27 July 2022

The aim of our early childhood approach is to support families with young children with developmental concerns, developmental delay or disability. We do this by helping them access supports early in their life.

Since our last update in October 2021, we've made some great progress, especially in the way families, providers, partners and the NDIS understand one another and share information.

The work we've done has continued to improve the way we support young children and their families. We've made connections between families, providers, early childhood partners and the NDIS stronger.

What we have achieved so far:

- Published two new guidelines, the early childhood approach and early connections guidelines on our website.
- Explained what the early childhood approach is and how early connections and early supports fit into it. We made this information accessible and translated it for people who need it in their language.
- Published new guidance and an updated early childhood provider report form. This is to help providers write reports about a child's progress and outcomes in a consistent way that we can all understand.
- Updated the process to improve the way we develop NDIS plans for children. This helps partners to focus more on their important work in early supports and early connections.
- Improved the way we support families to leave the NDIS. This happens when their child is no longer eligible or no longer needs NDIS funded supports.
- We are developing resources for early childhood educators. This is to help them talk to families where they have concerns about their child's development. It's also to help them make the early childhood setting they work in, more inclusive.

Completed recommendations

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress

1.	Explain and rename the early childhood early intervention approach	We've made the name of our approach easier to understand. We changed it from the early childhood early intervention approach to the early childhood approach. We published a new guideline to explain it.
2.	Explain how our approach to supporting families and young children helps them reach their full potential	We published the early connections guideline in November 2021. The early connections guideline explains how early childhood partners help families and young children to reach their full potential. They do this through providing supports that are tailored to their needs.
3.	Develop and publish new early childhood operational guidelines.	The early childhood approach guideline was published in June 2021. We also published the early connections guideline in November 2021. It explains how early childhood partners help families and young children to reach their full potential. They do this through providing supports that are tailored to their needs. It's the first time we've had guidelines specific to children. The guidelines are written in simple language to explain what we do and why, and how best practice support helps get the best results for children younger than 7 and their families.

13.	More clearly explain developmental delay and criteria	We updated ourApplying to the NDIS guideline . It now explains the developmental delay criteria. Early childhood partners and NDIS delegates have the same guidance to make decisions, and families can understand what we mean when we talk about developmental delay and developmental concerns.
21.	Giving families more information and support when they are transitioning from the Scheme	We improved the process to support families as they leave the NDIS. The guidelines related to leaving the NDIS will be published soon and will clearly explain the process for leaving the NDIS. This includes examples of children with developmental delay who will no longer be eligible once they turn 6.

22.	Make the ‘provider outcomes report’ mandatory for providers to evaluate the effectiveness of their supports and services	We published an updated provider report form and new guidance to help providers write early childhood reports for families, carers, and the NDIA. Providers have a choice between using our report form or adapting and using their own. They don’t have to use our report form but they do need to provide information about how they have supported you and your child to achieve outcomes. We published new information for families on the website. This is to make families aware about reports and help them understand the value of receiving annual reports. Reports help families discuss their child’s progress and outcomes with their providers. They also help the NDIA to provide the right supports for your child. We will continue to review and look at ways to further improve and streamline provider reporting.

Recommendations to be delivered in the next 12 months

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
4.	Create a delegate/planner workforce for young children.	A delegate is a person who works in the NDIA, who makes decisions about funded supports in a NDIA plan. They make these decisions according to the relevant legislation and the NDIS Act. We are making sure families can work with delegates who specialise in early childhood. This helps us make sure that young children and families are better supported.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
5.	Work with federal, state and territory governments to find gaps and strengthen the role of mainstream services	This recommendation is part of our ongoing priorities. We are working with other federal government departments to create information for early childhood educators. This information is to help early childhood educators have conversations with families. It includes simple conversation guides to help early childhood educators improve the way they work to support and include all children. This information can guide educators when they identify a child who could benefit from early childhood support, or when they want to make sure the early childhood setting is inclusive of children with developmental delay or disability.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
8.	Deliver tailored supports for families in remote and very remote areas	In phase one, we heard from more than 50 early childhood organisations in the remote and very remote sector. This gave us some useful insights. We will take what we learned from phase one back to the community and test our understanding of these insights. Phase two is about to commence. It will focus on parents and families of young children and the communities where they live. We'll use what we learn from the consultations to help inform the early childhood approach in remote and very remote areas. This work is part of the broader Agency strategy that guides targeted delivery of NDIS supports in remote and very remote areas.
15.	Focussing on best practice early intervention by making scheme access decisions under section 25 in the NDIS Act	In the updated guideline about applying to the NDIS, there is strengthened focus on children accessing the Scheme through early intervention (section 25 of the NDIS Act). This means that we will continue to focus on early intervention for all children who are eligible for the NDIS. We will do this by continuing to make sure NDIS plans support best practice early intervention capacity building supports that enable better outcomes for children and families.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
18.	Publish new guidance about what's 'reasonable and necessary' when making support decisions for children on the autism spectrum	We are continuing to work with key autism stakeholders to develop guidance around supports. This is to make our decision making more consistent. This work also involves considering where we can improve the current guidance.

Recommendations we have started and are to be delivered by end of 2023

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
6.	Improve provider compliance with the NDIS Practice Standards on early childhood supports and increase awareness of these providers	We are looking at ways to ensure all families have access to providers of early childhood supports who practice in line with the best practice in early childhood intervention national guidelines . We will work with relevant stakeholders to consider ways to increase compliance with NDIS practice standards and create greater assurance of the quality of early childhood supports.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
7.	Understand what disadvantaged and vulnerable families need, and create culturally appropriate services and resources	With cultural safety in mind, we have given early childhood partners resources and tools to help them observe and monitor the development of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children. We have provided training for early childhood partners to make sure the conversations they have with families are culturally appropriate and supportive. This is to help families feel safe and supported in finding and developing their child's strengths. We have also made the information we shared about how we support children and their families clear and accessible for those communities that need information in their language.
10.	Help our partners connect more with families in communities experiencing hardship or disadvantage	We are working with our early childhood partners to identify young children and families who are experiencing hardship and disadvantage. We're doing this by using our early childhood partners' strong community connections and partnerships. This approach means we can reach out to these young children and families instead of expecting them to come to us. In future, we plan for partners in the community to do more of these outreach activities.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
11.	Help our partners connect more families to local support networks and services, so they can find others with similar experiences or circumstances	We are working closely with other stakeholders to understand what families need from other families and their community when they have a child with developmental concerns or disability. The findings from this work will support early childhood partners to connect families and carers with others in their community in the best way for them.
12.	Boost partner capacity to provide more short term early intervention support for children under 6 with developmental concerns	We have updated the early childhood planning process and worked closely with our early childhood partners to understand how early supports is working at the moment. The process update means that our early childhood partners have more time to focus on delivering and improving their early supports programs.
19.	Help early childhood partners give families clear advice about the best providers for their child and situation	We are looking at ways to improve the information early childhood partners have available to share with families. This information will help families learn more about best practice so they can choose the right provider for them.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
20.	Do more research on outcomes for young children after receiving early intervention support	We are working with a sample of families who are receiving early supports. They have agreed to help us improve the way we measure outcomes in this area. We will use the feedback from these families and our early childhood partners to help us with measuring what has been achieved through early supports. The feedback will also help us make sure that the way we measure what has been achieved, meets the needs of all. We anticipate that evaluation will be completed within the next few months. We are also developing a research framework that will help us gather more data about the long-term benefits of early childhood intervention on the lives of young children and their families.

Recommendations to commence in 2023

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
16.	Increase the capacity and flexibility of our early childhood partners to help families use their child's NDIS plan and quickly connect to supports	The updated and improved early childhood planning process has given partners more time to support families to find the supports they need to achieve their best outcomes. We will continue to improve our processes.

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
14.	Move the age limit for the early childhood approach to children younger than 9	We are expanding the age range from younger than 7 to younger than 9 years of age. By doing this, we will make sure that young children are supported throughout their transition to primary school. This will also align the Scheme with the World Health Organisation's definition of young children, which is zero to eight years. The recommendation to lift the age limit to children younger than 9 is expected to start from the middle of 2023.
17.	Introduce a 'capacity building support in natural settings' item in the NDIS Price Guide so supports can be delivered at home or other natural settings	We are continuing to work on modelling and design. We're doing this with a focus on finding the best ways to promote, support and encourage providers to travel to deliver best practice supports in a child's natural environment.

May not be required

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress

23.	Create a transition plan to help children and families move to the next stage of their lives	We are working to deliver well-coordinated transition support as part of a child's plan. This is so children and families have a positive experience when they leave the Scheme. We're improving the way we help families and carers feel comfortable about leaving the Scheme. We do this by making sure their child has the right connections in their community to support them in the next stage of their life.

Discontinued

Recommendation number	Recommendation	Progress
9.	A tailored independent assessments approach for young children and their families	As a result of the announcement from the Minister for the NDIS on 9 July 2021, we have stopped independent assessments. In July 2021, Disability Reform Ministers agreed that we will develop a new co-designed and family-centred model to increase consistency and equity in access and planning outcomes. This model is consistent with legislative requirements set out under the National Disability Insurance Scheme 2013 Act. We have appointed a steering committee for this co-design topic and are working collaboratively to develop a schedule. We will continue to provide regular progress updates about our co-design activities.

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