



Empowering Autism Families

22 February 2021

Autism Awareness Australia welcomes the opportunity to prepare a submission regarding NDIS ECEI Reset Submission. We reached out to our community to obtain feedback on the submission question found collated below.

Founded in 2007, Autism Awareness Australia (AAA) is a not-for-profit autism education and awareness organisation. Our goal is simple: To improve the lives of all Australians on the autism spectrum and the families who love them.

As the country's leading voice for autism families, Autism Awareness Australia aims to spark positive change by increasing education and understanding of autism in Australia.

Autism Awareness Australia has long been led by parents of children with autism. Our CEO has a child with autism, as does 75% of our Board and 50% of our staff. Many contributors and volunteers over the years have either had autism or were the parents of children with autism.

NDIS ECEI Reset Submission

1. The age group best suited to receive early childhood services and whether this should be changed from under seven years of age, to under nine years.

- We would support increasing the age limit to nine years. As we have stated many times, in previous submissions, some children with autism are not diagnosed until after they have started school. These children miss out on critical Early Intervention supports and therapies that will affect their learning in the classroom. Raising the age limit for access to ECEI support will assist these children in getting the assistance they need while ensuring they are not disadvantaged in either the classroom or the playground.
- There are also cultural and socio-economic factors that contribute to a child not undergoing an early assessment. It's when this child attends school, that the signs become very clear. This situation seems especially true for girls with autism. Lifting the age from seven years to nine years will see children in these circumstances receive much needed early childhood services.



2. How independent assessments will be used to determine eligibility and budgets for participants over 12 months of age?

- Independent assessments in the current form are not suitable for children, let alone adults. Using them to determine eligibility and budgets is simply not in the best interest of the participant. A collaborative approach, including input from parents/carers, the child's existing and familiar allied health professionals, educators, GP, Paediatrician and other medical professionals is imperative. This approach will render a complete understanding of the skills, strengths and challenges each individual child or adult presents. Only then can a thorough and balanced assessment be conducted.

3. Short Term Early Intervention (STEI), which is the early support that is offered whether or not a child is eligible for the NDIS.

- 20 years of clinical and community experience tells us that access to STEI will have a dramatically positive impact on many children and their families. There are delays during the diagnostic process which impacts the start of critical early intervention. STEI will address this need whilst also supporting young children with milder developmental delays, who if they receive quality support early enough, may not need ongoing NDIS support. STEI may provide the development 'catch up' that triggers 'learning to learn' skills that will help all children reach their full potential.

4. Planning and implementation of best practice supports.

- We call for the development of a National Quality Framework for best practice in early intervention. Parents need to be supported and provided access to best practice interventions.
- NDIS planners need vastly better training and guidance on evidence-based early intervention options. Without appropriate training, planners will not be able to assist families to decide goals and put together plans that will help the child reach their full potential. This will culminate in negative health outcomes for families and wastage of valuable NDIA funds. Specialist planners are required to work in collaboration with the family / clinical team to ensure best outcomes are achieved.

5. Support for young children and families to transition to the next stage of their lives, if they are no longer eligible for the NDIS.

- Children who may not be eligible for on-going NDIS support may still need additional support and management. It is critical that the NDIS works with State Education and Health Departments to provide a clear pathway to support and provide options available in those systems such as better policies for behaviour support in classrooms and appropriate learning accommodations. Clearly understanding their options and being guided to support will not only ensure these children do not fall through the cracks, it's impact will also be felt across youth justice and socio-economic outcomes.