

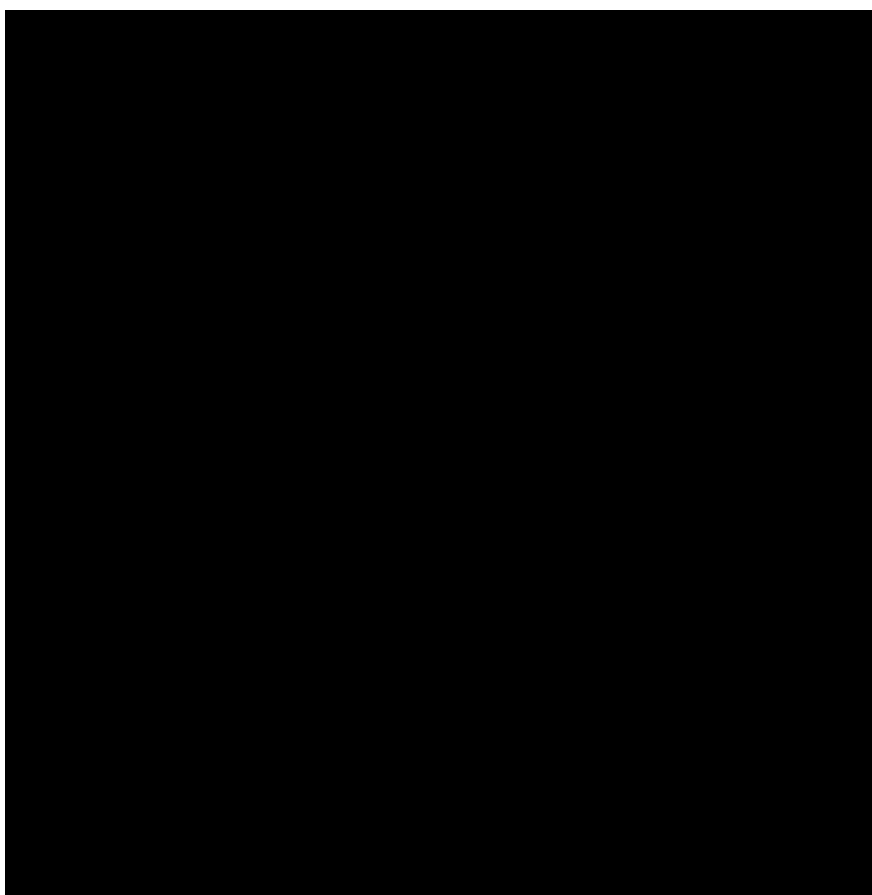
Autistics are not a burden on Australia

so why do we deport immigrants with Autistic kids?

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION FROM [REDACTED] (MELBOURNE)

In 1962, as an undiagnosed Autistic and Little Girl of Colour, my family and I sailed into Port Melbourne and disembarked at Station Pier, under the radar of both the White Australia Policy and the Migration Health Requirement. My younger daughter and I are now both diagnosed Autistics. Are we a burden on Australia?

Should my parents have been deported for bringing me as an Autistic to Australia? Obviously, my Autism is hereditary. Did my family damage Australia by bringing our Autistic genes to its shores? My father started the first Greek Elderly Citizens Club in Australia and earned an Order of Australia Medal for his contribution to community. My uncle computerised Australia's Commonwealth Bank, using STEM skills he acquired while overseas.



Hearing disabled people's voices

The call for submissions to review the Significant Cost Threshold is welcome, particularly since the terms of reference for this government's previous reviews, the Migration Review and the Multicultural Framework Review, have disallowed submissions on migration health tests.

The unrealistic time limit of two weeks in which to prepare submissions is woefully inadequate and, in my mind, amounts to indirect discrimination against the very people this review seeks to help. Migrants with disability and their care-givers often need more time to seek appropriate assistance and support to prepare written submissions, yet they are being given less time than was given for public submissions to other reviews. Some disabled migrants have health problems which make it difficult to burn the midnight oil researching and writing submissions, some need outside assistance to frame their comments and some need help with English. Unpaid carers are especially stretched for time. Community organisations are being deprived of adequate time to properly consult with disabled migrants and their care-givers to represent their views.

According to news reports, health economists were examining the Significant Cost Threshold for many months before disabled migrants were invited to share their views. This runs counter to the principal of "nothing about us without us" and elevates the views of experts above those of migrants with disability, their care-givers and representative organisations.

Deporting Australian-born children

In the midst of a skills shortages, particularly in the medical and STEM fields, Australia regularly threatens valuable professionals with deportation if their children are diagnosed with Autism, on the pretext that their children's care will exceed the Significant Cost Threshold. This happens even if the child was born in Australia. We can't afford to lose these skilled migrants and the services they provide. In fact, it is possible that these skilled migrants themselves are undiagnosed Autistics, since Autism is hereditary.

Australia almost lost the wonderful contributions of Bangladeshi-born Monash Academic Dr Biswajit Banik and his wife, Dr Sarmin Sayeed, when they were threatened with deportation by Home Affairs in 2016, because their son Arkojeet is Autistic. This was despite the fact that this professional couple had pledged to cover all the costs of Arkojeet's therapies and education. The couple were forced to run an online petitioning campaign, and collect tens of thousands of signatures, to reverse the Minister's decision. This is but one example of where Australia has turned against valued and respected professionals because they produced an Autistic or disabled child, threatening them with deportation even if they have the means to pay for their child's services and pledge to do so.

7-year-old Australian-born Autistic Seongjai Lim and his Korean-born family also had to petition and campaign to be allowed to remain in Australia, before being granted a visa this year. Isn't it stressful enough for parents to go through the diagnosis process

and obtain services for disabled children without having to publicly fight stigmatising assumptions that their child is a burden? Isn't it enough to have to deal with the uncertainty of raising a disabled child without the added insecurity of having to defend your family's right to remain in its adopted homeland?

We now have a government which is, on the one hand, committed to producing a National Autism Strategy yet, on the other hand, still committed to labelling Autistics as an economic burden on Australia, people who would be rejected if they are not anchored to this country by way of citizenship or permanent residence.

While members of our government loudly criticise those who accuse migrant workers of competing for Australian jobs, they are not above accusing migrants' disabled children of competing with Australians for disability services. We need to value the services which all migrants provide to Australians, including those migrants who have disabled children. We also need to stop scapegoating disabled migrants for our own over-stretched services and meaningfully address Australia's skilled worker shortfalls.

The Autism-STEM skill link

It has long been noted that there is a higher incidence of Autism amongst engineers, scientists, mathematicians and IT experts. Encouraging such expertise to our shores should necessitate the acceptance of the genes that give many people the edge in such fields; in fact, world renowned Autism experts believe that Autistic genes have been pivotal to scientific discovery and innovation.

Autistic Animal Scientist Dr Temple Grandin and Australian Professor Tony Attwood are adamant that Autistic individuals helped kick-start the development of religion and science which underpin all of human advancement. Dr Grandin declares that without Autistic genes, we would still be socialising around the campfire. Cambridge professor Simon Baron-Cohen takes this a step further in his latest publication *The Pattern Seekers*, where he expounds the idea that Autistic genes are linked to the uniquely human ability to invent, to further refine and build upon these inventions and to advance as a species.

How can we lure people to our shores for their Autistic capabilities, yet throw them out when they pass on their genes to their children? With acceptance and support, it is quite possible that newly diagnosed Autistic children will make a significant contribution to Australia's economy and quality of life, not in spite of their Autism, but because of it. Dr Temple Grandin herself, made famous in the movie "Thinking in Pictures", was thought to be a profoundly disabled child, who rose to become a world-famous expert in both animal science and Autism advocacy when she was given opportunities to learn. So too was child prodigy Jacob Barnett, the Autistic boy with an IQ higher than Einstein's, whose parents were told he would never learn to tie his shoelaces. Jacob went to university to study physics, at age 11, with his shoelaces untied.

Let's not forget that past Australian of the Year, Grace Tame, is also Autistic. Her Autism enhances her audacity and brilliance as an advocate-survivor of child abuse

and she is an inspiration to Australian women. Teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg, who leads a worldwide movement of millions and has propelled climate change into the centre of public discourse, credits her Autism for her successes. Our immediate past Australian of the Year, retired Paralympic tennis star Dylan Alcott, is adamant that people with disabilities are invaluable in the workplace, but his message is only just beginning to cut through.

Sadly, I hear anecdotally, that Australia's refusal to accept Autistic children born to migrant parents encourages some parents to delay diagnosis until they gain permanent residency. Their children thus miss out on early intervention services, which wastes Autistic children's unique potential to contribute to our society and economy. The Autistic children of our much-loved New Zealander neighbours, such as 3-year-old Jariah Tino, born in Australia, were also deprived of speech and occupational therapy and other NDIS services, a bureaucratic over-sight which would have consigned Jariah, and others like him, to a lifetime of completely preventable disadvantage. Thankfully, the current government saw the light and created easier pathways for New Zealanders to gain citizenship and access services for their disabled children. Let's extend some of these benefits to all migrants, by following the lead of Canada, which has a much higher Significant Cost Threshold for prospective migrants and new Citizens.

By classifying Autism as a burden to Australian society, and Autistics as people we get rid of when we have a chance to, the Australian immigration system currently maligns, enrages and alienates its own Autistic population, estimated to be some half a million strong. The assumption that Autistics are a burden perpetuates stereotypes which cause our talented, young, highly qualified Australian Autistic graduates to experience some of the highest levels of unemployment in this country. We, the Australian population, miss out on everything young Autistics have to offer us and our economy when Australian Autistics get stereotyped and rejected. Our immigration system's depiction of Autism has a lot to answer for. Let's take the advice of the Disability Royal Commission and reform the way we treat disabled immigrants!

Albert Einstein was an Autistic Immigrant

If Albert Einstein had been born in Australia to non-permanent resident parents today, he and his family would have been deported for being a burden on the taxpayer and Australia's services. Einstein couldn't speak until he was 4 and spoke in repetitive phrases until he was 7, and in today's society would likely be diagnosed as Autistic and deported.

Because of Autistic intellectual potential, Hans Asperger saved most of his "little professors" from being sent to Nazi "hospitals". What is it going to take for us to save Australian-born Autistic children from being deported to countries where they will never receive education, acceptance, therapies or health services, where they will be locked in their homes for fear of shaming their families, where their mothers are rejected by friends and family for producing an Autistic child and remain locked in the home along with their child and disowned by in-laws? Australia needs to take responsibility for the

fate that they consign migrant women and their Autistic children to, when they issue these deportation orders. Surely these are grounds for compassionate permanent residency?

By accepting these families and their Autistic children, Australia benefits from the skills and capabilities of the parents, skills often acquired at their home country's expense, professional parents who are Australians by choice, not by accident, and who value the home and opportunities that Australia offers. Australia also benefits from the uniqueness and capabilities of such families' misunderstood, but valuable, Autistic children, whose health and education needs are often covered by their devoted and highly skilled professional parents.

I am an Autistic immigrant, a Maths-Science graduate, a tuition centre teacher, an Autism research advisor and the founder of Neurodivergent Labor. Both of my daughters are neurodivergent, one of whom has an Autism diagnosis, and they are both university graduates who are professionally employed. Am I as an Autistic immigrant, or my daughter as an Autistic child of an immigrant, a burden on the taxpayer? Unwelcome in Australia because of our Autism? Or are we the "OK" types of Autistics who Australia accepts, while seeking to protect the taxpayer from the Autistics who are not "OK"? Remember Albert Einstein, Jacob Barnett and Dr Temple Grandin, who started out in life looking like they were not going to be "OK"....

Do migrants' Autistic children compete for services?

We readily reject the idea that migrants compete with Australian workers for jobs yet, somehow, we do not question the assumption that the children of migrants will compete with Australian children for access to therapies or Autism related services. It is time to call this out as ill-informed racism. The non-permanent resident parents of many Autistic children themselves provide valuable skills and services that Australia will lose through its wholesale deportations of children with Autism or other disabilities.

I am an immigrant who had an Autistic child in early intervention services for 6 years. I am now one of few Autistic migrant self-advocates, contributing my lived experience to research co-production to better understand Autism service provision to our non-Anglo Celtic population. I have also initiated Australia's only Neurodivergent group which seeks to harness the political mechanisms to advance policy to serve the Autistic and Autism communities. I am also a maths and English tuition centre teacher and, with my logical and original thinking style and strong persistence, I have had great success in teaching students of all abilities.

As a migrant, I am grateful for the opportunities that Australia has given me and my Autistic daughter. I do my best to repay the community every day, and I believe this is emblematic of what migrant parents of Autistic children have to offer this country.

It is time to re-examine the Significant Cost Threshold and respect the human rights of disabled migrants and their families.