

## Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback

Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is Australia's largest not-for-profit provider of services and supports for people on the autism spectrum. Aspect is a provider of choice, knowledge leader and a charitable entity. The organisation's Constitution, Vision and Mission clearly identify that Aspect is focused on being an autism-specific service provider. Aspect's autism-specific services include operating one of the world's largest network of schools and satellite classes for students on the autism spectrum; and being approved to provide a range of therapy, intervention and lifestyle options under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Aspect's success depends on its key stakeholders, which are organisations and individuals with whom Aspect regularly interacts, namely:

- People on the autism spectrum;
- Families and carers of people on the autism spectrum;
- Governments;
- Supporters;
- Strategic partners;
- Aspect's staff.

Aspect works to establish and consolidate collaborative relationships with all key stakeholders, recognising that effective communication and the sharing of skills, knowledge and experience with key stakeholders and the broader community is essential to achieve optimal outcomes for the people we support.

Aspect works in partnership with people on the autism spectrum, highly valuing people's strengths, talents, interests and capabilities. Aspect acknowledges the contributions of people on the autism spectrum within their community networks and collaborates with individuals and groups on the spectrum to promote evidence-informed and evidence-based practices that ensure both inclusion and support.

Aspect informs people on the autism spectrum and their families of Aspect's policies and key processes, including how to provide feedback or make a complaint. This information is available in accessible formats that will include information in plain English or easy-read visual formats.

Partnerships between families, carers and staff are also essential in order to prioritise the strengths and interests of the people we support and to develop person-centred, comprehensive programs. Autism-related conferences and workshops, research projects, and regular awareness and

fundraising activities provide further meaningful opportunities for reciprocal engagement with Aspect to individuals, families, supporters, and support Aspect's mission.

Aspect maintains close working relationships with relevant government agencies in order to further promote the interests of people on the autism spectrum. Aspect engages with Government to provide feedback on how policies are affecting users of Aspect's services and to provide information about people on the autism spectrum and their needs.

Aspect's supporters are particularly valued as their generosity contributes to the expansion of services to people on the spectrum and their ongoing gifts and social investments are crucially needed. Aspect is clear and transparent and regularly updates its supporters on the tangible positive impacts of their support and donations to the lives of people with autism and their families.

Aspect is committed to building mutually beneficial strategic alliances with complementary organisations in order to build capabilities in evidence-informed and evidence-based autism practices, and increase access to high quality autism-specific services nationally. This is also achieved through fostering interagency collaboration; providing integrated service approaches; providing professional education and workshops; demonstrating innovative practice through model classrooms; and pioneering best practice approaches.

Staff are engaged as Aspect's most valuable resource, with regular participation and input into all strategic planning, committee's and panel processes, along with opportunities to share views in biennial surveys. Individual skills and knowledge is shared and collectively celebrated within Aspect, with all staff supported to develop their skills through further learning or research projects. This collective specialist knowledge and experience gained through working with people on the autism spectrum for more than fifty years is articulated and promoted through Aspect's constitution, policies, procedures, the evidence-informed and evidence-based Aspect research publications; and the use of media for external communications and systemic advocacy.

Aspect recognises the importance of media exposure and use of online activities in strengthening its engagement with the community. Aspect's communications promote positive perceptions of people with disability, including people on the autism spectrum, and contribute to wider community awareness about the autism spectrum. Aspect exhibits a culture of openness, trust and integrity in its media use and online activities at all times.

Aspect monitors its engagement with key stakeholders and the broader community throughout the year in line with its strategic and business planning processes. The results are shared with the broader community through the annual report.

### **Information, support, assistance and advocacy**

Aspect provides appropriate information, support and assistance to ensure opportunities for all relevant stakeholders to participate in individual planning meetings, provide feedback or make a complaint. This may include arranging for an interpreter to be present at meetings; assistance with documentation accessibility including translation; assistance to put complaints or feedback in

writing; and providing assistance to contact an external organisation; make a referral to an advocacy service; or find an appropriate support person.

### **Protection of the right to provide feedback free from retribution**

Whilst Aspect always strives to maintain positive stakeholder and community engagement, it recognises that at times people may have negative feedback or a complaint about their interaction with Aspect. All feedback is valued, and is collated and used for continuous quality improvement within Aspect's quality management processes.

This policy recognises that all people need to feel safe to make a complaint or provide negative feedback, and reiterates that retribution in the case of complaints is illegal and not tolerated at Aspect. In the event that a complaint cannot be resolved by Aspect or the individual and their family are unhappy with the result or complaints management process, Aspect will assist the individual with appropriate referrals to external complaints resolution processes.

### **External Framework**

Aspect's Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback policy upholds Aspect's collaboration with the people we support in partnership with the wider community to promote evidence-based and evidence-informed contemporary practices, and to place value on stakeholder engagement and feedback to embrace opportunities for improvement. These practices are part of meeting the National Standards for Disability Services in:

- Standard 2: Participation and Inclusion
- Standard 4: Feedback and Complaints
- Standard 5: Service Access
- Standard 6: Service Management

Additionally, this policy outlines Aspect's compliance with the Disability Standards for Education 2005, which require Aspect to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community. In particular, this policy also upholds the organisation's requirement under Part 8: Standards for Harassment and Victimisation to ensure that complaint mechanisms are available to a student who is harassed or victimised in relation to a disability of a student or an associate of the student, which are fair, transparent, accountable and handled promptly with due regard to the severity of the matter.

### **Critical Definitions**

***Autism spectrum*** - Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects, among other things, the way an individual relates to his or her environment and their interaction with other people. The word 'spectrum' describes the varying degree to which autism may impact the person.

Aspect recognises that people on the autism spectrum have unique strengths, interests and talents and values neurodiversity.

**Retribution** - is detrimental actions or punishment taken in the spirit of moral outrage or personal vengeance. This can be threatened or actual, subtle or overt punishment / detrimental action for perceived wrongdoings; and be against the individual making the complaint, or anyone involved or impacted as a result of the complaint. It can include things such as ridicule, abuse, withdrawal of services, and revenge activities. Complaints are a legally protected right, and retribution against a complainant is illegal in most states of Australia.

## Legislation References

### International

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948

### National

Carer Recognition Act 2010 (Cth)

Disability (Access to Premises- Buildings) Standards 2010 (Cth)

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)

Disability Discrimination Act 1993 (Cth)

Disability Services Act 1986 (Cth)

Disability Standards for Education Act 2005 (Cth)

National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth)

National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Quality & Safeguards Commission & other measures) Bill 2017 (Cth)

National Standards for Disability Services 2013 (Cth)

Ombudsman Act 1976 (Cth)

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

### New South Wales

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)

Anti-Discrimination Act 2004 (NSW)

Carers (Recognition) Act 2010 (NSW)

Community Services (Complaints, Reviews & Monitoring) Act 1993 (NSW)

Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)

Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW)

### Victoria

Carers Recognition Act 2012 (VIC)

Disability Act 2006 (VIC)

Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (VIC)



### **South Australia**

Carers Recognition Act 2005 (SA)

Disability Services Act 1993 (SA)

Disability Services (Rights, Protection & Inclusion) Amendment Act 2013 (SA)

Equal Opportunity Act 1974 (SA)

### **Australian Capital Territory**

Disability Services Act 1991 (ACT)

Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)

