

## RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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# **UNDERSTANDING THE PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF CHRONIC PAIN IN AUSTRALIAN NEURODIVERSE YOUTH**

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## **Background:**

Chronic pain affects 11–20% of adolescents and is linked to disability, school absence and mental health challenges. Neurodiverse youth—including those with autism or ADHD—experience chronic pain at nearly twice the rate of neurotypical peers (8.2% vs 15.6-19.9% in US data). Unique pain expression and communication differences create additional barriers to diagnosis and treatment, suggesting actual prevalence may even be higher. However, Australian-specific data remains limited. Understanding the prevalence of chronic pain in neurodiverse youth is essential for inclusive healthcare.

## **Methods:**

The study aimed to estimate the prevalence of chronic pain in neurodiverse youth, compared neurotypical peers. It used cross-sectional data from 3,037 18-year-olds in the 2018 wave of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). Participants self-reported chronic pain, autism, and/or ADHD, with neurodiversity defined as the presence of autism and/or ADHD. Descriptive statistics were used to examine prevalence rates as well as educational and emotional functioning and health-related comorbidities.

## **Results:**

Neurodiverse adolescents reported slightly higher rates of chronic pain than neurotypical peers. Many reported multi-site and variable-intensity pain. The small number of neurodiverse participants limited deeper analysis.

## **Conclusion:**

Chronic pain appears more common among neurodiverse Australian youth, though at lower rates than international figures suggest. Further research is needed to provide updated prevalence estimates and inform inclusive healthcare approaches.

## **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

This research is part of Payton Soussa's PhD, funded by an MRFF grant (APP2017114) through the University of Sydney.