

For
the
Future

Labor's plan
for students
with Autism



South
Australian
Labor



Acknowledgment of country.

We acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians whose ancestral lands we live and work upon and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their deep spiritual connection and the relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to Country. We also pay our respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their nations in South Australia, as well as those across Australia.



Foreword

Having a child diagnosed with autism can be a confronting experience, full of uncertainty about how to best support your child and what the future will hold for them. A Malinauskas Labor government understands the challenges in front of those families and will walk by your side as you navigate your child's education and your journey.

That's why Labor will:

- ✔ Invest \$17.15 million to appoint an Autism Lead Teacher in every public primary school with clear accountabilities of outcomes.
- ✔ Seek to increase the number of autism-qualified staff in preschools.
- ✔ Work with service providers including Autism SA to offer early intervention services in children's centres.
- ✔ Develop a State Autism Strategy that operates with the State Disability Plan and require all government agencies to sign up to the Autism Friendly Charter.
- ✔ Invest \$50 million to fund 100 additional speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists and counsellors for access in the public school system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Malinauskas'.

Peter Malinauskas MP
SA Labor Leader



Autism Lead Teachers in Public Primary Schools

Teaching children on the autism spectrum requires support and experience. All children deserve the best teaching, and all teachers deserve the support they need.

Labor in government will appoint a qualified autism lead teacher in every public primary school (including reception to 12 schools) from 2023 and offer up to a day a week funding for more teachers to free them up to take on the role.

The autism lead teacher in every public primary school will provide support to their fellow teachers on how to best support and educate all students, will be a point of contact for parents and teachers and will drive autism policy and practice that works for their school. Teachers wanting to take up this role will need to have undertaken some specialist training.

Autism-qualified staff in preschools

Early intervention is crucial for children on the autism spectrum and that intervention is dependent on early diagnosis.

Labor's commitment to offer three-year-old preschool to all children in South Australia from 2026 recognises that while there is clear evidence that all children benefit from two years of preschool, children with developmental challenges in particular benefit from the early diagnosis and intervention that being in a high-quality education setting brings.

Staff in preschools who can recognise and support the learning needs of young children are crucial.

Labor in government will increase autism-qualified staff in preschools by making a qualification in teaching students on the autism spectrum a preferred criterion for appointment to preschools.





Diagnosis and intervention services in Children's Centres

Labor built 47 children's centres when last in government, largely in more disadvantaged areas. These centres bring together preschool, community childcare and rooms for allied health care providers. Not all centres offer these services, and Labor wants to see these centres used to their full capacity.

Labor will actively work with service providers including Autism SA, speech therapists, occupational therapists and NDIS support coordinators to invite them to use space in our children's centres to offer early intervention services.

Research shows that the earlier a child is diagnosed and has treatment, the more likely it is they'll develop the communication, social and life skills needed for a good quality of life².

2. Autism - types, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment | healthdirect

SA the Autism Friendly State

South Australia will become the Autism Friendly State, led by the way the government does business. Through a lack of awareness and understanding, the way government services interact with people on the autism spectrum can be intimidating, confusing and alienating.

Starting with schools, but working throughout the government, Labor will require all government services to sign up to the Autism Friendly Charter. This process means government services will go through training and will be equipped with a set of principals and have access to support on how to be truly Autism Friendly.

The Autism Friendly Charter is an initiative from Autism SA that has been designed to assist businesses, organisations and venues across Australia to create autism friendly places and services for people on the spectrum of all ages.³

3. Autism SA - Autism Friendly Charter



Specialist Support in Schools

When children on the autism spectrum require specialist support in schools, they shouldn't have to wait months to get a diagnosis from a child psychologist or support from a speech pathologist or guidance from an occupational therapist.

Labor will spend \$50 million to fund 100 additional speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, and counsellors for the public school system. These staff will make a significant difference to the quality of support for children with autism, making qualified professionals available for children who need assistance, when they need it.

“We now know if we've got the child early enough, the intervention can be great. We can do the best possible we can for this child to get him or her the best we possibly can,”

Professor Robyn Young, Flinders University¹

1. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-14/what-we-needed-to-hear-when-our-son-diagnosed-autism-spectrum/10890204>



