Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are characterized by impairment in social interactions and communication capacities as well as by repetitive behaviours and narrow interests. In addition to these core features, anxiety, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, aggression or self-injury are common in ASDs. Intellectual disability affects the majority of ASD children and seizures are present in an estimated 30% of the autistic population. The estimated median prevalence rate in the general population is 62/10.000, suggesting that ASDs represent a serious public health problem. Furthermore, autism is a lifelong condition with a very high burden and economic impact on families and Health System. Early detection of ASDs, identification of causes and treatments and the sharing of best practices and knowledge are recognized by WHO as the “main challenges to address regarding ASD management in order to increase the capacity of health and social care systems to provide services for individuals and families with ASDs”. To address these challenges, a priority issue is the establishment of national surveillance programmes in each EU member state, to estimate prevalence and implement early detection and intervention involving health and social services, schools, and families.

SESSION I: Main Lectures
Chair: Maria Luisa Scattoni

9.45 Autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disorders: from raising awareness to building capacity
Shekhar Saxena
Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

10.15 Autism spectrum disorders
Jan K. Buitelaar
Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Center Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behavior Nijmegen, The Netherlands

11.00 Coffee break

11.30 A Parent’s Point of View
Giovanni Marino
FANTASIA

12.00 EU-AIMS: a boost to autism research
Will Spooren
CNS Research and Early Clinical Development, F. Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd., Basel, Switzerland

SESSION II: Main Lectures
Chair: Franco Nardocci

13.45 National guidelines for treatment and management of ASD children and adolescents (NICE, SIGN and ISS)
Nicola Vanacore
Clinical Epidemiology and Guidelines Unit National Centre for Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Health Promotion, Italian National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy

14.15 ISS national census survey on ASD health services
Aldina Venerosi
Neurotoxicology and Neuroendocrinology Section Department of Cell biology and Neuroscience Italian National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy

14.45 Coffee break

15.15 Round Table: national and regional experiences
Chair: Teresa Di Fiandra

Introductory speakers:

Topic: Prevalence studies
Manuel Posada De La Paz
Rare Diseases Research Institute, Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Madrid, Spain

Topic: National birth cohorts/registries
Erik Thorlund Parner
Department of Public Health, University of Aarhus, Denmark

Topic: Delay in diagnosis
Ricardo Canal Bedia
University of Salamanca
Department of Personality, Assessment Psychological Treatment Salamanca, Spain

Discussant: Italian Regional Representatives

17.15 Concluding remarks
Maria Luisa Scattoni
Principal Investigator
Italian Network for Early Detection of Autism Spectrum Disorders
Italian National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy

Angelo Lino Del Favero
General Director
Italian National Institute of Health, Rome, Italy