To whom it may concern,

I am writing as both a parent and a member of my community who cares deeply about the wellbeing of our children. I want nothing more than to see every child have the chance to thrive, but too often there are too many barriers in their way. Yet despite these barriers, our children continue to strive, doing their best to understand and use their unique abilities.

In my family, my 6-year-old son, who has diagnoses of ASD2, ADHD and Anxiety, has already faced many struggles. For these to be minimised as “mild” or “moderate” is absolutely heartbreaking — not only for his life now, but for the challenges he will face as he grows up. Until the age of 3.5 he spoke almost entirely in echolalia. When he finally gained access to the NDIS after a six-month wait, he was able to start speech therapy. Thanks to fortnightly support, he has made huge progress in his speech, but he still struggles every day.

Through the NDIS, my son also receives Occupational Therapy (OT) to support his fine motor skills, gross motor skills and social development. Until the age of five he needed help with all self-care tasks. Even now, he still requires assistance and reminders for daily routines, and he cannot yet catch a ball or ride a bike. He also sees a therapist funded by the NDIS to help him regulate, understand, and express his emotions. Before this support, he was physically violent towards his younger sister and me every day.

These therapies have been vital — not only for my son’s development, but also for our whole family. They equip parents with strategies to support our children at home, in public, and at school. Our therapists are more than professionals; they are the support system holding thousands of families across Australia together.

Accessing these services was not easy. It required long waitlists, endless specialist reports, and thousands of dollars before we could even access NDIS funding. But without this support, my son would not have the quality of life he has today. I also have family and close friends with children on the NDIS due to ASD2 and ASD3. While the diagnoses are similar, each child’s needs are completely different. To label children as "mild," "moderate," or "severe" does not reflect the reality. Each child has severe challenges in their own way — whether with speech, behaviour, social settings, or learning. What they all share is the positive impact of tailored NDIS support.

For this reason, I hope that the new Thriving Kids program will include the same level of funding, one-on-one supports, and tailored plans for every child. No family should be left out of pocket and no child should fall through the cracks. Support must be extensive and ongoing, starting from early ages, because this is what reduces pressure on the health system later in life.

What helps children thrive is simple: early help, consistent support, and communities that include everyone. Government has a vital role in making services easier to access, reducing wait times, funding programs that support kids' mental health and social connections, and — most importantly — listening directly to families. Every child's needs must be recognised and met, not pushed into a "one size fits all" approach.

I believe every child deserves the chance to thrive. Thank you for considering the voices of parents and communities in this important inquiry.

Sincerely,

[redacted]