

# Meeting of experts on community-based approaches to Autism

*Bangkok, Thailand, 15-17 September, 2010*

*A Report*



**World Health  
Organization**

Regional Office for South-East Asia



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Printed in India

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## Executive summary

The WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia organized a meeting of Experts on Community-based Approaches to Autism in Bangkok from 15-17 September 2010. The meeting was inaugurated by Dr. Chatri Banchuin, Director General of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand. The meeting was chaired by Dr. R.K. Shrivastava, Director-General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

Experts from seven Member States in the Region participated. The background of the participants included psychiatrists, developmental pediatricians, therapists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, special educators, sociologists, academicians and three parents of children with autism.

The objective of the Meeting was to review the situation of autism in the Region, and to develop community-based approaches to the management of autism in the SEA Region from a public health perspective.

On day one, the participants were taken on a field visit, first to a rehabilitation special school, to a school with a policy of inclusive education, to a tertiary care psychiatric hospital caring mainly for autistic children, and finally to a district-level hospital where services are provided for autistic children from the surrounding areas. Participants were impressed with the quality and the range of services provided in every centre and the strong bi-directional linkages between them.

The second day's proceedings started with a review of the situation of autism in the Region followed by seven presentations on epidemiology, current research, on-going community-based projects, NGO activities, assessment tools developed, human resources development as a strategy, and public health challenges in autism.

The third day's proceedings consisted of group discussions on strategies for interventions and the development of an action plan for the development of community-based approaches to autism. Two pilot projects, one in India (multi-centric, funded by the Government of India) and the second one in Sri Lanka (funded by WRO, Sri Lanka) will be

developed/strengthened over the next one year with the objective of testing the efficacy of a community-based approach to identify children with developmental delay, followed by determination of the domain of delay. The second step in the community-based approach will be the development of a screening instrument for identification of autism in the primary health care setting, in Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and possibly in Indonesia. The specific interventions for children with autism include: primary prevention, early identification, early intervention, transition and adult care services.

Recommendations for governments include developing policy framework/legislation for early detection and community-based intervention strategies for autism; integrating advocacy/awareness campaigns and early detection of autism through the overall maternal and child care system; building capacity of all stakeholders, forging partnerships and promoting multi-sectoral linkages within the country.

Recommendations for WHO include establishing centres of excellence in the South-East Asia Region for training and capacity building in autism; developing technical guidelines for identification, interventions and best practices for autism; undertaking advocacy with governments and partner agencies for prioritizing autism within the public health agenda and promoting legislation and policy frameworks; and promoting applied operational research on the development of community-based approaches for the management of autism.

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