

Submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry into the Thriving Kids Initiative

Introduction I write to you as a parent of a child with disability. I welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the enquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative. While I acknowledge the vision of helping children “thrive,” I am deeply concerned that the approach and assumptions behind this initiative will be detrimental to children with disabilities such as autism.

Parents Do Not Invent Disabilities There is a troubling narrative that families are pursuing diagnoses for their children in order to access funding. This is not only false, it is harmful.

No parent would choose a diagnosis of autism, ADHD, or other developmental condition for financial reasons. The process of assessment is long, invasive, and emotionally difficult. Parents seek it only because they want their children to be understood, supported, and given the best chance at life.

To suggest otherwise delegitimises families and undermines the integrity of every child’s diagnosis.

The Realities of Autism and Disability Children with autism and other disabilities face complex, lifelong challenges:

- Communication barriers – many cannot express their needs or feelings, which can lead to distress and behaviours of concern.
- Sensory processing issues – everyday environments such as schools or shops can be overwhelming and even traumatic.
- Social difficulties – forming friendships and joining community activities often requires structured support.
- Multiple diagnoses – many children also experience anxiety, ADHD, or intellectual disability, adding to the challenges.

Families must juggle therapy schedules, medical appointments, behaviour support planning, and constant advocacy. This is not about seeking advantage; it is about survival.

Why NDIS and Early Intervention Are Essential The NDIS is not a luxury – it is a lifeline. It funds therapies, communication tools, respite, and inclusion opportunities. Most importantly, it enables early intervention.

Without NDIS supports: - Children miss out on critical developmental windows. - Families face enormous financial and emotional strain. - Children grow into adults who are far more likely to need intensive crisis services later in life.

Investing early is not only ethical but economically responsible. It reduces the long-term costs to government and allows children to build independent, meaningful lives.

Concerns with the Thriving Kids Initiative As it stands, the initiative risks creating a two-tier system: - One where children with straightforward needs are supported, - And another where children with lifelong, complex disabilities are overlooked or disbelieved.

If Thriving Kids reduces reliance on the NDIS or casts suspicion on diagnoses, it will actively harm the children it claims to help.

Recommendations 1. Respect lived experience. Parents do not fabricate disability – they fight for their children’s rights. 2. Protect NDIS funding for children. Thriving Kids must complement, not replace or reduce, the NDIS. 3. Prioritise early intervention. Guarantee timely, affordable, and evidence-based supports. 4. Include families in design. Policies must be shaped in partnership with those who live this reality daily. 5. Think long-term. Children with disability will become adults with disability; their needs do not end with childhood.

Conclusion Children with disabilities are not statistics or budget lines – they are individuals who deserve the chance to thrive. That chance comes from recognition, respect, and access to proper supports, not suspicion or funding cuts.

As a parent, I urge Parliament to ensure that the Thriving Kids initiative strengthens, rather than weakens, the rights and futures of children with disability.

Signed,