



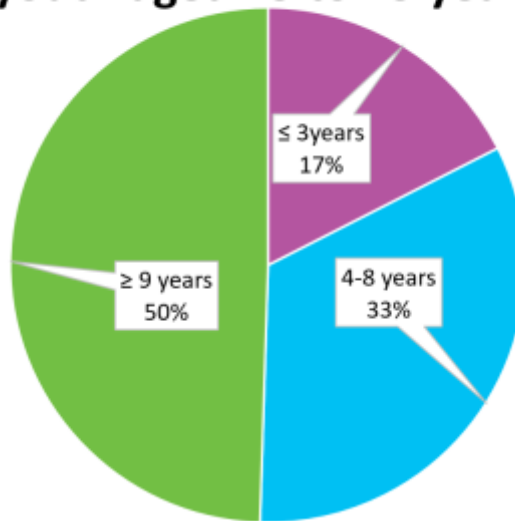
# Current approaches and barriers to consistent, timely and best practice autism diagnosis

This short presentation is based on the La Trobe University Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) response to the Senate Select Committee on Autism, Term of Reference A (pg. 4). You can find a full copy of the submission [here](#).

## When are Australians being diagnosed?

The average age of autism diagnosis in Australian children is approx. 3-4 years, but this increases as people age. The [SASLA](#) study of Australian autistic youth (aged 15-25) found that average age of diagnosis was 9.7 years.

## Age of Diagnosis Australian youth aged 15 to 25 years



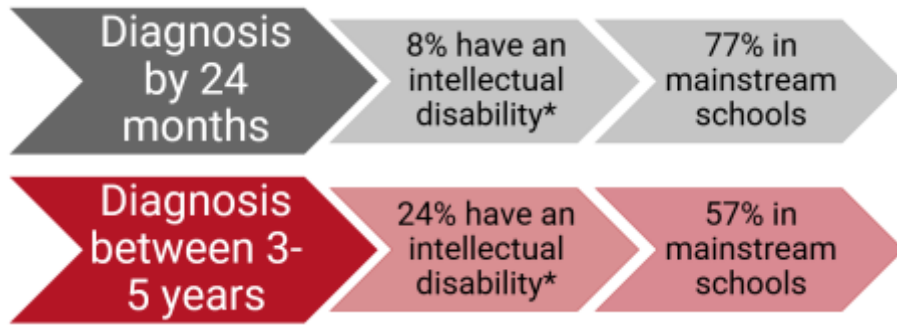
### Benefits of early diagnosis

Being diagnosed early reduces the need for ongoing support at school age by 30%.

#### Earlier identification, assessment and diagnosis:

1. enables children to participate in specialised intervention programs at younger ages, maximising their developmental opportunities,
2. promotes greater independence and better quality of life for autistic children and their families, and
3. benefits the community by significantly increasing the chances of these children contributing to society and the economy as adults. The social and economic advantages of an early diagnosis are well established.

*\*(IQ < 70) at school age*



## Barriers to diagnosis



1 - [ASDetect](#) - early autism assessment mobile app (for children aged 11-30 months)

Lack of awareness of the very early signs of autism among parents and professionals. Many General Practitioners and paediatricians believe that an autism diagnosis is not possible in children under 3 years of age.



Long waiting lists for diagnosis of 6 to 18 months. These long waits are highly detrimental to outcomes.



Accessing diagnosis privately, while often quicker than waiting for a publicly-funded diagnosis, typically costs more than \$2,000.

*"Getting a diagnosis outside of the school system means expense @\$500-\$2500. Can we improve this for older undiagnosed family members who fit the profile and may also be the primary carer?"*

(Family of an autistic individual who works for an autism organisation)

## Recommendations to the Select Committee

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- 1. Development of a national autism plan in consultation with autistic individuals, families, autism organisations, service providers and researchers.*
- 2. Provision of funding for Early Assessment Clinics in each state and territory in Australia, including a lead clinic at La Trobe University's Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre.*

3. *Training of all Maternal and Child Health Nurses (or equivalent) in each state and territory in Australia to identify the early signs of autism.*
  4. *Co-funding by government and industry to continue development of online tools for the early identification, assessment and diagnosis of autism to facilitate access for under-served regional, rural, and remote communities.*
  5. *Funding for the development and implementation of autism training for healthcare providers working with older children, adolescents and adults.*
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## Acknowledgements

### **The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre**

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) is Australia's first centre dedicated to autism research. It has a strong focus on research translation through the development of evidence-based tools, and collaborates with other autism research centres and institutes both in Australia and internationally.

OTARC is situated in the School of Psychology and Public Health within the College of Science, Health and Engineering (SHE) at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

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### **The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)**

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum. The Autism CRC funds the **SASLA** study.

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This presentation was created by [Alex Haschek](#).