

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Statement by Member for Belmont

MS C.M. ROWE (Belmont) [12.59 pm]: Today, I rise to acknowledge World Autism Awareness Day, which is coming up on 2 April. I, of course, celebrate the beautiful neurodivergent humans who bring their unique perspectives and vast array of talents to our community. That is a day to remind us to each do our bit to create a world in which autistic individuals feel supported, accepted and, indeed, celebrated. Autism is the most invisible and hidden of disabilities. Autistic people are often at increased risk of experiencing both mental and physical health conditions, highlighted by an enormous body of research in this space globally. I wish to shine a light very briefly on some of that research and the issues faced by so many autistic people.

Research shows that 79 per cent of autistic adults meet the criteria for a mental health condition, including depression, anxiety and eating disorders. Approximately 40 per cent of autistic individuals experience depression at some point in their lives, and 84 per cent of young autistic people experience clinically elevated anxiety. Studies show that between 42 and 79 per cent of autistic children and teenagers meet diagnostic criteria for anxiety disorders. Sadly, the anxiety symptoms presented in early childhood intensify over time for autistic people and, in many instances, affect every facet of their daily lives and ability to function. Forty-two per cent of autistic adults experience anxiety for the entirety of their life, including issues of social phobia and obsessive compulsive disorder. Clearly, anxiety in its various forms is a pervasive issue that stays with many autistic individuals for their life. The impact of depression on autistic people is far-reaching, diminishing their quality of life, heightening their risk of suicide and increasing feelings of loneliness and employment difficulties. It has a ripple effect on caregivers who face increased stress and challenges.

In the words of the amazing disability advocate Chloé Hayden, autistic people are different, but absolutely not less. I hope to see more people in our community celebrate the differences of neurodivergent people.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm