

Autism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Florence Williams, Yvonne O'Neill

Autism Queensland Limited, QLD

A 2012 review of global prevalence estimates of autism spectrum disorders found a median of 62 cases per 10,000 people. The disorder is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is 4-5 times more prevalent in boys. In Australia the incidence rate for young children is 1:100. Evidence from worldwide best practice evaluations supports the early intervention will provide the best outcomes for children on the autism spectrum. Despite a federal government response to the increasing needs of support for children with ASD and their families, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families accessing support is disproportionately low. This raises questions in relation to identification of the condition, access to services and suitability of services for Indigenous families.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer Project (Helping Children with Autism DSS) has been working since 2012 to increase awareness of ASD in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This presentation provides a longitudinal appraisal of available data from aligned ASD services to identify the current incidence and prevalence of ASD in young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, discusses the challenges of identification and service provisions and highlights a pathway for improved identification and support services for these children and their families.