

ACT Election Commitments - ACT Voice for Autism Spectrum Disorders - Due date to be advised

1. *Will your party improve (rationalise) the diagnostic service that the ACT Government offers (funds) for children in the ACT? What will it do to improve diagnosis of paediatric and developmental disorders?*
2. *Will your party develop and fund a therapy model for children with ASD that is compatible with the Commonwealth's national Helping Children with Autism package?*
3. *Will your party ensure children with ASD can access best practice early intervention in the ACT?*
4. *Do you accept Therapy ACT's view of early intervention for children with ASD, that "early intervention services can **only** work to provide improved coping mechanisms", that is their claim that early intervention for ASD cannot reduce a child's dysfunction or improve long-term outcomes significantly ... as expressed in advice provided to Ministers and top level staff?*
5. *Will you take steps to ensure children diagnosed with ASD in the ACT can access best practice early intervention for their ASD, instead of focusing services funded for ASD on "coping mechanisms"?*
6. *Do you have any evidence that outcomes for people with ASD in the ACT are different from the outcomes reported for people with ASD at the national level?*
7. *Will you or your party improve education services and outcomes for students with ASD in the ACT?*
8. *What will you do to ensure students with ASD can access an appropriate education setting regardless of location within Canberra?*
9. *What will you do to ensure that all ACT Government schools deliver effective education programs to all students with ASD?*
10. *What will you do to ensure students with ASD can access effective education*
11. *Will you change the current policy so students with ASD cannot be excluded, suspended or expelled due to their behavioural challenges or other issues that the school should be managing with appropriate services and support?*
12. *Is it your party's intention that parents/carers of people with ASD cease work (or moves to part-time employment) when a student diagnosed with ASD (or any severe/profound disability) leaves school? If not, what will you do so that parents/carers will no longer be likely to need to give up their employment when the person in their care leaves school?*

13. What will your party do to improve participation of people with ASD in the labour force?

14. What will your party do to ensure people with ASD can access the accommodation support services they need?

16. Does your party see access to services for people with ASD as an issue? What will you do to address this issue?

17. What will you do to develop awareness of mainstream service providers and of the community generally as to how mainstream services can meet the needs of people with ASD?

18. Will you take particular steps to inform the health, welfare, disability service and government policy development sectors about specific needs of people with ASD, their families and carers?

19. What will your party do to protect basic rights such as the right to life (health and safety) for people with ASD while they are in the care of service providers?

20. What will your party do to protect rights of people with ASD such as the right to treatment and rehabilitation, the right to primary and secondary education, the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to economic security, etc?

21. What will your party do to protect the rights of carers to economic security and participation in the labour force? What will your party do to ensure family carers are not required to work endless hours caring and supporting a person with severe or profound disability in the family home?

22. What will you do to ensure the NDIS meets the needs of people with ASD?

23. Do you believe people with ASD need service providers that are locally based and administered? If so, how will you ensure services funded through the NDIS are locally based and administered?

24. What will you do to address the substantial unmet service needs of people with ASD in the interim?

ACT GREENS RESPONSE

The ACT Greens understand that for children, young people, adults and their families and carers, it can be a real challenge to access the right diagnostic service, the appropriate interventions and the ongoing support needed to respond to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Over the past four years, we have held many consultations with stakeholders, parents and carers on these and allied issues, and we recognise that there are a range of issues, some requiring further resources, and some requiring policy changes.

The Greens have been calling for more support in this area for some time. As part of the Labor-Greens Parliamentary Agreement, we secured a review of disability education. This complemented the important review undertaken by Tony Shaddock into special education. We also secured through the Parliamentary Agreement an inquiry into the educational achievement gap based on socio-economic background and disability.

Much of our work more recently has focused on the important area of school based response, and post school options. The ACT Greens have a range of initiatives designed to support better educational outcomes and post school options for people with disability, which will be announced in the coming weeks. These initiatives will be focused on improving school support as well as better systems for later life.

The ACT Greens believe that ongoing research into the issue of early intervention programs has provided some evidence of not only mitigating some effects of ASD, but have also provided promising indications of continuing improvements and a greater quality of life.

We are awaiting the results of some ongoing Government reviews, such as the newly created Learning Difficulties Taskforce, the release of research into the ACT's alternative education settings, and the practical integration of the recently created and federally funded Disability Education Coordinators.

In many recent forums and consultations, the ACT Greens have been concerned to hear of problems and delays for parents and carers seeking diagnosis, Individual Learning Plans and access to services in schools. We recognise that this is an ongoing issue, and one that cannot be solved overnight. We will continue to call for greater consistency between the Education and Training Directorate's policy and the day to day reality facing children and their families.

The ACT Greens were instrumental in the establishment of the therapy assistant pilot program, which provides services to students in schools, and we have consistently called for this successful program to be expanded and provided with recurrent funding.

The ACT Greens also know that at the core of the issues facing people with disability, and their carers, is the basic lack of funded support hours and Individual Support Packages, and we will continue to lobby for an increase in these hours.

We need to support people with ASD to engage in meaningful education and recreational programs, but just as importantly, we recognise that we need to provide carers with the ability to return to or remain in employment, if they so choose.

Any consideration of these complex and important issues needs to take into account the major reforms currently on the national agenda – namely the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and the Gonski review of education funding. These two initiatives hold some promise for children and families with disability in the ACT, and will require careful negotiation to maximise the potential positive impacts. The ACT Greens are committed to working with local services to ensure that the ACT does not lose when entering into any Commonwealth partnerships.

With the proposed trial of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the ACT, people with disabilities and their carers will have a greater self-determination in the services they purchase. There will be a shift away from models of supported accommodation where the ACT Government is the only provider. The ACT Greens have made an election commitment of \$250,000 for a study to undertake an economic and social analysis of models of supported accommodation for people with a disability to commence in 2013. The research work will identify supported accommodation models that are economically and socially viable and should be progressed. The analysis is also important to provide a long-term perspective to meeting supported accommodation needs in the ACT.

We appreciate there is a lot of work to be done in preparation for the NDIS, and expansion of services are needed. While we are open to some interstate services operating in the ACT, we also want to ensure there is a sufficient level of local services.

With regards to human rights, the number one principle of the ACT Greens human rights policy states that “economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights are interdependent and must be respected and protected”. Rights such as to education or housing are seen as social rights. The right to economic security is an economic right.

The Greens support the recommendations from a recent Australian National University report to Government that recommended expanding the Human Rights Act to include economic, cultural and social rights that are currently not included in the Act.

The right to discrimination is currently in legislation, however the operation of that is currently subject to a review by the Law Reform Advisory Council. We look forward to the outcomes of that review to see if improvements can be made.

The Greens believe it is important that there are adequate education and awareness campaigns regarding the needs of people with ASD and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with key stakeholders how this area can be improved.