

Australian Government's continuing war on autistic children

The NDIS shut down AEIOU¹, one of the most effective and beneficial early intervention services for severely autistic children in Australia, many of those who will remain in the NDIS once it completes its Thriving Kids autism purge.

When Thriving Kids was announced media reports (e.g. [here](#)) said

Only those with "permanent and significant" autism will remain eligible for the NDIS, Health Minister Mark Butler said when announcing the plan this week.

But the government's ongoing war on autism² is annihilating essential supports for children with severe and profound ASD, or "permanent and significant" autism. Since it started, the NDIS's support model for autistic children shut down:

- Labor's [Autism Specific Early Learning and Childcare Centres](#)³ (ASELCCs) that were the centrepiece of autism support in the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020,
- the HCWA autism advisors who provided impartial advice for families of newly-diagnosed autistic children and had close to 100% of autistic children accessing⁴ non-NDIS supports like Carer Allowance (child), and other early supports for and investments in young autistic children, and
- various ASD-specific early intervention services, like AEIOU, investing early to help children who are diagnosed autistic at a young age.

¹ <https://aeiou.org.au/blog-view/a-message-from-the-chair-407> ... and in the media <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-13/act-father-shock-sudden-aeiou-autism-intervention-centre-closure/106452834> and <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-12/qld-aeiou-closes-with-no-notice/106446068>

² See <https://a4.org.au/node/2243>, <https://a4.org.au/node/2331>, <https://a4.org.au/node/2441>

³ See https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/Live/clac_ctte/estimates/bud_1112/FaHCSIA/248.ashx Note: AEIOU ran the Brisbane ASELCC. The QoN says "On page 57 of the NDS there is a reference to the number of Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres (ASELCC) being established. This is an error which will be corrected in the first year report". The government never corrected the error.

⁴ Recent data indicates that with the arrival of the NDIS the number of autistic children accessing Carer Allowance (child) dropped from near 100% to around 50%. This is a serious failure in this very long-running DSS non-NDIS disability support program. The reason for the failure for autistic children is that with DSS guidance the NDIS replaced HCWA Autism Advisors with NDIS partners who only engage with NDIS-related supports and have serious conflicts of interest.

The government ignores the research reviews⁵ that it commissioned and that repeatedly advised young autistic children need “intensive ASD-specific individualised early intervention”.

The government has not commissioned research reviews to advise on the needs of older children, adolescents, or adults who are diagnosed later often with less severe symptoms and traits. This is a serious gap in the government’s disability administration that needs immediate attention. Notably, these people are unlikely to need the same supports as children diagnosed very early with permanent significant autism, so they rightly do not believe they need the same intensive support. However, everyone needs to understand that people with later diagnosed autism have nothing like the same experience ... so they do not speak for children diagnosed when they are very young with severe and/or profound autism.

The advice given to government has always been that “no one approach suits all autistic people”. Newcomers to the autism sector need to respect that if some approach does not fit your needs, that does not entitle you to advocate against other’s needs. Autism is a widening spectrum ... and that must be respected by all. Government included.

The NDIS must stop fighting strong clinical and research advice for young autistic children, advice from within the sector, that said they need “intensive ASD-specific individualised early intervention”.

Government also needs to understand *and respect* that autism is a distinct disability type. Rarely do generic services meet the different and individual needs of autistic Australians. Children who can’t play do not do well in play groups. That should be obvious. Chucking a severely autistic kid into a play group and yelling “play” is like throw a young child in the deep end of a pool and yelling “swim”. It is rarely successful.

Government needs autism-specific advice; it cannot get useful advice about autism from people who do not specialise in autism. They just give generic advice based on research that most ignores or excludes autistic subjects.

Government cannot just get its advice on autism entirely from people whose autism was not recognised until adulthood; people who show strong communication skills, substantial levels of social participation and whose behaviour is not frequently dysfunctional – that is people whose autism is at worst marginal. These are people who proclaim “nothing about us without us” then exclude or even deny the existence of people with profound autism.

⁵ See reviews listed at a) <https://a4.org.au/node/965> , <https://a4.org.au/node/1191> , <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/early-interventions-and-high-volume-cohorts/evidence-review-early-interventions-children-autism>

Their voices are important. Their needs must be addressed. But they do not represent and speak for the whole autism spectrum.

There are major parts of the autism spectrum that the government ignores ... especially those in parts of the autism spectrum where they need more support for their disability/impairments. This is just cruel⁶.

AEIOU provided evidence-based early intervention for severely autistic young children. It was a service that parents should have been able to make informed choice about.

Over the years, AEIOU provided strong evidence for the outcomes of its programs. It showed that typically children in their programs made accelerated developmental gains. Research indicates such gains are usually permanent ... and the NDIS should be able to report cost and wellbeing benefits from those developmental gains through analysis of NDIS data. But neither the NDIS nor the NDDA does such analyses ... or even facilitates others to do them.

The situation for severely autistic children in the NDIS is dire. If they need “intensive ASD-specific individualised early intervention” and their family is prepared to pursue such a goal, they are likely to have to fight the NDIS, the government, in its quasi-legal Administrative Review Tribunal (ART). They either divert their funds from early intervention into legal support for their case (which is an extremely difficult choice), or they have to run their case against the NDIS’s legal team without legal support. The case takes years – so the severely autistic child misses out on the early intervention that their treating clinician advised is reasonable and necessary. They have to mount their case on their own against a well-practiced and expert legal team. They have to mount it in front of a heavily biased Tribunal member – who routinely ignores or misinterprets the Applicant’s evidence.

The NDIS and the ART make it hard for young children who have the greatest needs to access essential disability supports. This injustice is counter to:

- the Objects of the ART Act 2024,
- rights described in the UN CROC and CRPD, and
- even the basic right to fair treatment in the nation’s Injustice System.

It exemplifies the legal maxim that “justice delayed is justice denied” (harking back to the *Magna Carta*).

The government omitted autism from Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-31⁷.

⁶ <https://a4.org.au/node/2567>

⁷ <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/australias-disability-strategy>

The government's National Autism Strategy⁸ ignored autistic Australians with severe and profound disorder/impairment⁹.

The government's ongoing war on autistic children, especially the most vulnerable and those with the highest support needs, is a national disgrace.

For the severely/profoundly impaired autistic children the government's war on autism is more of a siege. Since those under attack have no way to fight back. Instead of forcing the children behind walls where they can be just ignored, the government needs to first identify the problems it needs to solve, then find solutions ... that work.

Problem 1. Getting timely and proper diagnosis and functional assessment.

Few (if any) diagnosis reports are written as the DSM-5-TR describes. Diagnosing clinicians need to provide a complete diagnosis report with all the elements (2 severity ratings, with/without intellectual impairment & language delay, etc.)

There needs to be an agreed minimum standard for functional assessment reporting.

Clinicians need to be paid to do assessments ... not just for a diagnosis. By not funding assessments that fail, government promotes/encourages overdiagnosis (then refuses to take responsibility).

Problem 2. Once a young child is diagnosed autistic and has a sufficient functional assessment, parents and families need to make informed choices about what supports their child needs based on sound and comprehensive advice that is not currently available.

Families need impartial quality initial advice about what services are evidence-based or evidence-informed. And advice about what they should ask providers once they start to engage. This is not currently available.

Problem 3. The health and allied health workforces lack capability and capacity to support the number of young autistic children being diagnosed.

Few allied health professionals are trained to deliver evidence-based or evidence-informed early investment in young autistic children. Allied health professional need far better training ... and there need to be more of them. It may be that more specialisation is needed in the workforce (not just for autism).

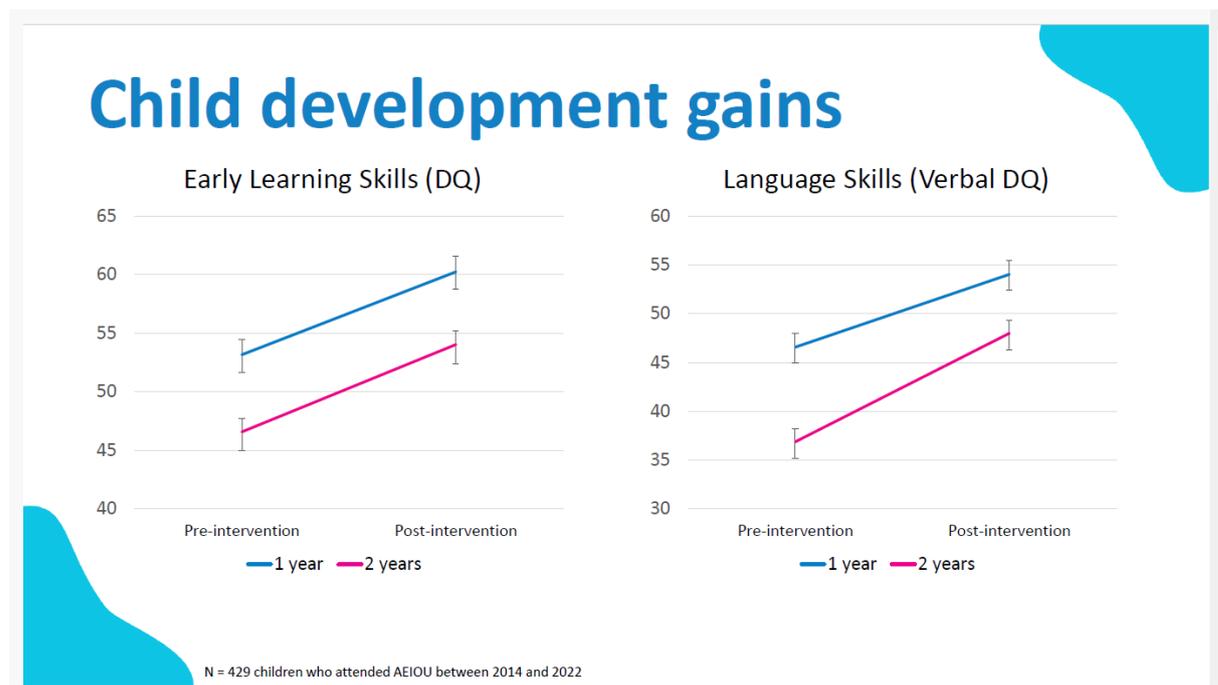
⁸ <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/national-autism-strategy>

⁹ <https://a4.org.au/node/2693> , <https://a4.org.au/node/2689> and <https://a4.org.au/node/2692>

Problem 4. Monitoring and reporting service quality

Outcomes from the early investment in autistic children needs to be monitored. Autistic children need regular re-assessment and the results must be recorded and reported.

AEIOU reported that its programs delivered the following outcomes for autistic children starting with low DQs. While individual results vary and some families may choose limited (or no) early investment, this sets overall expectations for comparable autistic children whose parents chose a comparable program.



There are many other outcomes measure that could also be used. Irrespective of therapy type/style, standards and expectations must be set and monitored. Goals must be met.

Funded programs need to comply with minimum recording, reporting and monitoring requirements. Outcomes goals may vary with different types of programs that families choose.

So, for families who choose playgroup or childcare setting as a primary support, research needs to establish what is best practice in those settings, what outcomes can be achieved and record progress and outcomes to ensure those programs deliver the expected developmental gains. Similarly, parent training programs needs to monitor more than parent satisfaction – child outcomes must also be reported.

Problem 5. Deciding what problems government will recognise and address for autistic Australians for ages beyond Thriving Kids.

Government needs to work with the whole autism sector to decide how to tackle the autism challenge in Australia. Currently, there are major problems in education, employment, health & mental health, law enforcement, the Injustice System, etc.

Government finances need to decide how much it is prepared to invest in disability, and how much into autism within that. This requires government to improve its understanding of the autism spectrum ... and that will need far more investment in proper research. Then it needs to manage expectation of what can be achieved with the funding it is prepared to commit to.

Government must develop a clear understanding of the current cost of supporting autistic Australians, especially the contribution that Informal Carers make. It needs to recognise their contribution and decide clearly what is “parental responsibility” for autistic children (see <https://a4.org.au/node/2775>) ... including the parental responsibility of ageing parents (<https://iview.abc.net.au/video/NC2602Q005S00>).

There are massive problems with the public service and politicians’ bizarre/incredible belief that regulating the private sector is better and cheaper than delivering services directly in the health and disability sectors.

Government needs to stop its war on autism and start its post-war rebuild. No one will win the war and the cost is prohibitive.

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