

Media Release

JENNY MACKLIN MP

**Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs**

KATE ELLIS MP

**Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care
and Youth**

BILL SHORTEN MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services

New early learning centre to support children with autism

A new Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre in Perth will give young West Australian children with Autism Spectrum Disorders access to specialist early childhood services to help them reach their full potential.

The Rudd Government will provide almost \$2.5 million over the next three years to the Autism Association of Western Australia and Jellybeans Child Care to operate the centre in partnership with Curtin University of Technology.

Opening early next year, the centre will operate out of an existing Jellybeans Child Care Centre in Warwick and will provide a minimum of 20 child care places for children aged 0 to 6 years with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin said it was one of six autism specific centres, which are part of the Rudd Government's \$190 million *Helping Children with Autism* package.

The centre will be staffed by trained child care workers and will offer programs run by speech pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists and other professionals experienced in dealing with autism.

"As many as one in 160 Australian children have an autism spectrum disorder," Ms Macklin said.

"Early intervention and ongoing family support can make a huge difference to these children's quality of life, making it easier for them to attend school and participate in everyday activities.

"Children with autism at the centre will also benefit from highly-structured interaction with other children, to help them grow in confidence and experience playing and learning in groups."

Minister for Early Childhood Education and Child Care Kate Ellis said the centre would be a great resource for parents in Western Australia during their children's early development years.

"The period from birth to six years is considered the most rapid period of development for a child, after prenatal development," Ms Ellis said.

"We know these early years are particularly critical for children with autism spectrum disorders."

Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services Bill Shorten said the Perth centre would offer crucial support and information to parents.

"Having a child diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder can be an isolating and difficult experience for parents. This centre will be a place where children can learn and interact with others, while getting professional support tailored to their needs," Mr Shorten said.

"The collaboration with Curtin University also means that the centre will be able to undertake research and build our knowledge of autism, as well as increasing the number of specialists who understand the condition."

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