

# **Federal budget 2025** **Enabling children with disability to thrive**

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| * National Cabinet has committed to building a continuum of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) supports for children with disability and developmental delay across mainstream services, the creation of an enhanced layer of foundational (tier 2) supports and NDIS supports
* Major reforms impacting children with disability and developmental delay and their families remain the subject of ongoing and extended inter-governmental negotiations.
* The priority investments we call for in the early learning, disability and carers portfolios are important forerunners to broader reforms and also focus on preventing children falling through gaps while program and systems transitions are underway.
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1. **Drive disability inclusion in early learning and care**

Being welcome and included in early learning settings – at the very start of the education journey – has profound and ongoing benefits across the life of a child with disability or developmental delay.

Recent landmark inquiries and reviews have all found Australia’s Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system is failing children with disability and developmental delay. The Productivity Commission ([2024 Report on the Future of Australia’s ECEC system](https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childhood/report/childhood-volume1-report.pdf)), the ACCC ([Childcare Inquiry 2023](https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/ACCC%20Childcare%20Inquiry-final%20report%20December%202023.pdf?ref=0&download=y)) and the Disability Royal Commission called for urgent measures to boost inclusion in early learning.

**Immediately improve the Inclusion Support Program**

The ACCC and Productivity Commission highlighted major shortcomings with the Inclusion Support Program and called for immediate action to:

*The needs of children with disability are not being met, nor are they adequately supported by existing mechanisms.*

*Some parents and guardians feel unwelcome when making inquiries at a childcare service and disclosing their child’s disability. Some are told their children cannot attend as educators do not have the skills or resources to support the child, or that the centre has reached its quota of children with specific needs.*
ACCC Childcare Inquiry 2023

* troubleshoot barriers to program access
* address delays in program applications
* change and increase subsidies to better reflect costs of inclusion support
* remove barriers to allow the employment of a broader range of additional educators.

**Provide dedicated funding to upgrade physical facilities at early learning centres**

Grant funding is needed to support services to improve the built environment to that all children can be included, irrespective of their abilities.

**Extend the Disability Standards for Education to cover the whole early learning sector**

Applying the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) to the while of the early learning and care sector is long overdue. Alongside this is the imperative of lifting the sector’s understanding and capability to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) to markedly improve inclusion of children with disability. This years scheduled Review of the DSE’s provides an important opportunity to make rapid headway.



1. **Provide a support guarantee for children with developmental delay and disability**

Currently, children with disability or developmental delay are reliant on the NDIS to receive life changing ECI supports. As reforms flowing from the NDIS Review are implemented, careful design and rigorous transition planning is critical to ensure that children do not fall between program and transition cracks. Effective and equitable access to supports is essential. The following support guarantees will help build trust and confidence among families at this time of significant upheaval.

**No rollback of NDIS access until alternate supports are in place**

The NDIS Review emphasised that no changes impacting children’s access to ECI should be introduced until foundational supports for children and their families are piloted, implemented and ramped up. This absolutely needs to be adhered to.

**Demand based funding for ECI supports outside of the NDIS**

Every child who meets the threshold for targeted foundational supports outside of the NDIS needs to be guaranteed rapid access to these supports. If capped funding means support places get exhausted and some children are left without support, trust and confidence will be rapidly undermined.

**Strong equity considerations in the design of early childhood supports:**

* No child excluded because of their visa status
* Strong cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families
* Enhanced provision for families experiencing multiple complexities
* Enhanced provision for children not engaged in early learning
1. **House family-led information, advice and connection services in all children’s hospitals**

When a child begins to develop differently, it can be an all-encompassing experience for that family. Parents and carers rapidly need good advice, support and connections to minimise the time spent in distress and isolation.

**Kiind at the Perth Children’s Hospital**

Kiind has been providing family-led connection and support at Perth Children’s Hospital for over 35 years.

Kiind’s on-site peer worker team provide a warm and ready connection for families – including those going through assessment and diagnostic processes and families from regional and remote areas travelling to Perth for treatment.

Being on site at the hospital means families are rapidly connected with peer supports. It has also strengthened the interconnect between peer support and the broader health and disability services system.

Access to rapid, trusted and strengths-based peer-support – from other parents that have travelled a similar journey – is critical to helping families build hope and be equipped and empowered to navigate complex systems for their child and themselves.

Enhancing the role and visibility of family-led, child focussed organisations as a landing place for families at the beginning of their journey ought to be prioritised when ramping up peer and capacity building supports.

Children’s hospitals are frequented by parents and carers of children with disability and developmental delay - including families travelling from regional and remote areas. Embedding peer outreach in every children’s hospital would be a simple, but highly effective way of meeting families where they are at. Co-location within the hospital ensures seamless integration with health and disability support services, creating clear pathways for families when they need support the most.



1. **Strengthen support for carers of children with disability**

CAFDA welcome the new national Carer’s Strategy 2024–2034. Intentional efforts are needed to ensure it delivers for families of children with disability, who often do not identify with the language of ‘carer’ and have historically had low engagement with the Carers Gateway platform.

Carers of children with disability face distinctive challenges. Their caring role is often relentlessly intensive and can extend throughout their child's life. This requires ongoing resilience, constant adaptation and long-term planning. Poor health and wellbeing and burnout is commonplace. Rates of relinquishment of children with disability are disproportionately high. Immediate funding is needed to fast track the following key actions:

**Expand access to respite care**

Greater access to flexible options tailored to the unique needs of families caring for children with disability is urgently needed. Frequent and easy access to respite care – including respite care delivered at home - helps families and carers to cope and can be game changing for those struggling to keep their child living with them.

**Expand programs to improve the wellbeing of carers of children with disability**

Free and accessible programs focussed on the wellbeing of carers of children with disability are currently few and far between but have been proven to deliver significant benefits to carer health and wellbeing.

**About the Child and Family Disability Alliance**

The Child and Family Disability Alliance (CAFDA) is a national partnership of not-for profit family-led organisations ACD, Kiind and Belongside Families (formerly known as Kindred).

Together, we support more than 30,000 families and carers raising children with all kinds of disability and developmental delay across Australia.

Established by families for families, our boards, management and front-line staff bring lived experience and understand the joys and the challenges of parenting a child with disability.

We work by building the capacity and wellbeing of parents and carers through our well established and proven model providing information, skills building and peer support.

