental demands make attendance genuinely impossible from a mental health and wellbeing perspective – requires focussed attention. School can't disproportionately affects Autistic students, with an estimated 50% of absences linked to school can't drivers, including anxiety from sensory overwhelm and inadequate supports. Government inquiries consistently highlight the need for neuroinclusive school environments, earlier identification of disengagement, individualised autism-affirming supports, coordinated interventions (including peer support), and stronger school capability. Yet responses remain fragmented and inadequate and are often activated too late. Embedding a dedicated action plan on school can't within the next education strategy is essential to ensure it is recognised as a legitimate attendance driver for Autistic students and a reflection of mental health and wellbeing. This reframes responsibility from students or families, towards addressing systemic barriers, enabling earlier, connected and flexible supports before disengagement and non-attendance becomes entrenched.



Our call to action

We call on the next Victorian Government to reverse recent changes to the Disability Inclusion Program and renew Victoria's Autism Education Strategy to deliver stronger, more consistent outcomes for all Autistic learners and address disengagement.
The new Strategy must:

- **Drive innovative and tailored outputs** that meet the diverse needs of Autistic students, strengthen inclusive practice across schools, and respond to gaps in adjustments, supports and participation.
- **Enhance engagement with families and carers**, including clearer communication pathways and stronger peer support opportunities.
- **Drive a strategic approach to AAC access and capabilities across schools**, supported by outreach coaches upskilling mainstream teachers and staff.
- **Implement stronger accountability and meaningful indicators and outcome measures** to ensure equitable, consistent learning experiences for Autistic students.
- **Embed a community-informed School Can't Action Plan** that drives a review of evidence and lived experience across primary and secondary settings to identify effective practice and foster neuroinclusive school environments. It should strengthen autism understanding and capabilities, coordinate supports and systems learning, enable earlier and more flexible intervention, and support all stakeholders (including teachers, families and students).
  It should also ensure that school can't, and early indicators of school can't, are explicitly considered in all attendance reviews and evaluations, as well as mental health and wellbeing assessments.

Impact

A renewed Autism Education Strategy can strengthen system capability and consolidate Victoria's leadership in inclusive education for Autistic learners. It can embed equitable participation so that Autistic learners can communicate and learn on an equal basis, with barriers identified and addressed early. With meaningful indicators and outcomes measures, the renewed Strategy can track progress and address gaps early. A renewed strategy can strengthen family and carer relationships with schools and improve access to peer support, increasing confidence, connection and capability in supporting their child's education and wellbeing.

3

A cohesive Foundational Supports system, supported by immediate and comprehensive investment in an autism-capable, neuro-affirming workforce to deliver Thriving Kids.

Why it matters

Many Autistic Victorians are not on the NDIS and face significant barriers to accessing inclusive, autism-informed, neuro-affirming, culturally appropriate supports across mainstream and community services. These challenges are most acute in regional and remote areas where limited services, workforce shortages, long waits and unclear pathways restrict timely access to support. Existing systems are fragmented and hard to navigate, leaving many Autistic people and their families without appropriate help when they need it.

Australian state governments have agreed that a cohesive Foundational Supports system is needed. As a first step, the Thriving Kids initiative will provide support outside of the NDIS to Autistic children (8 years and under) and their families through autism-focussed parent programs and resources, information and advice services, and allied health supports based on need. We welcome its recognition of the importance of autism-focussed services and supports, informed by lived experience. However, we have significant concerns about workforce readiness, the proposed pace of implementation and whether it will deliver equitable access to services. We are concerned that some children may fall through the gaps during transition. Thriving Kids must not replace NDIS access for Autistic children who require NDIS supports.

The next Victorian Government must provide strong leadership to deliver a cohesive, lived-experience-informed system that meets the needs of eligible Autistic children and their families. It must prioritise the development of an autism-informed and -capable workforce and co delivery with lived-experience stakeholders. We urge realistic timeframes that support piloting, workforce readiness and co-designed navigation supports, including investment in peer support, before a full roll-out.



A comprehensive Victorian system of Foundational Supports must accompany Thriving Kids to ensure all people with disability can access inclusive communities and equitable supports across all life stages. These supports must be available when and where they are needed, including times of crisis. A cohesive system of navigation support must be available early, so no-one is left to manage fragmented, complex systems alone.

Our call to action

- **Partner with Autistic people and their families** to design a robust Thriving Kids program for Victoria.
- **Work with the Australian Government to establish realistic timeframes** that allow for co-designed and -delivered pilots, workforce development, and navigation support (including peer support) before full roll out of Thriving Kids.
- **Invest immediately in building an autism-capable, neuro-affirming workforce**, embedding lived-experience-led training and a strong focus on regional and remote communities.
- **Create a statewide 'no wrong door' navigation system** that provides clear, coordinated access points and warm referrals, supported by Autistic- and family-led peer support.
- **Fund trusted disability and lived experience led organisations to deliver autism-capable supports and services** that are accessible, inclusive, culturally appropriate and locally embedded.
- **Guarantee that Thriving Kids will be accompanied by a comprehensive and well-connected system of Foundational Supports in Victoria**.

Impact

A strong system of Foundational Supports in Victoria can ensure Autistic people and their families and carers are able to access trusted, connected, culturally appropriate and neuro-affirming supports across all life stages. It can make services easier to find and navigate, support transitions and create clearer pathways through mainstream and community settings. By strengthening local delivery and workforce capability, this approach has the capacity to ensure Autistic Victorians and their families can access support where and when they need it outside of the NDIS, improving outcomes and reducing costs over time.

4

A Victorian roadmap to improve the physical and mental health of Autistic Victorians, and pilot autism-accessible one-stop healthcare clinics commencing in regional and rural areas.

Why it matters

Victoria has improved many aspects of healthcare accessibility, including by introducing Disability Liaison Officers. However, systemic barriers remain. Healthcare settings are not consistently designed with the sensory, communication and other support needs of Autistic people in mind. Workforce capability in neuro-affirming practice remains uneven, especially in rural and regional settings. Too many health and mental health services operate in silos, shifting the burdens of navigation and coordination to Autistic people and their families. This means Autistic people are more likely to delay or avoid healthcare, resulting in unmet healthcare needs.

The Australian Government's National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People 2025–2035 sets the national direction for autism-affirming care, workforce capability, better service integration, and stronger data over the next decade. A Victorian roadmap is now needed to translate these priorities into local delivery, embedding neuro-affirming practice and ensuring integrated autism-accessible care statewide.

As part of an inclusive healthcare system, consideration should be given to co-designing one-stop healthcare clinics to deliver autism-informed and neuro affirming care. These clinics could offer a single, coordinated point of access for Autistic people with complex support needs who experience barriers in traditional settings or require multiple services concurrently. These clinics would be especially valuable in regional and rural areas, where thin markets, travel distances, high costs and fragmented delivery often restrict equitable access. By bringing providers together in a coordinated autism-informed setting, one-stop healthcare clinics would reduce these barriers. One-stop healthcare clinics could also advance inclusion across the broader healthcare system by serving as centres for healthcare and autism excellence, strengthening workforce capability and modelling best practice in the delivery of accessible and neuro-affirming healthcare.



Our call to action

We call on the next Victorian Government to work in partnership with Autistic people, their families and carers, and autism organisations to deliver a more inclusive, connected and autism-accessible healthcare system. Key actions include:

- **Invest in a Victorian Physical & Mental Health Roadmap** for Autistic people, aligned with the National Roadmap, that can create a more accessible, coordinated and neuro-affirming health system for Autistic Victorians.
- **Pilot one-stop autism healthcare clinics**, commencing in regional and rural hospitals, for Autistic people with complex support needs who require coordinated service delivery in one location.
- **Embed neuro-affirming practice across all health services** through statewide capability building, professional development and clinical guidance.
- **Strengthen coordination across health, mental health and disability services**, reducing the burden on Autistic people to navigate complex pathways.
- **Ensure transparent reporting** on access, experiences and outcomes to monitor progress and equity.

Impact

A Victorian roadmap could help improve health outcomes for Autistic Victorians by driving the local delivery of a more accessible, coordinated and neuro-affirming healthcare system across the state. It could guide investment, strengthen workforce capability and service design, and embed safe, consistent standards of care. Autism-specific one-stop clinics could provide a central, accessible point of care for those who need coordinated support, reducing access barriers and setting best-practice benchmarks for the broader health system. Embedding neuro-affirming practice and strengthening coordination could streamline pathways, build trust and advance more equitable, timely and effective healthcare statewide.

5

Initiatives that build employer capability to harness Autistic talent and ensure timely, accessible workplace adjustments across Victoria.

Why it matters

Autistic people experience some of the poorest employment outcomes in Australia, despite strong motivation to work and valuable strengths that enhance organisational performance. Well-recognised barriers include inaccessible recruitment platforms, interview processes not designed to accommodate Autistic candidates, limited workplace understanding of autism, inconsistent access to adjustments, and insufficient ongoing support. General disability employment programs often fail to meet the specific needs of Autistic jobseekers. By contrast, Victoria's RISE initiative, which replaces traditional interviews with structured, autism-accessible discovery days and provides training and in work support, demonstrates that intentionally designed recruitment and workplace practices improve employee confidence, retention and performance.

Despite progress under initiatives like the Victorian Autism Plan, Autistic Victorians continue to face barriers to fair and inclusive recruitment and workplace environments. Transitions from school into tertiary education and early employment remain major barriers, with limited tailored guidance and accessible work experience opportunities. Strengthening these pathways is critical to improving long-term outcomes.

Access to workplace adjustments remains contingent on disability disclosure, placing the burden on employees to identify barriers and request change. True, autism informed universal design principals for work would shift this responsibility to employers and embed accessible practices that benefit all staff and strengthen engagement, productivity and retention. The processes for obtaining adjustments are often inconsistent and slow. Clearer, streamlined systems would enable timely action and improve the recruitment and retention of Autistic talent. Evaluation and feedback from Amaze's A-Plus Program demonstrates that practical, co-designed professional development rapidly strengthens organisational capability. However, without system-wide investment, impact remains limited in scale.



Our call to action

We call on the next Victorian Government to learn from our community and work together to drive initiatives that can improve Autistic employment outcomes. In particular:

- **Scale autism-inclusion training** programs to build employer capability and confidence.
- **Improve safety and reduce disclosure burden**, including through commitments to universal design.
- **Expand autism-inclusive recruitment and support across the Victorian Public Sector**, by expanding and building on the proven RISE model.
- **Report transparently on Autistic employment** in the Victorian Public Sector and set measurable targets to address systemic barriers and increase this representation within 5 years.
- **Make workplace adjustments faster and easier**, streamlining guidance and support through Jobs Victoria and related Victorian employment services.
- **Grow transition to tertiary education and work pathways,** incorporating co-designed mentoring and work experience programs.

Impact

A Victorian approach grounded in universal design, strengthened employer capability, timely adjustments, autism-inclusive recruitment and robust transition pathways support can expand access to meaningful, sustainable work for Autistic people, and strengthen workplace diversity and productivity across the state. It can also consolidate the Victorian Public Service's leadership in autism inclusion. With targeted investment and coordinated implementation, Victoria can embed inclusive employment practice as standard and reduce current gaps in employment outcomes.

For further information or to arrange a conversation with us, please contact David Tonge, Amaze's Chief Executive Officer at david.tonge@amaze.org.au or on 03 9657 1600.


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