

Good morning all,

I am pleased to announce that The Bendigo Early diagnosis Autism assessment & Referral Service clinic (BEARS Clinic) has commenced operating at Bendigo Community Health at Kangaroo Flat. As the name suggests the clinic will offer a best practice multidisciplinary assessment of children & youth as to the possible diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The age range is 0-18 years, with some preference given to the under 6 yo's because of the funding implications for early intervention. However we recognise the problems for youth in getting timely assessments, thus catering for up to the age of 18.

The aim of the clinic is to provide a diagnostic assessment & report in less than 10 weeks from the time of receipt of the initial referral, thus offering a prompt alternative diagnostic process for families in the wider Loddon Mallee region. However there will be no geographic restrictions, particularly recognising the needs of the North West region.

The clinic is staffed by Dr. Ken Armstrong, Developmental/Behavioural Paediatrician, Ms Julie Gillin, Speech Pathologist, Ms Donna Morgan, Clinical Psychologist, & Ms Kim Revell, Social Worker. Each of the clinicians have many years of specialist focus on the wide field of ASDs, & will already be well known by many in the wider Bendigo region.

Initial contact with the clinic will be via a GP referral to Dr. Armstrong. The process will usually consist of an initial consultation with Dr. Armstrong, thence a referral to the team for the multidisciplinary assessment in consultation with the family. Multidisciplinary team assessments take approximately 3 hours to conduct, with feedback by phone as to the outcome on the Monday after the Friday clinic, & a final report being available within 2 weeks of assessment.

Unfortunately there is currently no Government funding for the clinic, although this continues to be actively sought. This means a fee has to be charged for the assessment process to enable the BEARS team to be cost neutral. Currently that fee is \$450. This is considerably less than many other private assessment services, & also precludes the need to travel to more distant sites for such assessment to take place. Different arrangements as to how the fee is paid can be arranged in some instances.

We are hopeful this service will be of value to the people of the region & to other regions which are currently limited in their options for diagnostic assessments.

If you have any enquiries about the clinic or would like some pamphlets to let others know about the clinics existence please do not hesitate to contact Trish Kilpatrick on 54300500 or email trishkilpatrick@bchs.com.au.

With Kindest regards,

Dr Ken Armstrong

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