

Empowering Inclusion

Making Athletics Autism-Friendly



Autism-Friendly Assessment

Australian Athletics partnered with Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) to undertake an Autism Friendly 'walkthrough' assessment, conducted by Autistic consultants, of the NSW Athletics 'All Comers' event at Sydney Olympic Park Athletics Centre on 08/03/2025.

This particular event was chosen for assessment because of its all-abilities structure, providing a valuable real-world environment to evaluate accessibility and inclusion practices in action. The insights gained are intended to support improvements across all athletics events nationally.

This resource summarises key recommendations drawn from the Environmental Assessment Outcomes Report (full report available), which identified practical ways to improve inclusion, sensory accessibility, and communication supports for neurodivergent athletes.

The toolkit has been developed to support clubs, member associations and the broader athletics community in delivering inclusive events and creating welcoming environments for autistic individuals.

[Read the full report](#)

Key Insights & Recommendations

Insights

Recommendations



Culture of Inclusion

Athletes and families felt unsure if neurodiversity was recognised or supported due to lack of visible messaging.

- Display clear inclusive signage such as “Everyone is welcome here” or “Not all disabilities are visible.”
- Visibly promote initiatives like the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower to show that hidden disabilities are recognised without requiring disclosure.



Preparation & Predictability

Many autistic athletes experienced anxiety from limited pre-event information, relying on verbal instructions on arrival in noisy environments.

- Share pre-event info packs using plain language, visuals, and easy-read materials.
- Include visual venue maps, schedules, and sensory guides to build confidence before arrival.



Structure & Visuals

The walkthrough highlighted limited and inconsistent signage, creating confusion and cognitive overload for neurodivergent athletes.

Use consistent, high-contrast signage with universally recognisable symbols, and colour-code zones to clearly identify registration, quiet spaces, toilets, and event areas.



Sensory adaptations

Event environments were often busy and loud with no designated quiet or low-stimulation areas, increasing distress and early withdrawal.

- Identify or set up quiet spaces with minimal noise and soft seating.
- Provide sensory supports like noise-reducing headphones and highlight low-stimulation areas in sensory maps.



Communication supports

Reliance on fast-paced verbal instructions created challenges for athletes needing extra processing time or alternative communication methods.

- Pair spoken instructions with visual guides, step-by-step cards, and Easy Read versions.
- Allow extra time for processing and use symbols alongside text wherever possible.



Problem Solving

The assessment noted no proactive strategies to manage challenges like getting lost, feeling overwhelmed, or missing event calls.

- Create “What to do if...” visual guides for common problems, provide discreet help cards
- Train staff to recognise signs of distress and respond calmly.



Feedback & Improvement

There were no accessible or structured ways for neurodivergent athletes and families to provide feedback, missing opportunities for improvement and trust-building.

- Offer post-event feedback forms in multiple formats (paper, digital, Easy Read).
- Ask specific questions on accessibility and inclusion, and share how feedback is used to improve events.

