

41ST PARLIAMENT



Education and Health Standing Committee

Report 8

ANNUAL REPORT 2023–24

Presented by
Mr C.J. Tallentire, MLA
October 2024

Committee Members

Chair	Mr C.J. Tallentire, MLA Member for Thornlie
Deputy Chair	Ms L.L. Baker, MLA Member for Maylands
Members	Ms L.A. Munday, MLA Member for Dawesville
	Ms C.M. Collins, MLA Member for Hillarys
	Mr K.J.J. Michel, MLA Member for Pilbara

Committee Staff

Principal Research Officers	Dr Sarah Palmer (from April 2024) Ms Catie Parsons (until April 2024)
Research Officers	Ms Maddison Evans (from December 2023) Ms Sylvia Wolf (until December 2023)

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Education and Health Standing Committee

Annual Report 2023-24

Report No. 8

Presented by

Mr C.J. Tallentire, MLA

Laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on 24 October 2024

Chair's Foreword

This is the fourth and final annual report of the Education and Health Standing Committee in the 41st Parliament. This has been an especially productive committee; during the last 12 months we have tabled an inquiry report and a discussion paper.

Our reports are based on the information of experts from WA and other jurisdictions, community members and people with real experience. In all, 36 witnesses appeared before the Committee, enabling us to develop 37 findings and 24 separate recommendations.

Our report *A different kind of brilliance: Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools* received significant media and community interest. It was an honour to meet people and families living with autism and gain an understanding of the challenges they are courageously dealing with. The first part of the report title, 'A different kind of brilliance', was inspired by the people we met. The sensible nature of the report's media coverage was an encouraging indication of growing community interest and understanding of neurodiversity. The level of interest could also be taken as a measure of the prevalence, and therefore the need for improvements and greater capacity in our schools.

Our report into the fast developing changes to our food systems, *New bite: How alternative proteins could improve dietary and planetary health*, also received significant media and community interest. We are aware that the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has been investigating the feasibility of investment in WA towards plant-based proteins. This approach would certainly capitalise on our existing broadacre capability.

Our current work, an inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities, is sure to result in some interesting findings, including in relation to the proportionate shortfall in nationally available funding coming to WA.

Reflecting on the accomplishments of the Committee for the duration of this parliament, it's pleasing to see that the recommendations in our report from 2022, *Making Hope Practical – report of the inquiry into the response of Western Australian schools to climate change*, receive ongoing support. Most recently the report was referenced at the Australian Climate Change Education Summit. Understandably, some of the commentary expressed disappointment that some recommendations had not yet been implemented.

A recurring theme for this committee and for previous EHSCs has been the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases. In the 40th Parliament the EHSC challenged prevailing views around type 2 diabetes and discussed the reversibility of the disease. No doubt the EHSC in future parliaments will have its own priorities, but in a spirit of continuity, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest an examination of the economic and health benefits of greater investment in preventative health, specifically in relation to physical exercise being seen as a priority preventative health measure. It's a sad irony that we are proudly a nation of sports lovers, while we suffer myriad health consequences caused by declining rates of physical activity.

I offer my sincere thanks to my parliamentary colleagues on the EHSC, Deputy Chair Ms Lisa Baker MLA, Ms Lisa Munday MLA, Ms Caitlin Collins MLA and Mr Kevin Michel MLA.

The smooth functioning and quality of the EHSC's work is in large part thanks to our exceptionally diligent and gifted committee staff. On behalf of the elected EHSC members I would like to express our deepest thanks to principal research officer Catie Parsons and her successor Dr Sarah Palmer, and to research officer Sylvia Wolf and her successor Maddison Evans.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Chris Tallett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE, MLA
CHAIR

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Chapter 1

Committee Activities

Introduction

This report covers the work undertaken by the Education and Health Standing Committee of the 41st Parliament during the 2023-24 financial year.

In this reporting period, the Committee completed the activities presented in Table 1.1 in the course of:

- completing the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools
- completing a discussion paper on alternative proteins
- commencing an inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities.

Table 1.1: Summary of the activities of the Committee, 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Description	Activity
Deliberative meetings	12
Briefings	8
Site visits	4
Formal evidence hearings (including 4 closed)	19
Witnesses appearing (public hearings)	36
Reports tabled	3
Report findings tabled	37
Report recommendations tabled	24

Portfolios

The four portfolio areas of the Committee as determined by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly are:

- Education and Training
- Health
- Mental Health
- Medical Research.

Public hearings

Pursuant to Assembly Standing Order 264, the Committee has the power to send for persons, papers and records. During the period 1 July 2023–30 June 2024, the Committee conducted 15 public hearings, taking evidence from 36 witnesses to assist with its investigations (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Public hearings of the Committee, 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Date	Witness	Position	Organisation
30 August 2023	Grace Lazuardi	Director of Policy, Planning and Service Development	Autism Association of Western Australia
	Tasha Alach	Director, Therapy and Clinical Services	
13 September 2023	Nick Avery	Chief Executive Officer	South West Autism Network Inc
	Mel Jacobson	Coordinator	
	Dr Emily Pearce	Chair	Furthering Autistic Children's Education and Schooling (FACES)
	Andrew Oud	Board Member	
	Dr Cindy Smith	Educational Consultant	
20 September 2023	Dr Sarah Bernard	Autistic medical doctor, researcher and advocate	Square Peg Round Whole
	Symone Wheatley-Hey	Member advocate and national/state coordinator	
	Tania Cataldo	Member advocate	
	Carrie Clark	Chief Executive Officer	Kiind
	Renee Darbyshir	Systemic advocacy lead	
11 October 2023	Professor Sven Bölte	Director; expert in autism	Center of Neurodevelopmental Disorders at Karolinska Institutet, Region Stockholm, Curtin University
	Professor Sonya Girdler	Professor of Occupational Therapy and Director	Curtin Autism Research Group
	Professor Andrew Whitehouse	Professor of Autism Research; Director, CliniKids	Telethon Kids Institute
	Sarah Pillar	Research Development Manager, CliniKids	
18 October 2023	Niel Smith	President	Western Australian Primary Principals Association
	Melissa Gillett	President	Western Australian Secondary Schools Executives Association
	Jane Cunningham	President	Isolated Children's Parents Association

8 November 2023	Paula Power	Team Leader, Students with Disability	Catholic Education Western Australia
	Alana Williams	Funding Executive Officer	
	Helen Pedersen	Moderator	PDA Perth Parents Support Group
	Heidi Brandis	Founder and administrator	
	Steve Metlitzky	Moderator	
	Chris Champion	Director	Positive Partnerships
	Rebecca Wahlsten	WA State Coordinator	
	Katherine Browne	Delivery team member	
	Adam Howie	National Coordinator, First Nations Schools and Community Programs	
15 November 2023	Lisa Rodgers	Director General	Department of Education
	James Bell	Deputy Director General	
	Stuart Percival	Assistant Executive Director, Service Delivery	
	Joanna Hall	Principal, SSEN Disability	
8 May 2024	Frances Bell	Executive Officer	Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes – Western Australia
15 May 2024	Dr Debra Turner	Acting Executive Director	Western Australian Health Translation Network
	Debra Langridge	Head, Consumer and Community Involvement Program	

Briefings

In addition to formal hearings, the Committee held 8 briefings to gather information in relation to inquiries as well as other matters of interest (Table 1.3).

Seven briefings were held in Victoria and South Australia during investigative travel for the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools. One briefing was held prior to commencing the inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities.

Table 1.3: Briefings provided to the Committee, 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
31 July 2023	Rachael Davies	Senior Advisor – Education	Office of the Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP, Minister for Education & Women (Vic)
	Stephen Fraser	Deputy Secretary, School Education Programs and Support	Victorian Department of Education
	Sharon Barry (via videolink)	Executive Director, Inclusive Education Division, SEPS	

Chapter 1

	Deb Parker	Director, Inclusive Education Division, SEPS	
	Alan Wilson	Manager, Inclusive Education Division, SEPS	
	Chris Varney	Chief Executive Officer	I CAN Network (Vic)
	Dr James Ong	Evaluation and Policy Manager	
1 August 2023	Carolyne Jones	Clinical Manager	Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (Vic)
	Professor Alison Lane	Director	
	Professor Cheryl Dissanayake	OTARC Endowed Chair	
	Associate Professor Josephine Barbaro	Research Director, Identification & Diagnosis	
	Faiza Muhammad Fauzi	Manager, Strategic Projects	
	Jim Mullen	Chief Executive Officer	Amaze (Vic)
	David Tonge	Chief Operating Officer	
2 August 2023	Rhoni McFarlane	Director, Inclusive Teaching and Learning	South Australian Department of Education
	Anna Noble	Assistant Director, Inclusive Practice	
	Hon Emily Bourke MLC	Assistant Minister for Autism	South Australian Government
	Maggie Rutjens	Principal Community Engagement Officer	Office for Autism (SA)
	Helen Graham	Chief Executive Officer	Autism SA
	Rebecca Morton	Executive Manager, Clinical, Care and Community Excellence	
	Maddison Cocks	Business Operations Manager, Clinical Services	
	Sarah Schumann	Business Unit Lead, Schools Inclusion Program	
17 April 2023	Rachel Smith (via Teams)	Chief Executive Officer	Animal-Free Science Advocacy
	Natalie Anderson	Science Outreach Consultant	

Investigative travel

Table 1.4: Summary of Committee investigative travel, 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Date	Description	Attendees	Cost
30 July to 2 August 2023	Melbourne and Adelaide, for the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools	4 Committee members, 2 staff	\$30,718

On 30 July 2023, 4 members of the Committee and 2 research staff spent 3 days in Melbourne and Adelaide collecting evidence for the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools.

The inquiry's terms of reference included considering strategies in other jurisdictions that support school systems to respond to the needs of autistic students, and the applicability of those strategies to WA. Victoria and South Australia were the first states to develop dedicated whole-of-government autism strategies. Victoria also implemented a specific Autism Education Strategy with more than \$19 million committed over 4 years.

In Melbourne, the Committee met with Victoria's Department of Education, the I CAN Network, the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, and Amaze. In Adelaide the members met with South Australia's Department of Education, staff at Marryatville Primary School, the Assistant Minister for Autism, the Office for Autism, and Autism SA.

It was useful for the Committee to visit jurisdictions with firm policy commitments to autistic students, hearing firsthand about the development and implementation of associated strategies and their implications for the school system. The Committee was particularly impressed with the metrics employed in these states – specifically how they are able to measure improvements in autistic students.

Attendees at the Melbourne and Adelaide briefings emphasised that WA has some of the best autism researchers in the world, and that they should be listened to. The Committee heard repeatedly that WA is well-placed to develop and implement a whole-of-government autism plan similar to the Victorian and South Australian models.

Conferences

Deputy Chair Lisa Baker MLA travelled to Melbourne to attend the Food Frontier AltProteins 23 Conference (3 to 5 October 2023). This conference provided an opportunity to hear from independent think tanks and representatives of the alternative proteins industry, and to gather information for the alternative proteins issues paper.

Reports tabled

The Committee tabled three reports during the period 1 July 2023–30 June 2024.

- [Annual Report 2022-23](#) (tabled 20 September 2023)
- [A different kind of brilliance: Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools](#) (tabled 21 March 2024)
- [New bite: How alternative proteins could improve dietary and planetary health](#) (tabled 9 May 2024).

A different kind of brilliance: Report of the inquiry into support for autistic children and young people in schools

The Committee announced its terms of reference for the inquiry in May 2023, hence the greater part of the inquiry was conducted during the 2023–2024 financial year. The Committee heard from a range of people including parents of autistic children, school staff, and autism research experts.

The inquiry found that the prevalence of autism diagnosis in Western Australia is increasing. While some children are experiencing success with current supports, WA’s schools and support services are under-resourced and ill-equipped to deal with the increased numbers and complexities of autistic students. The Committee found that there is a lack of communication and coordination between schools, support services and families, creating barriers to accessing effective support.

The Committee made recommendations for the development of a whole-of-government neurodiversity strategy to be led and co-designed by autistic and neurodiverse people, as well as for increased training in autism for school staff. The report also recommended embedding inclusive, evidence-based practices and flexible arrangements within schools to assist in engaging autistic students in education.

New bite: How alternative proteins could improve dietary and planetary health

The Committee’s intention to table a discussion paper on alternative proteins was announced in the Legislative Assembly on 18 May 2023. The paper was tabled on 9 May 2024, following completion of the autism inquiry. It drew on evidence taken from a hearing in the previous reporting period (early 2023), the Food Frontier AltProteins 23 Conference and relevant literature.

The paper discussed evidence that consuming too much red meat has negative effects on human health, increasing rates of cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. The level of livestock production needed to sustain current meat consumption rates has led to increased greenhouse gas emissions, and decreased water quality and food security.

The Committee considered alternative forms of protein as one potential solution. Alternative or complementary proteins come in many forms and are being explored globally as a solution to current health and environmental issues caused by excessive meat consumption.

Given Western Australia's existing strength in broadacre grain farming, there are considerable economic opportunities for the agriculture and food industries here if they are supported to develop plant-based proteins. Analysis for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development identified opportunities for the state to position itself as a leader in the 'foods for health' industry, which includes alternative dairy and plant proteins. This industry was projected to offer high growth and high margins, with attractive markets here and overseas. The report recommended the government support the development of the alternative proteins industry.

Other activities

The Committee conducted two hearings while exploring the potential for an inquiry into health and medical research.

Australian Association of Medical Research Institutes (WA Chapter) (AAMRI WA)

The Committee invited Frances Bell of AAMRI WA to a hearing on 8 May 2024 to discuss the health and medical research landscape in Western Australia. Ms Bell gave evidence about the work of AAMRI and the competitive nature of applying for federal research grants. Her evidence was influential in the Committee's decision to undertake its inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities.

Western Australian Health Translation Network (WAHTN)

The Committee invited Dr Debra Turner and Debra Langridge of the WAHTN to attend a hearing on 15 May 2024 to provide further insights into how the health and medical research sector operates in Western Australia, and any barriers to translation of research. They gave evidence about the work of the WAHTN, the role of consumers in shaping health and medical research, access to clinical trials in WA, and the importance attached to research translation.

Work in progress

On 16 May 2023 the Committee commenced an inquiry into support for health and medical research funding and priorities. The inquiry is investigating WA's small share of national competitive funding, how the state's health and medical research priorities are determined, and how funding and priority decisions impact specific types of research and areas of need. The Committee is due to table its final report in November 2024.

Chapter 2

Financial Statement

The Committee does not have its own formal budget and is funded from the budget of the Legislative Assembly. Approval for major expenditure is required on a case-by-case basis and is entirely at the discretion of the Speaker.

The Committee's expenditure for the financial year 1 July 2023–30 June 2024 (in accordance with Standing Order 276) is detailed below:

Table 2.1: Expenditure items of the Committee, 1 July 2023–30 June 2024

Expenditure Item	Amount (\$)
Advertising	3,091
Conference fees	480
Travel	35,355
Printing	1,062
Miscellaneous	104
TOTAL	40,092

Notes:

- Figures rounded to nearest dollar.
- Salaries of committee staff are not included.
- Costs of shared administrative expenses, including lease costs for committee accommodation, not included.



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