

MEDIA RELEASE

Bairnsdale Advertiser, Friday 16 April 2010

Help for children with autism spectrum disorder

Gippsland Lakes Community Health (GLCH) has recently become an accredited member of the Early Intervention Panel that provides families of children aged 0-7 with access to a number of allied health services including speech pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and counselling.

The Helping Children with Autism initiative aims to address the need for support and services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families, providing eligible children up to the age of seven with access to early intervention funding of up to \$12 000 (up to \$6000 per financial year).

Families living in a regional or remote area may also be eligible for a one-off payment of \$2000 per child to cover the additional expenses associated with accessing early intervention services.

The Australian Government has committed \$190 million over four years (2008–2012) to deliver the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package. The initiatives in the package are delivered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

"As many as one in 160 Australian children have an autism spectrum disorder," explained Melanie Spits, Speech Pathologist at GLCH. "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."

"The early years are an important time for all children, but it is especially important for helping children with autism to reach their full potential and become receptive learners," added Ms Spits.

Gippsland Lakes Community Health delivers paediatric services from their sites in Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance, and also via outreach. For more information about what services we offer, either contact our Allied Health Department, pick up a brochure from one of our four service sites including Bruthen and Metung, or visit our website www.glch.org.au.



Pictured L to R: Allied Health team members and therapy providers Angela Ellis, Executive Manager Community Health Services and Physiotherapist; Parivesh Kumar, Physiotherapist; Danielle Thomson, Occupational Therapist; Casey Howarth, Allied Health Assistant; Alpa Vyas, Physiotherapist; Melanie Spits, Speech Pathologist; Anne Webb, Occupational Therapist; Julianne Webb, Allied Health Assistant; and Terry Stathakis, Speech Pathologist.