

Social Investment Fund

Autism New Zealand Early Years Support – FAQ

Initiative description: Early identification and support for whānau and educators to understand the needs of autistic children and children showing signs of autism. The programme will provide support for around 200 (or 50 per year) children. Whānau receive intensive support with workshops, home visits and coaching to learn ways to support their child. Educators and other professionals in the child’s education setting are also provided training and support. There is on-going support from age two, for at home and in Early Childhood Education, including transition to school and building life skills.

This investment will test evaluation of cutting-edge identification and support services for families of young children showing early signs of autism. If successful, this initiative could change the support for hundreds of families.

For more information see our announcement:

<https://autismnz.org.nz/social-investment-agency-announcement/>

Note this FAQ will be updated as we receive further questions about the programme and funding.

Why is a lot of money being allocated to support only 50 children per year?

The programme will support around 50 new children per year and around 200 children throughout the four years of the programme. It will involve ongoing support from around 2 years of age through to school transition. This means that after the first year of the programme, we will likely be working with at least 100 children at a time. This will take significant resource. The pathway also includes early identification training, diagnosis, parent/whānau education programmes and educator/professionals education programmes.

What is the Social Investment Agency?

The Social Investment Agency is a government agency that is leading, developing and demonstrating a social investment approach. It takes a long-term holistic approach to support. It focusses on prevention and early intervention/support, rather than responding to crises. It measures long-term outcomes to understand what works. This includes measuring value in dollar terms (return on investment). Meaningful outcomes to enable New Zealanders to live a good life is core to the approach. For more information see: [FAQs from SIA website](#)

How does the Social Investment Fund work? How is the Social Investment Fund different to other Government Funding?

The Social Investment Agency has a Social Investment Fund. Instead of individual and siloed fundings contracts from different government departments that focus on just one area, the Social Investment Fund allows for a flexible pathway of support spanning education, health, social service, justice and disability support. For more information see: [About the SIF from SIA website](#)

What outcomes will children accessing the programme have to achieve?

The programme will be responsive to each child's needs; children will not be expected to achieve specific outcomes. Instead, the focus is on educating the adults around the child (parents, caregivers, whānau, educators) to understand, support, and enable children to flourish. This will be measured through long-term outcomes, such as supporting the child to participate in education and family wellbeing. All outcomes will align with our existing services and programmes, and principles of service. For more information see: <https://autismnz.org.nz/resources/autism-nz-principles-of-service/>

There are shortages of key staff including clinical psychologists. How will the programme be staffed?

Psychologists are just one part of the team, and therefore will not contribute to a shortage. A range of professionals will be involved in delivering the programme such as educators, early intervention specialists, speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, and psychologists. The programme will be primarily delivered by early support coaches, who do not need a specific professional qualification, but instead have experience in early childhood and/or autism support. They will be trained on the job as well as provided with ongoing professional development and supervision. Psychologists (mostly educational psychologists) will mostly be involved in diagnosis as well as specific aspects of individualised support for the child. We are committed to increasing professional capacity and expertise. For example, our diagnostic service is a teaching-based facility for psychology interns and hosts professional development workshops on autism assessment and diagnosis.

If it's a one off and ignores the need for wider disability support, early intervention, support for families and inclusive schooling, what will it really achieve?

The programme will provide a flexible pathway of support encompassing education and wider disability support. It will include:

- Identification of autism from 12 months of age
- Needs assessment and individual plan for the tamariki, family, whānau and education setting
- Diagnostic assessment
- Parent/whānau education programme, including peer support network
- Educator/professionals education programme
- Ongoing individualised and responsive support within the home and early childhood education setting, including working with and connecting to other services as needed
- Focus on comprehensive school transition support.

It will measure the impact of this approach to prove a case for ongoing funding through an integrated pathway.

What is envisioned for the diagnosis pathways?

A diagnosis of autism is not needed to access the programme. Children showing signs of autism will be eligible to participate in the programme. Their family will be given the option to receive a diagnostic assessment as part of the programme. If the family decide to pursue a diagnosis this will be completed through our diagnostic service. Our diagnostic service is individual- and family-centred, neuro-affirming, and connects people to ongoing supports that meet their needs. See our website for more details: <https://autismnz.org.nz/diagnostic-service/>

Which autistic community will be involved in co-design?

We will aim to ensure representation across the autistic community in co-design. This will aim to include: Māori, Pasifika and people from a wide range of ethnic groups; high or complex needs and/or co-occurring conditions (e.g., high communication needs and/or non-speaking/unreliably speaking and/or AAC users; learning and intellectual disability); LGBTIQ+ people; education, health, allied health, and support professionals. Co-design will be led by our Research and Advocacy team and our Advisory Groups: <https://autismnz.org.nz/advisory-groups/>