



# TRANSFORMING AUTISM DIAGNOSIS: EARLY, ACCESSIBLE, AND INCLUSIVE

## BACKGROUND

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects how individuals communicate, interact, and engage with the world around them. These differences include social communication challenges, repetitive behaviors, intense interests, and unique sensory experiences.

Autism can have significant impacts on learning, communication, and behaviour. Many children will meet the criteria for multiple diagnoses and are susceptible to poor mental health during their school years and beyond, reducing their own and their family's wellbeing across the lifespan.



## AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT\*



Report an  
autism  
diagnosis



Estimated  
prevalence



Of NDIS  
participants

## THE GAP

Early diagnosis of autism is crucial for ensuring that children receive the support they need to thrive. Although early diagnosis, especially before age two, leads to better outcomes, fewer than 3% of Autistic children in Australia are diagnosed this early. Significant barriers include long waitlists, high costs, and a shortage of trained professionals.

## THE SOLUTION

Expanding our low-cost, neurodiversity-affirming, evidence-based, neurodevelopmental assessment clinic.

## The Victorian Early Assessment Clinic

We are closing the gap with the Victorian Early Assessment Clinic's five-step multidisciplinary, combined telehealth and in-clinic assessments. Backed by the Victorian Government, we launched in October 2023 as part of the Victorian Autism Plan. The VEAC team sees families two days per week, averaging 2.5 weekly assessments.

### Oct 2023- Nov 2024:

102

Families have started their VEAC journey

81

Families have completed their VEAC journey

75

Reports sent

## AIMS, PROGRESS AND TIMELINE



To provide an affordable, comprehensive neurodevelopmental assessment within a neurodiversity-affirming practice model to families of children under 3 years of age with a high likelihood of autism in Victoria.

- ✓ **Establish the clinic:** employ Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, a Speech Therapist, a Clinic manager and an intake officer and train them in neurodiversity-affirming practice. Train clinicians in the diagnosis of autism (2023).
- ✓ **Open the clinic** two days per week at the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University (2023), including designated clinic days at La Trobe's regional campuses.
- ⊖ **Expand operations** to five days per week at the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University (2025-).



## POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT

- **Build capacity** in early primary health workers to identify neurodevelopmental differences (NDD) in children under 3 years of age.
- **Improve access** to diagnostic services for families in regional and remote areas of Victoria by fostering stronger ties with rural and regional communities.
- **Reduce diagnosis costs** for Victorian families, making it more accessible and affordable.
- **Contribute to** developing Australian Government guidelines for autism-friendly service design and delivery.
- **Improve models of diagnostic services** to ensure more efficient, accurate, and timely assessments.
- **Improve long-term outcomes** for children and their families by strengthening early identification and support access.
- **Support evidence-based policy changes** to improve autism diagnosis and care across the lifespan.

## CLINIC LEADERSHIP



A/PROFESSOR  
JOSIE BARBARO

Clinic Director & Principal Research Fellow



ROB ANDERSON

Associate Director of Community Programs



KIM GALLETTI

Practice Manager



“

The report is amazing and I am so grateful to the practitioners who supported me through this assessment. I could not believe how comprehensive and detailed the report was and I will forever be thankful to having the opportunity to have had such amazing people helping X and our family to identify the challenges X may face in the future. This information will be crucial in supporting X to develop their skills and understand who they are from an early age. With the recommended supports I can now support them to do this.

—parent of X after attending the VEAC



## INVESTMENT

Our approach has shown great success in the efficient and affordable provision of comprehensive neurodevelopmental assessments for Victorian Families, improving their ability to access timely support for their children. Unfortunately, we have 80 families waiting five months for an appointment. This waitlist is growing. Your investment can help us open five days per week, reducing their wait time for assessment and vital neurodevelopmental supports.

2023-  
2025

The Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (\$400K per year)

2025

Seeking funding of \$600K to expand clinic by three days per week

2026+

Seeking funding of \$1.15M per year to run five days per week

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<https://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/veac>