

# Autistic and Autism Community's Responses to the Thriving Kids Announcement

Survey Report from the Australian Autism Alliance  
August/September 2025



AUSTRALIAN  
Autism Alliance



# Introduction Survey Design Summary of Findings

Overview of the Thriving Kids survey (August/September 2025)

# Introduction & Survey Design



## Introduction to this Survey and Reporting

On the 20<sup>th</sup> August 2025, The Hon. Mark Butler MP announced the [implementation of the “Thriving Kids”](#) program in July 2026. In the subsequently published Fact Sheet\*, it was explained as involving:

*“The Australian Government is restoring the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to its original purpose—supporting people with permanent and significant disability—and ensuring the Scheme remains sustainable. Reforms announced by Minister Butler on 20 August 2025 will secure the future of the Scheme and put people with disability and their families back at the centre of the NDIS. Establishing an effective national system of support for parents and children outside the NDIS is an important part of these reforms. The Australian Government has announced its commitment to contribute \$2 billion towards Thriving Kids, commencing from 1 July 2026. The final program design will be settled between the Australian Government and state and territory governments, informed by experts and the significant community input received ....”*

*Thriving Kids will focus on identifying developmental concerns earlier and establishing a national system of supports for children aged 8 and under with mild to moderate developmental delay and autism, and their families. Children with permanent and significant disability will continue to be supported through the NDIS.”*

\*This original Fact Sheet has since been removed from public access and replaced with another/others. Please contact the Australian Autism Alliance for the original version to which this survey referred..

## About the Australian Autism Alliance

This survey has been designed, hosted and reported upon by the **Australian Autism Alliance** (‘the Alliance’), the national disability representative organisation furthering the rights and interests of Autistic people across the life span, their parents and carers, and the autism community in Australia.

Established in 2016, the Australian Autism Alliance strives to improve the life chances of autistic people and facilitate collaboration within the Autistic and autism community, and those making decisions that affect us, e.g. Federal, State & Local Government, and their departments and sectors. If you would like more information visit us at <https://australianautismalliance.org.au>

## Please Contact Us

The Australian Autism Alliance welcomes all questions, suggestions and feedback relating to its research, advocacy, communication and any other matters.

Please contact us via the following:

✉ [chair@australianautismalliance.org.au](mailto:chair@australianautismalliance.org.au)

🌐 [www.australianautismalliance.org.au](http://www.australianautismalliance.org.au)



# Introduction & Survey Design

## About this Consultation

Keen to gather genuine and timely feedback from the Australian Autistic and Autism community following the Minister's 20/11/25 announcement of the Thriving Kids program, the Alliance conducted qualitative consultations with members of the Australian Autism community and employed the data gained from those to design a quantitative, online survey.

The Thriving Kids survey was launched in August 2025 and was open until late September. This report contains the Descriptive Analysis of that Thriving Kids survey.

## About the Survey Methodology

A link to the online Questionnaire is appended. All respondents were asked if they were aware of the Thriving Kids program, and if not, did not proceed without being exposed to a briefing and indicating they were ready to provide their opinions of it (refer questionnaire link appended).

All responses were guaranteed to remain anonymous (i.e. no respondent contacts were gathered by the survey tool/research team) and the survey was accessible online via all responsive screen types, e.g. mobile, tablet, desktop. Alternative methods of participation were offered to everyone within the survey invitations, e.g., invitations to contact the Alliance and determine the most accessible way of participating.

Most questions were enabled to be skipped by the respondent, should they choose to. Only those requiring a specific logic progression were mandated.

## About the Respondents

Respondents were recruited in many ways: via emails, the Alliance's website and social media invitations. Within these invitations, Alliance made it clear that it welcomed survey participation and feedback via all channels and from any Australians, including Autistic and non-Autistic people, family members, organisational representatives, educators, and any others. The final section of this Report describes the characteristics of the respondents to the survey.

It also invited feedback from participants (and others) relating to the survey, its accessibility and any other matters relating to the topic or methodology. This has been recorded and will inform future consultations.

460 people participated in this Thriving Kids survey. Numbers participating in each question/section varied, owing to the online tool offering optional responses to most questions and people dropping out of the survey (for reasons not queries or investigated) and/or preferring to not share opinions/information etc.

The survey sample most likely to provide reliable indications feedback from the general population of the Australian Autistic and Autism community is  $n=370$ , providing a 95% Confidence Level and a 5% Margin of Error.

Further surveying of sub-groups within this sample (e.g., intersectionality, locations, parents/carers etc.) will be required to draw robust conclusions and descriptions of their opinions, suggestions and responses. Please contact the Australian Autism Alliance if you have any questions and/or requests relating to this data.



# Summary of Findings

The following provides short summaries of the opinions and feedback provided by all respondents participating in the Australian Autism Alliance's Thriving Kids community survey.

## Introduction & survey design

- Strong awareness of Thriving Kids announcement among respondents (at time of survey).
- Survey design ensured exposure to program info before opinions.
- A minimum sample of ~370 provides indicative community insights.
- Broad recruitment across autistic individuals, families, professionals etc. All welcome to participate, inclusive access offered.

## This survey's sample characteristics

- Diverse sample: half autistic, many parents/carers.
- 72% NDIS participants.
- Respondents mostly caring for children aged 0–14.
- Preferences lean toward online consultation methods.

## Initial awareness & opinions of the Thriving Kids program

- 94% had heard of the Thriving Kids program (prior to survey).
- **59% mostly not in favour**; 32% unsure; 9% in favour.

## Suggestions for improved protection from 'Dodgy Providers' to the NDIS and the Autistic and Autism community

- Calls for stronger regulation, audits, and penalties.
- Desire for clearer information and complaint pathways for participants.
- Concern narrative is overstated and used politically.

## Claims that NDIS participants are receiving 'too much' therapy and supports

- 95% disagreed or said "depends on the child".
- Strong agreement that support should be individualised.
- Family wellbeing and expert input seen as essential.

## Future Autistic & Autism community information requirements

- Strong call for transparency, detail, and evidence to support this program and those affected by it.
- Requests for eligibility rules, service models, workforce plans and other reassurances.
- Need for co-design with Autistic individuals and the Australian Autism community (particularly parents of current NDIS participants).
- Concerns about safe, effective transitions between systems.

# Summary of Findings

*Continued: Summaries of findings...*

**Respondents provided many reasons for NOT being in favour of Thriving Kids program** *(provided by the **majority** of all respondents)*

## **Access & Supports**

- Major concerns about loss of NDIS supports.
- Fears of increased burden on families.
- Strong rejection of labels like “mild/moderate”.
- Worries about inequitable access and insufficient information.

## **Planning & Delivery**

- High concerns about already under-resourced systems.
- Lack of consultation and transparency.
- Distrust of the Inklings pilot evidence base.
- Workforce shortages and school capacity doubts.

## **Trust & Confidence**

- Deep distrust in government motives.
- Communications seen as disrespectful or misinformed.
- Perception of cost-cutting rather than genuine support.
- Anxiety driven by uncertainty and poor engagement.

## **Fairness & Impact**

- Fears of a two-tier system disadvantaging autistic children.
- Worries about long-term support gaps after age 9.
- Concerns about financial burden and systemic inequity.
- Predicts greater disadvantage for rural and diverse groups.

**Possible reasons to be in favour of the Thriving Kids program** *(provided by the **minority** of respondents)*

## **Access & Inclusion**

- Some hope for improved access for non-NDIS families.
- Potential for reduced costs via Medicare-style access.
- Recognition that current NDIS gaps leave many unsupported.

## **Simplicity & Integration**

- Desire for a less complex system than NDIS.
- Hope for better integration with schools and community.
- Interest in streamlined navigation and coordinated supports.

## **Quality & Principles**

- Conditional support if co-design and neuroaffirming practice occur.
- Expectations for qualified specialists and safeguards.
- Hope for sustainable early childhood support models.

## **Impact**

- Expectations of more consistent local services.
- Desire for improved affordability and system alignment.
- Hope for stronger whole-of-government coordination.





# Summary of Findings

The following provides short summaries of the opinions and feedback provided by all respondents participating in the Australian Autism Alliance's Thriving Kids community survey.

## Information Requirements

- Strong call for transparency, detail, and evidence.
- Requests for eligibility rules, service models, workforce plans.
- Need for co-design with autistic people and families.
- Concerns about transitions between systems.

## Suggestions for protection from 'Dodgy Providers'

- Calls for stronger regulation, audits, and penalties.
- Desire for clearer information and complaint pathways.
- Concern narrative is overstated and used politically.

## Therapy Volume & Support Decisions

- 95% disagreed or said "depends on the child".
- Strong agreement that support should be individualised.
- Family wellbeing and expert input seen as essential.

## Sample Characteristics

- Diverse sample: half autistic, many parents/carers.
- 72% NDIS participants.
- Respondents mostly caring for children aged 0–14.
- Preferences lean toward online consultation methods.

## Respondents agreed with and provided many more reasons for NOT being in favour of Thriving Kids program *(provided by the majority of all respondents)*

### Access & Supports

- Major concerns about loss of NDIS supports.
- Fears of increased burden on families.
- Strong rejection of labels like "mild/moderate".
- Worries about inequitable access and insufficient information.

### Planning & Delivery

- High concerns about already under-resourced systems.
- Lack of consultation and transparency.
- Distrust of the Inklings pilot evidence base.
- Workforce shortages and school capacity doubts.

### Trust & Confidence

- Deep distrust in government motives.
- Communications seen as disrespectful or misinformed.
- Perception of cost-cutting rather than genuine support.
- Anxiety driven by uncertainty and poor engagement.

### Fairness & Impact

- Fears of a two-tier system disadvantaging autistic children.
- Worries about long-term support gaps after age 9.
- Concerns about financial burden and systemic inequity.
- Predicts greater disadvantage for rural and diverse groups.



# Detailed Descriptive Reporting

Australian Autism Alliance survey 2025





# Initial Awareness & Opinions of the Thriving Kids Program

Heard of the Thriving Kids program & opinions at the time of this survey

## Heard of the Thriving Kids Program in Aug/Sep 2025

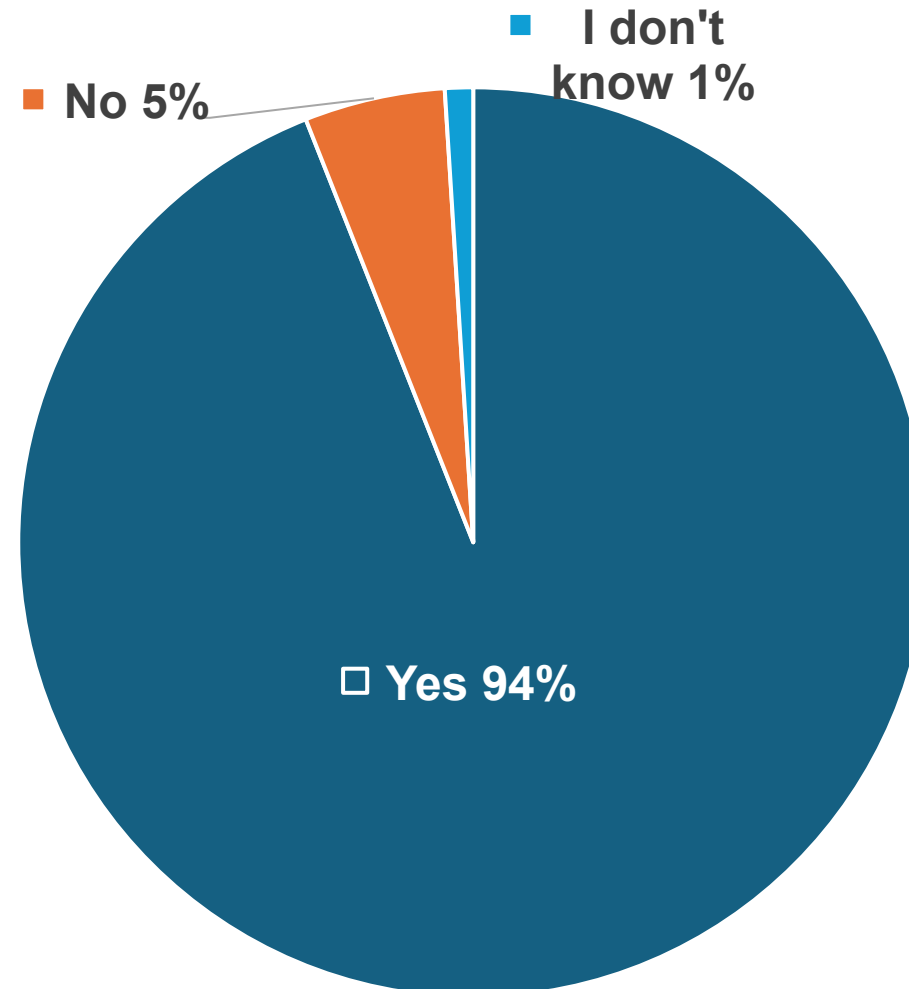
Word of the Thriving Kids Program travelled fast among Australian Autistic individuals and the Autism community following its initial announcement on 20th August 2025.

94% of the 460 respondents to this survey had heard of the Program, indicating its level of importance to the Alliance's community and stakeholders.

The 6% who told us they had not heard of the Thriving Kids Program (or did not know), were briefed on it, and asked if they wished to proceed with the survey (18 of the 19 respondents chose to proceed).

*Q: Have you heard about the Thriving Kids Program announced by Minister Mark Butler on 20 August 2025? N=460*

HAVE HEARD ABOUT THE THRIVING KIDS PROGRAM

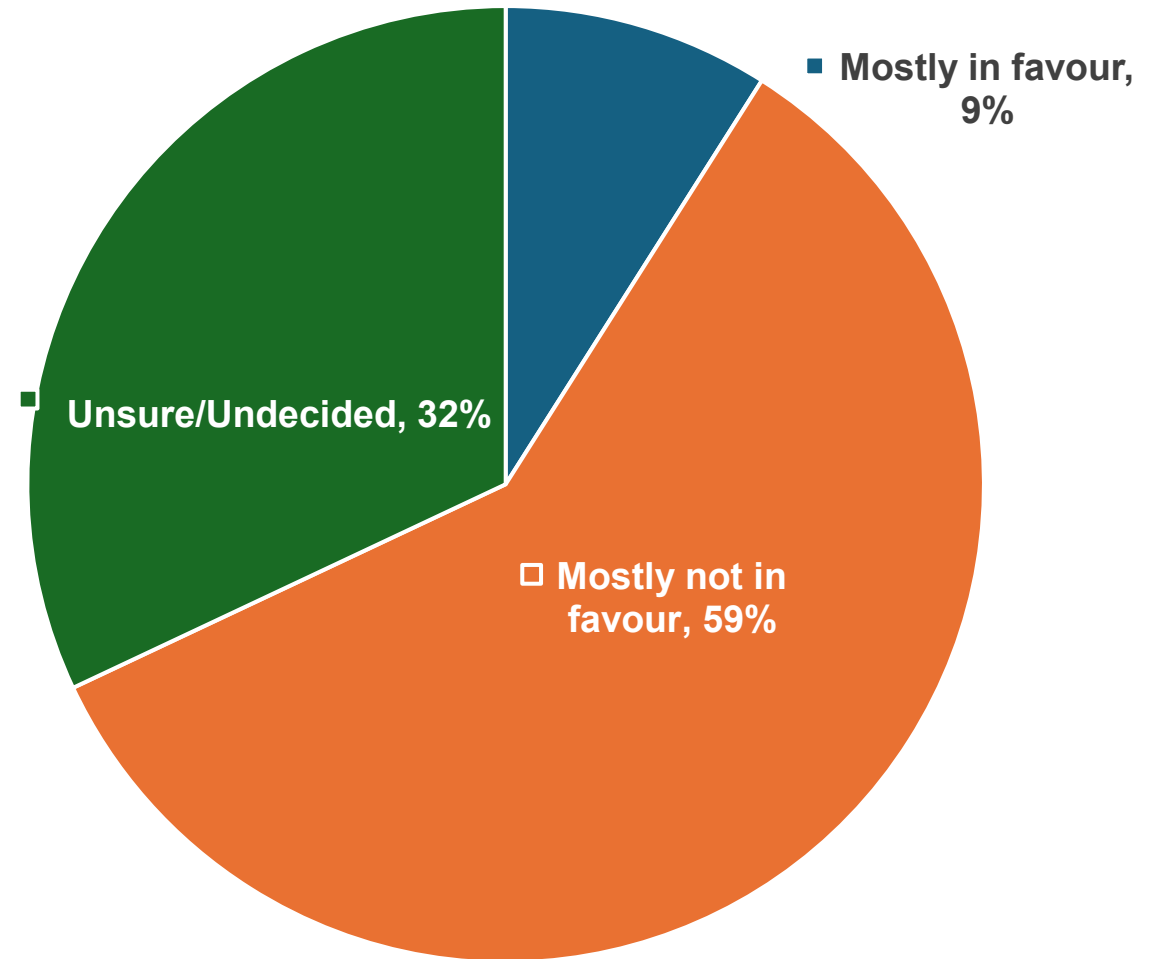


## Initial Views of the Thriving Kids Proposal

People were asked about their current view of the Thriving Kids Program and 59% (three-fifths) told us they were mostly not in favour of it. 32% (one-third) were unsure or undecided about it and 9% were mostly in favour of it.

*Q: Overall, what is your current view of the Thriving Kids proposal (planned to start on 1 July 2026)? n=421*

## CURRENT VIEW OF THE THRIVING KIDS PROPOSAL





# Not In Favour of the Thriving Kids Program

Respondents' Opinions and Reasons, by Focus Areas

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

*59% of respondents to this survey were mostly not in favour of the Thriving Kids program. However, ALL Respondents were given the opportunity to respond to each section (i.e. both reasons for being in favour and not in favour of the Thriving Kids Program).*

Respondents were asked to focus on the topic of 'Access & Supports' and share why they were not in favour of the program. The frequency of their responses (80% and 79%) indicates that fears of the loss of essential NDIS supports is a significant reason for concern around the Thriving Kids Program.

In addition, 71% feared greater parental/carer responsibilities (without the needed support) and 66% felt that families had not been respected or empowered in the process of making decisions around their children's lives and the supports they require.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=348**

*A list of possible reasons, gained from community engagement prior to the survey design) and people were encouraged to add their own rationale.*

Children and families may lose access to essential NDIS supports currently available only through NDIS

80%

No guarantee of support if Thriving Kids is failing and a child has been excluded from the NDIS

79%

Shifting more or greater responsibility onto parents/carers without sufficient resources or systemic change

71%

Power imbalance without choice and control with families not respected in decisions.

66%

Disagree with cutting funding for children 0–9 due to uncertainty about future support at a critical time in my child's life.

64%

Concern that children will compete for already limited supports with children already not in the NDIS

63%

Other Access/Support comments?  
Please write in

23%

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

79 respondents provided other reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program (with focus upon: Access & Supports). These 'other' responses have been collated into 10 themes, which have been listed (opposite) for further investigation by the Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

*Q: Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. Base: N=79 'other' responses*

- **Inadequate Funding and Resources:** Concerns about the program's budget being insufficient, existing systems already being stretched, and a lack of resources in schools and state-funded services.
- **Lack of Individualised Support and Standardisation:** Worries that the program will move away from individualised support approaches towards standardised, "one-size-fits-all" models that are not appropriate for all children, especially those with diverse needs or complex presentations like PDA.
- **Misunderstanding of Autism and Discriminatory Language:** Strong objections to the use of terms like "mild to moderate" and the framing of Autism as a temporary childhood issue rather than a lifelong neurodivergence (or disability) . Concerns about discriminatory decisions targeting Autism and the program's focus on "converting" Autistic children to suit neurotypical values.
- **Accessibility Barriers and Exclusion:** Concerns about the program's accessibility for children who are home-educated, experience "school can't" or have sensory triggers that make group or classroom settings inaccessible. Also, concerns about the impact on rural, First Nations, and CALD communities.
- **Lack of Evidence-Based and Neuro-Affirming Practices:** Skepticism about whether the program will offer evidence-based and neurodiversity-affirming therapies, with concerns about its association with ABA-style programs that teach masking.
- **Increased Burden on Families and Caregivers:** Worries about shifting responsibilities to parents, particularly mothers, who may already be struggling with complex needs and lack the capacity to implement therapist's suggestions. Concerns about the program not accounting for the neurodiversity and mental health of caregivers.
- **Uncertainty and Lack of Information/Consultation:** Significant concerns about the lack of clear information regarding the program's implementation, application processes, eligibility criteria (e.g., for co-occurring ADHD), and what happens when children age out of the program. Also, a perceived lack of consultation with the Autistic community.
- **Impact on Existing NDIS Supports:** Concerns that the program will lead to children being thrown off the NDIS prematurely, losing existing individualised supports, and forcing competition for limited resources. Included questions about how secondary diagnoses and associated supports will be covered.
- **School System Incapacity:** Highlighting that schools are already underfunded, ill-equipped, and lack the capacity, training, and understanding to effectively support Autistic children or facilitate therapies on-site.
- **Age-Related Support Gaps:** Specific concerns about what happens to children accessing "Thriving Kids" when they turn 10, and the lack of funded supports for children over 9 and young adults who may need to apply/re-apply for NDIS (and all the issues/harm associated with this process).

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of these additional reasons for NOT being in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

The top 3 mentioned Themes relate to the misuse of neuroaffirming language, concerns around the removal/lack of individualised supports and uncertainties through insufficient information or consultation.

Themes mentioned on the previous page and not included in this table received only 1-2 mentions.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

*Q: Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Multiple responses. Base: N=79 'other' responses*

Focus Area: Access & Supports Other reasons NOT in Favour	No. of Mentions
Misunderstanding of Autism and Discriminatory Language	12
Lack of Individualised Support and Standardisation	10
Uncertainty and Lack of Information/Consultation	10
Accessibility Barriers and Exclusion	9
School System Incapacity	7
Lack of Evidence-Based and Neurodiversity-Affirming Practices	6
Increased Burden on Families and Caregivers	6
Impact on Existing NDIS Supports	5
Age-Related Support Gaps	4



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

Q: Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Multiple responses. Base: N=79 'other' responses

**Misunderstanding of Autism & Discriminatory Language**

*“Discriminatory decision. Why autism? What would happen if we suggested taking people with Down syndrome off the scheme? People would be outraged.”*

**Lack of Individualised Support & Standardisation**

*“Children may lose individualised support approaches and standardised approaches are not appropriate for all children or all family contexts”*

**Uncertainty & Lack of Information/ Consultation**

*“Lack of information. The messaging out low and high support etc is counter productive and does not align with the National Autism Strategy”*

**Accessibility Barriers and Exclusion**

*“I am concerned about moving therapies to group and early childhood settings, as they are inaccessible to my child. His main sensory triggers are noise and people - he cannot handle being in a classroom setting, let alone engage with therapy”*

**School System Incapacity**

*“As a very experienced teacher, we are NOT qualified to provide the very complex support needed. The thriving kids program is relying on systems already stretched and without resources or skills to support children”*





## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

A continuation of verbatim quotes, illustrating the tone and manner of these respondents' rationale, within the identified 'other' themes.

Lack of Evidence-Based Neuro-Affirming Practices

“ Not clear what Thriving Kids involve or if it will offer evidence based neurodiversity (sic) affirming therapy (rather than trying to 'fix' kids)

Increased Burden on Families and Caregivers

“ What about where the parent CANT provide the supports ie: requiring supports themselves. The child just misses out - to ALL of our detriment

Impact on Existing NDIS Supports

“ Butler is throwing children off NDIS before having an appropriate evidence- based substitute

Age Related Support Gaps

“ What will happen to the child after early intervention, autism is a lifelong neurological condition not a childhood illness

Inadequate Funding & Resources

“ Focused on ensuring children with developmental delay or disability, who can be better supported outside of the NDIS - This is a dream if you think further resources can be accessed when THERE ARE NONE !!!!!!!furfie (sic)

#### **Focus Area: Access & Supports**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Multiple responses. Base: N=79 'other' responses

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

*59% of respondents to this survey were not in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

Respondents were asked to focus on the topic of 'Planning & Delivery' and share why they were not in favour of the program; their responses demonstrated a high frequency of concerns.

Nine-out-of-ten respondents mentioned the under-resourcing of current systems, being those involved with supporting children via the Thriving Kids Program.

86% mentioned the lack of clarity and information relating to the program and 79% felt that implementation was being rushed and this may affect quality of the Thriving Kids Program.

Three quarters (74%) demonstrated concern around the links between this program and the 'Inklings pilot' and that this affected their confidence in the Thriving Kids Program's planning and delivery.

#### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=350**

*A list of possible reasons, (gained from community engagement prior to the survey design) and people were encouraged to add their own.*

Existing systems (education, health, childcare) are already under-resourced.

89%

There is not clear or sufficient information that I need to be confident to be in favour

86%

No clear plan with States/Territories on how services will be funded or delivered.

86%

Start date (1 July 2026) feels too soon for a quality system to be ready

79%

Limited or unclear information about the Inklings pilot and how it links to Thriving Kids to have sufficient confidence.

74%

Other Planning & Delivery comments? Please write in

19%

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

66 respondents provided other reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program (with focus upon: Planning & Delivery). These 'other' responses have been collated into 9 themes and have been listed (opposite) for further investigation by the Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

#### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

*Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=66 'other' responses*

- **Lack of Consultation and Co-design:** A strong and pervasive theme highlighting the absence of meaningful consultation with the Autistic community, parents, specialists, educators, and current providers in the development and design of the program.
- **Uncertainty and Lack of Information/Transparency:** Significant concerns about the lack of clear information regarding how the program will be delivered, accessed, funded, and monitored. This includes questions about eligibility, referral processes, progress monitoring, and long-term outcomes.
- **Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base:** Skepticism and outright opposition to the program's foundation, particularly its reliance on the "Inklings" pilot, which is perceived as lacking robust evidence, independent evaluation, and neurodiversity-affirming practices. Concerns about potential for harm and the program being an "expensive experiment."
- **Workforce and Service Delivery Challenges:** Worries about the availability of a qualified workforce to deliver the program, the potential for current NDIS providers to leave the sector, and the capacity of existing state-based systems (especially education) to take on new responsibilities. Concerns about consistency of care, particularly in regional areas.
- **Funding Model Concerns:** Apprehensions about the proposed block-funding model, with respondents recalling previous negative experiences with similar models (e.g., HCWA) and concerns about it not promoting accessibility or being sufficient to replace NDIS funding.
- **Risk of Harm and Negative Impact on Autistic Individuals:** Fears that the program will be designed to fail Autistic children, force masking behaviors, cause trauma, and lead to a lower quality of life due to a lack of individualised, neuro-affirming supports.
- **Discriminatory Language and Misunderstanding of Autism:** Continued concerns about the use of outdated and non-medical terminology like "mild to moderate Autism," which is seen as dismissing the challenges faced by Autistic people and demonstrating a lack of understanding of autism as a complex, lifelong condition.
- **Inappropriateness of School-Based Delivery:** Strong objections to the idea of the program being rolled out in schools, given that many Autistic children are unable to access mainstream schooling, and schools are already seen as ill-equipped and lacking resources to support neurodivergent children.
- **Loss of Individualised Therapy and Choice:** Concerns that the program will remove the ability for families to choose providers, tailor services to individual needs, and maintain strong therapeutic relationships with skilled therapists.

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of these additional reasons for NOT being in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

The most frequently mentioned themes were: lack of information and transparency and consultation and opportunities for co-design (with lived-experience participants).

Concerns with a lack of evidence around the Program's effectiveness, probable workforce challenges and the involvement of schools in the Thriving Kids Program delivery followed.

#### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

*Q: Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Multiple responses. Base: N=66 'other' responses*

Focus Area: Planning & Delivery Other reasons NOT in favour	Number of mentions
Uncertainty and lack of Information/Transparency	21
Lack of Consultation and Co-design	18
Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base	16
Workforce and Service Delivery Challenges	13
Risk of Harm and Negative Impact on Autistic Individuals	10
Inappropriateness of School-Based Delivery	9
Funding Model Concerns	7
Loss of Individualised Therapy and Choice	6
Discriminatory Language and Misunderstanding of Autism	5



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

Uncertainty and Lack of Information/Transparency



*There is not nearly enough information given and all the information that is given is concerning*

Lack of Consultation and Co-design



*Why has there not been a codesign with stakeholders?*

Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base



*Where is the evidence that supports the programs being implemented that shows clearly there is no risk of harm from these programs*

Workforce and Service Delivery Challenges



*The workforce required to deliver this doesn't currently exist- unless it's relying on providers leaving the NDIS.*

Risk of Harm and Negative Impact on Autistic Individuals



*It is being designed to fail autistic children.*

#### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=66 'other' responses**



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

A continuation of verbatim quotes, illustrating the tone and manner of these respondents' rationale, within the identified 'other' themes.

Inappropriateness of School-Based Delivery

“School systems are not built to deliver health/disability supports and do not have the space or resources to collaborate with new programme.”

Funding Model Concerns

“The NDIS review stated that block funding has not worked previously. This type of funding does not promote or give accessibility.”

Loss of Individualised Therapy and Choice

“How can one program be the way to go? Individually tailored therapy is so much better.”

Discriminatory Language and Misunderstanding of Autism

“The announcement was appalling and showed a complete lack of awareness of autism, referring to mild or moderate autism, which are outdated non-medical terms that dismiss the extreme challenges autistic people face.”

#### **Focus Area: Planning & Delivery**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=66 'other' responses**

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

*59% of respondents to this survey were not in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

Respondents were asked to focus on the topic of 'Trust & Confidence' and share why they were not in favour of the program.

90% of those responding indicated that they were not in favour of the Thriving Kids Program because the government has not demonstrated meaningful co-design with future Autistic participants and community stakeholders.

Four in five told us their lack of trust and confidence was created by the tone and manner of communications surrounding the program and a lack of evidence proving that the Thriving Kids Program will offer better outcomes than the NDIS.

These high levels of lack of trust and confidence in the Program, and those who are designing and implementing it, were also attributed to current and past activities of public systems and agencies that have not provided their promised outcomes.

#### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=343*

*A list of possible reasons, (gained from community engagement prior to the survey design) and people were encouraged to add their own.*

The government has not demonstrated meaningful codesign with Autistic people, their families or the autism community.

90%

Communication about the program felt disrespectful, unclear, divisive, excluding and/or stressful. Feels like we are being labelled a burden.

81%

No clear evidence Thriving Kids will achieve better outcomes than NDIS.

80%

Lack of trust in government/NDIA to deliver fair outcomes as the announcement was unexpected

73%

Language and framing did not reflect Autistic identity or neurodiversity impacting my level of confidence

72%

The NDIS early intervention was created because pathways outside the NDIS did not work well in the past.

68%

It feels like our hard-fought-for rights are being taken away, especially when outcomes have been so poor.

63%

Past systems outside the NDIS didn't work well.

51%

Other Trust & Confidence comments? Please write in

18%



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

63 respondents provided other reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program (with focus upon: Trust & Confidence). These 'other' responses have been collated into 9 themes and are listed (opposite) for further investigation by the Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

#### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=63 'other' responses*

- **Lack of Trust in Government and Program Intentions:** A prevalent theme indicating a deep distrust in the government's motives, with many believing the program is primarily a cost-cutting measure rather than genuinely designed to support Autistic children. There was a concern about the program being a "rebranding exclusion" or "eugenics of accountancy."
- **Misunderstood and Disrespectful Language from Government/Minister/s:** Strong objections to the language used by government officials, particularly the Minister, which is perceived as uninformed, disrespectful, and using outdated terminology (e.g. "mild to moderate autism"). This language is seen as undermining the Autistic community's hard-won progress, causing harm to it, and demonstrating a fundamental lack of understanding of Autism as a lifelong condition/disability.
- **Lack of Consultation and Exclusion of Autistic Voices:** A significant concern that the autistic community, including parents and individuals with lived experience, has been excluded from the planning and development of the program, leading to the call for "nothing about us without us."
- **Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base:** Skepticism regarding the program's foundation, particularly its reliance on the "Inklings" program, which is seen as not being sufficiently evidence-based, potentially harmful to Autistic children & families and lacking transparency in its protocols, data, and studies.
- **Inconsistent Messaging and Lack of Alignment with the National Autism Strategy:** Frustration over the program's perceived misalignment with the National Autism Strategy and its guiding principles, leading to inconsistent messaging and undermining government commitments and confusing communications to Autistic individuals and the Autism community.
- **Increased Anxiety, Stress, and Confusion:** The sudden, unexpected, and poorly communicated announcement of the program has caused significant anxiety, stress, and confusion among individuals, families, carers and those who support and educate them. This has since been exacerbated by a lack of clear plans and unanswered questions.
- **Concerns about Discrimination and Exclusion:** Fears that the program constitutes direct discrimination against Autistic people and the Autism community, targeting them for exclusion from disability frameworks and potentially leading to further marginalisation and poorer life outcomes.
- **Workforce and Systemic Failures:** Concerns about the capacity of existing systems (like Medicare and NDIS) which already have issues, to effectively deliver new supports, coupled with a generalised lack of confidence in the government's ability to make the NDIS work for this community.
- **Conflicts of Interest and Lack of Accountability:** Worries about potential conflicts of interest, particularly regarding service providers who may benefit from the program, and a lack of accountability for all Thriving Kids Program providers.



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of these additional reasons for NOT being in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

Most of these "other" themes/comments in respondents' answers to this questions, mirrored the category responses offered in this section, e.g. lack of trust in government and the Thriving Kids Program's intentions and the language employed in its communications surrounding the program.

Presumably, some people felt it was important to repeat/re-state their concerns relating to their (lack of) trust and confidence in the Thriving Kids Program. The most frequently mentioned themes were: lack of trust in government and the Thriving Kids Program's intentions and the language employed in its communications surrounding the program.

#### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=63 'other' responses**

<b>Focus Area: Trust &amp; Confidence</b> <i>Other reasons NOT in favour</i>	<b>Number of mentions</b>
Lack of Trust in Government and Program Intentions	15
Misunderstanding and Disrespectful Language from Government/Ministers	14
Lack of Consultation and Exclusion of Autistic Voices	10
Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base	9
Increased Anxiety, Stress, and Confusion	8
Inconsistent Messaging and Lack of Alignment with National Autism Strategy	7
Concerns about Discrimination and Exclusion	6
Workforce and Systemic Failures	4
Conflicts of Interest and Lack of Accountability	3



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

#### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

**Q:** Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. **Base:** N=63 'other' responses

Lack of Trust in Government and Program Intentions



*Neurodiverse people and families are being asked to trust a government body that continues to address us with language implying we are a burden*

Misunderstanding and Disrespectful Language from Government/Ministers



*The Minister did not demonstrate an understanding of autism - he made it clear he wants children off the scheme and used inaccurate terminology in his reasoning.*

Lack of Consultation and Exclusion of Autistic Voices



*There has been very little input from people who are autistic and the parents of autistic children*

Concerns about Program Effectiveness and Evidence Base



*Thriving kids is ABA therapy under another name They seem to be planning to use ABA therapy, quiche traumatised and abuses autistic children.*

Increased Anxiety, Stress, and Confusion



*States and Territories heard the news via the news, does not bode well*



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

A continuation of verbatim quotes, illustrating the tone and manner of these respondents' rationale, within the identified 'other' themes.

Inconsistent Messaging and Lack of Alignment with National Autism Strategy



*Undermines the Government's commitment to support Autistic people outlined in the National Autism Strategy and Roadmap*

Concerns about Discrimination and Exclusion



*If this goes through for children with Autism Level 1 or 2 who will be next? Adults with autism level 1 or 2?*

Workforce and Systemic Failures



*Medicare and NDIS already have so many issues - expecting this to have just as many, if not more, issues in the long term.*

Conflicts of Interest and Lack of Accountability



*I'm concerned about conflicts of interest and that a tender process has not occurred - mirroring what happened under the LNP*

#### **Focus Area: Trust & Confidence**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=63 'other' responses**

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

*59% of respondents to this survey were not in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

Clearly there were many also concerns around respondents' the perceived fairness and impact of the Thriving Kids Program. 93% told us that labels like "mild" and "moderate" Autism are not recognised and that the program should be based on the provision of individualised support needs.

These responses have also communicated that there are significant fears that the program will result in an unfair system, with negative impacts on present and future lives of the targeted 0-9 year olds, their families/carers and those who provide supports to them.

#### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=347**

*A list of possible reasons, gained from community engagement prior to the survey design) and people were encouraged to add their own rationale.*

Labels like "mild" or "moderate" autism are not recognised and unhelpful; supports should be based on individual needs.

93%

Risk of creating an unfair "two-tier" system that leaves children behind

75%

Loss of losing choice and control over supports.

74%

Concerns about long-term costs and inequities without strong early supports

65%

Too much change at families are already exhausted by NDIS.

62%

Concern of the strain to support my child in this new program forcing me to leave or reduce employment.

56%

Professionals worry about working across two systems.

46%

Other Fairness & Impact comments? Please write in

16%

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

54 respondents provided other reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program (with focus upon: Fairness & Impact).

These 'other' responses have been collated into 9 themes and are listed (opposite) for further investigation by the Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

#### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

*Q: Please select your main **reasons for not being in favour** of the "Thriving Kids" program, or add in your own. Base: N=54 'other' responses.*

- **Increased Inequality and Disadvantage:** A prominent theme highlighting concerns that the program will exacerbate existing inequities, particularly for low-income families, those in rural and remote areas, and specific demographics like young girls, gender-diverse individuals, and people of color who may already face barriers to diagnostics and support.
- **Lack of Individualised Support and "One-Size-Fits-All" Approach:** Strong objections to the idea of generic, standardised programs that do not cater to the diverse and individual needs of Autistic children, especially those with complex co-occurring or atypical presentations. Concerns that this will lead to a loss of tailored therapies and potentially cause harm.
- **Financial Burden and Inaccessibility of Services:** Worries that families will face unaffordable costs for supports, longer waiting lists, and increased non-Thriving Kids Program services & supports, e.g. Medicare, private payments for "non-NDIS participants".
- **Harmful Language and Misunderstanding of Autism:** Continued concerns about the use of ableist language like "functioning labels" and "mild/moderate" scales, which are seen as harmful, inaccurate, and demonstrating a lack of understanding of Autism as a lifelong condition/disability. This language is perceived as leading to mental health harm and a focus on "hiding" Autism rather than supporting Autistic individuals and the Autism community.
- **Ageing Out and Long-Term Impact:** Concerns about what happens when a child "ages out" of the Thriving Kids program and the lack of clarity regarding ongoing support, potentially leading to lifelong trauma and negative impacts on development and future functional capacity.
- **Systemic Failures and Inadequate Existing Systems:** Frustration with the current NDIS and other state-based systems already failing to provide adequate support, with concerns that the Thriving Kids program will simply shift costs and create more gaps in supports, rather than addressing underlying systemic problems.
- **Loss of Choice and Agency:** Concerns that the program will remove the choice and control for Autistic individuals and their families & the Autism community in selecting therapists and therapies, and that parents' and professionals' views are being disregarded in favor of a top-down, inflexible approach.
- **Further Risk of Undiagnosed and Underserved Populations:** Fears that the program will make it harder for certain demographics to get diagnosed, leading to a "hidden generation of autists" and increased rates of life-limiting outcomes due to a lack of early intervention and support.
- **Impact on Workforce and Service Quality:** Concerns about the potential loss of jobs for allied health professionals and a decline in the quality of services if big companies are prioritised over smaller, more individualised therapy providers.

## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of these additional reasons for NOT being in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

The predominant, additional themes of mention were concerns around the implementation of the Thriving Kids Program may increase inequality and disadvantages currently being experienced by those within this targeted population (and their parents/carers and others). People also mentioned fears surrounding increased costs and other barriers to accessing individualised plans for the 0-9 year olds not sufficiently supported within the Thriving Kids Program.

#### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=54 'other' responses.*

Focus Area: Fairness & Impact Other reasons NOT in favour	Number of mentions
Increased Inequality and Disadvantage	14
Financial Burden and Inaccessibility of Services	10
Lack of Individualised Support and "One-Size-Fits-All"	9
Harmful Language and Misunderstanding of Autism	7
Ageing Out and Long-Term Impact	6
Systemic Failures and Inadequate Existing Systems	6
Risk of Undiagnosed and Underserved Populations	6
Loss of Choice and Agency	4
Impact on Workforce and Service Quality	3



## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

#### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own.**

**Base: N=54 'other' responses.**

Increased Inequality and Disadvantage



*If you're born into poverty then you're screwed with this new system!*

Financial Burden and Inaccessibility of Services



*The costs will be astronomical for families and the waiting lists will be 18 months+, like what happened before the NDIS.*

Lack of Individualized Support and "One-Size-Fits-All" Approach



*Every child is different and needs different supports depending on their circumstance. You can't just throw a child into a generic program and expect that it will suit all children with needs.*

Harmful Language and Misunderstanding of Autism



*We don't use functioning labels or level scales as these are ableist, even the DSM-5 reflects that*

Ageing Out and Long-Term Impact



*What happens for when a child 'ages out' of thriving kids*





## **MOSTLY NOT IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

The continuation of verbatim quotes, illustrating the tone and manner of these respondents' rationale, within the identified 'other' themes.

Systemic Failures and Inadequate Existing Systems

“All the systems are already failing us. How can we have confidence that they will deliver this to our benefit when they are already failing so badly?”

Risk of Undiagnosed and Underserved Populations

“Young girls, gender diverse and people of colour are disproportionately affected by not being diagnosed or being diagnosed at lower levels because of the fact that they tend to be able to mask better and have higher social and emotional skills, they already are slipping through the cracks and going without diagnosis and if you are trying to syphon off the "milder" cases then it will be these demographics even though that's not fair, accurate or even true.”

Loss of Choice and Agency

“It sounds like individual therapies will not be prioritised when these can be pivotal for a child with autism.”

Impact on Workforce and Service Quality

“Big companies do not give the same level of service that smaller therapy providers give. Qualifications and experience should be vetted to ensure quality is provided.”

#### **Focus Area: Fairness & Impact**

**Q: Please select your main reasons for not being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=54 'other' responses.**





# In Favour of the Thriving Kids Program

Respondents' Opinions and Reasons, by Focus Areas

## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Inclusion**

*9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.  
However, ALL Respondents were given the opportunity to respond to each section (i.e. reasons for being in favour and not in favour of the Thriving Kids Program).*

Responses to this question demonstrated, on average, lower conviction than those provided by people who were mostly **not in favour** of the program.

Half these respondents (51%-53%) told us that the program will offer improved access and inclusion, in particular, to those who are currently ineligible for NDIS supports.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Inclusion**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=240*

Increases access to developmental assessments, screenings, and supports with no cost/ reduced to families.



Provides clearer pathways for children who don't qualify for the NDIS.



Builds more local, accessible supports outside the NDIS, if done as well as possible.



It is understood that there will be no Medicare Gap payments for services



Integrates children into mainstream supports while still recognising their rights and differences.



Other Access & Inclusion comments?  
Please write in





# MOSTLY IN FAVOUR

## Focus Area: Access & Inclusion

9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

64 respondents provided responses to the 'other' category of this question. Nearly all of them were from people who sought to reinforce that they were *not in favour* of the Thriving Kids Program, along with their rationale for this stance.

There were some positive/in favour responses, and these have been themed (opposite) and listed in the table (also opposite) demonstrating the frequencies of mentions.

These themes/reasons may be proposed for further investigation by future Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

**Focus Area: Access & Inclusion**

Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=64 'other' responses.

### Additional Positive/In Favour Themes

- **Potential for Improved Access and Diagnosis:** The possibility of no Medicare gap payments, services for children who don't qualify for NDIS, and increased access to diagnoses and assessments are seen as potential positives.
- **Capacity Building and Reduced System Exploitation:** A belief that the program could focus on capacity building for both parents and children, reducing reliance on "endless therapy", and addressing the "exploitation of the system" by some carers.
- **Addressing Gaps in Current NDIS and Mainstream Supports:** Recognition that the NDIS doesn't work for all families and that skilled professionals outside of NDIS are needed. There's also a hope that the program could drive changes in education, health, and justice departments, and improve understanding of neurodiversity within schools.
- **Desire for Individualised Support (with caveats):** While acknowledging the need for individualised support, some responses indicate that if the new system *can* deliver these things, they would be in favour, but there was significant doubt that this will occur.

Focus Area: Fairness & Impact Responses to 'other reasons IN favour'	Number of mentions
Not in favour / Identifying problems / objections	62
Potential for Improved Access and Diagnosis	9
Capacity Building and Reduced System Exploitation	7
Addressing Gaps in Current NDIS and Mainstream Supports	6
Desire for Individualised Support (with caveats)	6



## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Access & Inclusion**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the (more positive) tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

#### **Focus Area: Access & Inclusion**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=64 'other' responses.*

Potential for Improved Access and Diagnosis

“ *There is possible positives such as no gap, services for kids that don't qualify for ndis and increased access to diagnosis's and assessment. Those things could be very good*

Capacity Building and Reduced System Exploitation

“ *Stops at exploitation of the system and brings the focus back to the child. It's outrageous the number of carers who access the child's funds for household staff - cleaners / gardeners - maintenance etc - it's absurd!*

Addressing Gaps in Current NDIS and Mainstream Supports

“ *May cause other providers like education, health and justice departments to make change in their organisations - which they currently don't feel compelled to do.*

Desire for Individualized Support (with caveats)

“ *Allows services to make decisions on priority of access which will potentially mean more equitable access to service providers. All great things if done well but not possible based on the programs already referenced. And certainly not without proper co-design.*



## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

*9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

53% indicated that there were two leading reasons to be positive about the promise of simplicity and integration of the Thriving Kids Program; they would no longer need to deal with the complexities and bureaucracy of the NDIS and that the program will bring together their health, education and community supports (for a 0-9 year old).

28% hoped that it will assist the sustainability of the NDIS, enabling it to reach its potential.

#### **Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=213*

No longer need to deal with the complexity and bureaucracy of navigating the NDIS.



Brings together health, education, and community supports in one system



Helps make the NDIS more sustainable for those with the highest needs.



Other Simplicity & Integration comments? Please write in





# **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

## **Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.

55 respondents provided responses to the 'other' category of this question. Once again, the majority were from people who sought to reinforce that they were *not in favour* of the Thriving Kids Program, with some providing additional reasons for their stance.

There were few positive/in favour themes, which have been listed in the table opposite.

These themes/reasons may be proposed for further investigation by future Thriving Kids Program co-designers.

**Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=55 'other' responses.

### **Additional Positive/In Favour Themes**

- **Potential for Simpler and Integrated System:** A hope that the new system could be simpler to navigate than the NDIS and offer better integration of services, particularly with education.
- **Addressing NDIS Shortcomings:** A recognition that the NDIS is currently challenging and doesn't work for all families, with a desire for alternatives and support from skilled professionals outside of the NDIS framework.
- **Individualised Support in Natural Environments:** A belief that support should be individualised and delivered in a child's natural environments, such as home/schools, which could make lives less complex.
- **Potential for Improved Understanding of Neurodiversity in Schools:** A hope that the program could improve the understanding of neurodiversity within schools, reducing pressure on children to comply with neurodevelopmentally inappropriate expectations in that sector.

<b>Focus Area: Simplicity &amp; Integration</b> Responses to 'other reasons IN favour'	<b>Number of mentions</b>
Not in favour / Identifying problems / objections	<b>54</b>
Potential for Simpler and Integrated System	3
Addressing NDIS Shortcomings	2
Individualised Support in Natural Environments	2
Potential for Improved Understanding of Neurodiversity in Schools	1



## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR** **Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the (more positive) tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

### **Focus Area: Simplicity & Integration**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=55 'other' responses.*

Potential for Simpler and Integrated System



*If done well (i.e. delivered in a participatory and socially valid way), anything simpler than NDIS would be good.*

Addressing NDIS Shortcomings



*NDIS does not engaged on any level with education which is a key tenet of any child's life - TK enables that pathway to reconnect*



Individualized Support in Natural Environments

*Supports need to be individualised and done in the child's natural environments*

Potential for Improved Understanding of Neurodiversity in Schools



*Potential to improve understanding of neurodiversity within schools in general, reducing pressure on child to comply with expectations that are not neurodevelopmentally appropriate.*

## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

*9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

The statement *“Will be co-designed with Autistic people and families and reflect neurodiversity-affirming principles”* was the most frequently mentioned (57%), positive reason to generate support for the Thriving Kids Program.

43%-46% were hopeful that the program will provide specialists and neuro-affirming services and supports.

A third (32%) shared that it could contribute to the sustainability of the Scheme and will include safeguards and choice-and-control principles.

#### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=209*

Will be co-designed with Autistic people and families and reflect neurodiversity-affirming principles.



Professionals will have proper understanding of autism and developmental needs



Will use neurodiversity-affirming principles.



It could contribute to the financial sustainability of the NDIS for those with highest ongoing needs.



Safeguards and choice-and-control principles will be included in the program development.



Other Quality & Principles comments?  
Please write in





## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR** **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

These are verbatim quotes, selected from actual survey responses, to illustrate the tone and manner of respondents' additional reasons for not being in favour of the Thriving Kids Program, under this focus area.

These have been illustrated and tabulated opposite.

As has been the pattern in these responses to 'other reasons (to be in favour)', 49 people employed this section to share their 'not-in-favour of the program' positions.

### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=57 'other' responses.

### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles** Responses to 'other reasons IN favour'

	<b>Number of mentions</b>
Not in favour / Identifying problems / objections	49
Potential for Neurodiversity-Affirming and Co-designed Program	3
Addressing Fragmentation of Care	1
Belief in the Need for Medical Intervention and Support for Autism	1

Potential for Neurodiversity-Affirming and Co-designed Program



*if it will be codesigned and then implemented according to that codesign it might be good*

Addressing Fragmentation of Care



*Will bring the focus firmly back to the child and not the bureaucracy of ndis - creates equality for all children and opportunities to have a wholistic treatment-care program. My son received treatment at an early childhood development centre - the allied health professionals worked together to care for him. The NDIS causes fragmentation of care - serving occurring in different practices or consultation rooms - with allied health practitioners who never meet or interact with each other.*

Belief in the Need for Medical Intervention and Support for Autism



*More respect for families who don't have the ideology that autism doesn't need a cure and medical intervention because many aspects of living with autism does need medical intervention and support!*

## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Impact**

*9% of respondents to this survey (a total of 39/421 people) were mostly in favour of the Thriving Kids program.*

When considering the possible positive impacts of the Thriving Kids Program, 49% thought there would be more Autism and neurodivergent supports and 40% indicated that there could be more affordable and accessible supports.

Consistency of resourcing for, and the understanding of, Autism and developmental delays was another positive area for approximately a third (34%-36%) of these respondents. And 30% hoped for the development of an interconnected, inclusive system.

#### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Multiple responses. N=208*

More local autism/neurodivergent-specific supports

49%

Affordable and accessible supports that meet individual needs

40%

More consistent resources for families, educators, and communities

36%

All stakeholders involved will have a competent level of understanding of developmental delay and autism commensurate with their role

34%

It will be an enabler to creating a whole-of-government integrated and interconnected system where there is inclusion, and no accountability gaps

30%

It will reduce costs of the NDIS

24%

Other Impact comments? Please write in

27%

## **MOSTLY IN FAVOUR**

### **Focus Area: Impact**

Once again, positive reasons to be in favour of the Thriving Kids Program were in the minority (13 mentions, 3 themes) among the 49 'other' responses to this question.

The verbatim comments below illustrate the tone and manner of these potentially positive aspects of the impacts of the program.

Others (69 mentions) again used this as another opportunity to describe their position as being NOT in favour of the program.

#### **Focus Area: Quality & Principles**

*Q: Please select your main reasons for being in favour of the "Thriving Kids" program or add in your own. Base: N=49 'other' responses.*

#### **Focus Area: Impact**

Responses to 'other reasons IN favour'

**Number of mentions**

Not in favour / Identifying problems / objections

69

Potential for Improved Access and Holistic Care

7

Reduced Burden on Parents/Carers

3

Cost Reduction (with caveats)

3

Reduced Burden on Parents/Carers



*A program design specifically for autistic kids will release the parent/carer from the burden of being their child's manager/ceo etc & let the be parents!*

Potential for Improved Access and Holistic Care



*So many parents struggle with navigating the NDIS, supports and therapists, juggling child care/kindy/ school, and therapy sessions. How can services be provided in and with these settings to reduce impact for all? Eg, inclusive practices at the ground level*

Cost Reduction (with caveats)



*It may reduce the NDIS cost but it's not going to cost the government less overall. As there will be higher mental health issues, reliance on Centrelink and other programs when needs aren't met.*



# Information Requirements & Impacts of the Thriving Kids Program

Respondents' Opinions

## Additional Information Requirements

Many of these 198 respondents expressed a strong desire for clarity, transparency, proof and reassurance before forming an opinion on the Thriving Kids Program, stating that **almost no meaningful information was currently available**.

Their comments have been themed and described (opposite). Most requested clear, evidence-based details on the Thriving Kids Program design, eligibility, funding, and delivery safeguards — particularly how the program will operate across different states and regions, and how it will interact with the existing NDIS and education systems.

People also sought proof and reassurance that the program will avoid further harm to harm to Autistic individuals and Autism community.

In addition to requests for information, some respondents used this question as an opportunity to request/suggest respectful/neuroaffirming planning and implementation development. These included calls to conduct genuine co-design with Autistic people, families/carers, and neuroaffirming professionals to build trust and discuss practicality and information needs.

*Q: What other information would help you form your opinion about the Thriving Kids Program? N=198*

- **Transparency and Detailed Information**  
Respondents consistently asked for open, complete, and timely information about the program's purpose, design, and evidence base. Many noted that almost no concrete details have been released.
- **Program Design and Implementation Details**  
There was strong demand for practical information: who qualifies, what services will be provided, how supports will be delivered, and how the program will differ from the current NDIS system.
- **Evidence Base and Evaluation**  
Respondents wanted assurance that Thriving Kids is based on credible, independent research and will be subject to evaluation, data transparency, and safeguards for children.
- **Co-Design and Autistic Leadership**  
Many called for genuine involvement of autistic people and lived-experience families in co-design, governance, and review, expressing mistrust in top-down or politically driven models.
- **Neuroaffirming Practice and Safeguards**  
Families requested confirmation that the program will be neuroaffirming, non-behaviourist, and designed to prevent harm or masking. Clear rejection of ABA-style or conformity-based approaches.
- **Access and Regional Equity**  
Respondents emphasised the need for equitable access across states and rural or remote regions, with adequate workforce capacity and locally available qualified professionals.
- **Integration with Existing Systems**  
Clarification was sought on how the Thriving Kids Program will align with the NDIS, education, and health sectors, and how children will transition between systems or back to the NDIS if needed.
- **Eligibility and Continuity of Support**  
People wanted clear definitions of “mild” and “moderate” autism, what happens after age nine, and how continuity of care will be maintained for lifelong conditions.
- **Accountability and Governance**  
Participants asked who will manage and oversee the program, how decisions will be made, how conflicts of interest will be managed, and how parents can appeal or provide feedback.
- **Communication and Community Engagement**  
Respondents requested better communication — public information sessions, accessible summaries, and opportunities to ask questions or see draft plans before rollout.

## Additional Information Requirements

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of the most prevalent themes emerging from the responses to this question.

The requests for transparency and detailed information about the Thriving Kids Program were most frequently referred to (71 mentions).

This was followed by a need detailed information surrounding the whole program and its implementation (58 mentions), all backed by evidence (46 mentions) and reassurance that this had been/was being prepared with a co-design focus, under Autistic Leadership (41 mentions).

Other responses also point to the significance in the perceived gaps in the information surrounding the Thriving Kids Program and demonstrate these respondents' strong desire to receive this before forming an opinion about the program.

*Q: What other information would help you form your opinion about the Thriving Kids Program? N=198*

### Requests for Additional Information to Help Form An Opinion of the Thriving Kids Program

Themes emerging from written responses

Number of mentions

Transparency and Detailed Information	71
Program Design and Implementation Details	58
Evidence Base and Evaluation	46
Co-Design and Autistic Leadership	41
Neuroaffirming Practice and Safeguards	37
Access and Regional Equity	29
Integration with Existing Systems	24
Eligibility and Continuity of Support	19
Accountability and Governance	17
Communication and Community Engagement	14



# Additional Areas of Enquiry: “Dodgy Providers, “Too Much Therapy” & Calculating Support

Respondents' Opinions

## “Dodgy Providers” Recommendations For Change

206 respondents generously provided suggestions for changes to prevent the “dodgy providers” from taking NDIS money, to the detriment of participants and others.

As one may expect, this created a diversity of recommendations and these suggestions have been grouped into nine different themes (listed opposite).

Viewpoints appear to begin with the acceptance that exploitation of the Scheme occurs, and recommendations of increased oversight and punitive measures to deter it.

Possible solutions progressed through to recommending that the NDIS participant and provider community debunks the “dodgy provider” narrative, reasoning that it is not a significant aspect of the NDIS costs and is being employed to justify/cover up the government’s cost-cutting actions.

*Q: Minister Butler has spoken about “dodgy providers” taking money while people miss out on quality support. What changes do you think would stop this from happening? N=206*

- **Increased Regulation and Oversight:** This theme encompasses suggestions for more stringent government regulation, mandatory registration and accreditation for all NDIS providers (including support workers), regular and unannounced audits, and better monitoring by bodies like the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NQSC) or a new AHPRA-like entity.
- **Accountability and Consequences for Dodgy Providers:** This theme focuses on the need for clear accountability mechanisms, including harsher penalties, fines, prosecution, deregistration, and lifetime bans for providers found to be exploiting the system or providing substandard care.
- **Improved Reporting and Complaint Mechanisms:** This theme highlights the demand for easier, more effective, and responsive systems for participants and families to report concerns about providers, with assurances that complaints will be investigated promptly and action will be taken.
- **Enhanced Transparency and Information for Participants:** This theme includes suggestions for greater transparency regarding provider qualifications, pricing, and services. It also emphasises the need for better education and support for participants to understand their rights, identify quality providers, and manage their plans effectively.
- **Addressing Systemic Flaws within the NDIS:** This theme argues that the “dodgy provider” issue is a symptom of deeper, systemic problems within the NDIS itself, rather than solely the fault of providers or participants. Suggestions include internal reviews of NDIA processes, better plan writing, and a shift from dollar-driven to needs-based funding.
- **Workforce Quality and Training:** This theme addresses concerns about the qualifications, training, and supervision of support workers and other non-allied health professionals. It calls for minimum qualification requirements, compulsory neuro-affirming training, and fair pay rates for qualified workers.
- **Pricing and Cost Control:** This theme focuses on addressing price gouging by providers, implementing additional price caps, reviewing NDIS pricing schedules to ensure fair and reasonable costs, and potentially streamlining administrative expenses.
- **Focus on Participant Choice and Control:** While acknowledging the need for safeguards, this theme emphasises the importance of maintaining and strengthening participant choice and control over their supports and providers.
- **Debunking the “Dodgy Provider” Narrative:** This theme expresses a strong sentiment that the “dodgy provider” narrative is largely government rhetoric, a “smokescreen” to justify cost-cutting, and that fraud in the NDIS is less prevalent than in other federal social support systems. It also highlights the dedication of “the majority of providers”.
- **Integration of Services and Funding Models:** This theme includes suggestions for better integration of disability, healthcare, mental health, and education systems, encouraging discussions around different funding models (e.g., block funding, Medicare-style payments) to improve service & support delivery and reduce opportunities for rorts.



## “Dodgy Providers” Recommendations For Change

The table opposite shows the frequency of mentions of the most prevalent suggestions/themes shared in response to this question.

The most significant of these is the 107 calls for increased regulation and oversight of NDIS providers.

These suggestions indicate that these respondents consider that all actions to deter “dodgy providers” are the responsibility of the government, and the Scheme’s development and implementation of regulation, quality and compliance systems, complaint actions, workforce training, and improving the information to all involved with it.

23 respondents independently suggested the debunking of the “dodgy provider narrative”, opening the way for further investigation into their claims of inflated occurrences.

*Q: Minister Butler has spoken about “dodgy providers” taking money while people miss out on quality support. What changes do you think would stop this from happening? N=206*

Recommendations For Change to Prevent “Dodgy Providers” Themes emerging from written responses	Number of mentions
Increased Regulation and Oversight	107
Accountability and Consequences for Dodgy Providers	47
Addressing Systemic Flaws within the NDIS	42
Improved Reporting and Complaint Mechanisms	30
Workforce Quality and Training	29
Pricing and Cost Control	27
Debunking the "Dodgy Provider" Narrative	23
Enhanced Transparency and Information for Participants	14
Focus on Participant Choice and Control	12
Integration of Services and Funding Models	10

## Opinions of “Too Many” Therapy Sessions via the NDIS

While just 5% of the 315 respondents to this question agreed with the statement, the remainder did not.

54% were of the opinion that this is a statement that would need to be answered in context, because it depends on the child.

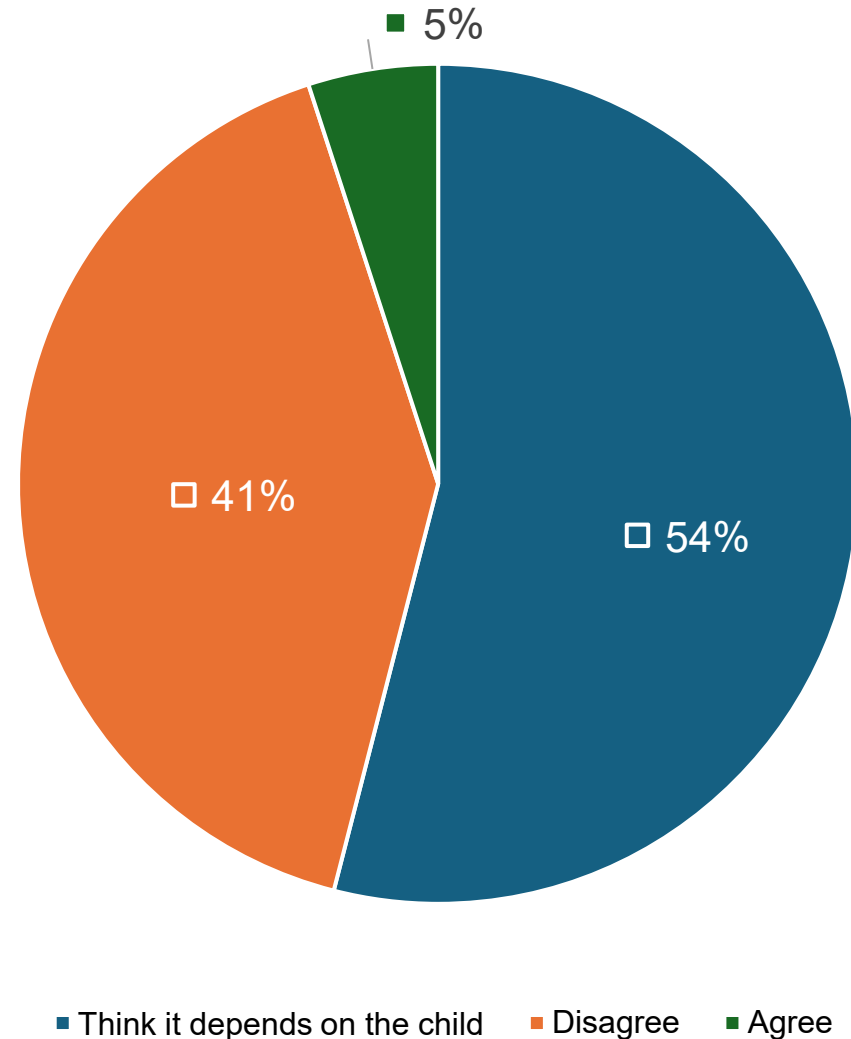
41% firmly disagreed with the statement.

Together, the Australian Autism Alliance’s survey respondents strongly believed that the statement lacks veracity.

This indicates that the claim that children in the NDIS are getting too many therapy sessions requires deep investigation leading to the discovery of proof (or disproving it) before it is employed in future public statements.

*Q: Some people say children in the NDIS are getting “too many” therapy sessions (for example, 80 per year). Do you agree or disagree with this, or think it depends on the child? N=315*

CHILDREN IN THE NDIS ARE GETTING TOO MANY THERAPY SESSIONS



## Factors Driving How Much Support a Child Should Receive?

People shared their opinions of what matters most when deciding on how much support a child should receive.

Their written responses have been collected into themes, describing the different factors that these respondents believe should drive how much support a child should receive.

Overall, responses have demonstrated that those responding to the Alliance's survey strongly believe that the quantum of support allocated to and/or received by, a child, should depend upon the individual's needs, and those of the family/carer, in consultation with experts in the disability.

*Q: What do you think matters most when deciding on how much support a child should get? N=238*

### Themes emerging from the written responses to this question:

- **Individualised, Function-Based Support**  
Beliefs that support/s should match each child's functional needs and goals, not a fixed level or per-diagnosis. One size does not fit all.
- **Result of Family/Carer, Child, and Clinician Voices**  
Theme around the importance of consultation and partnership between all parties. Decisions should rely on input from both families/carers and qualified professionals who know the child best.
- **Whole-of-Family Wellbeing**  
Frequency and the funding attached to it should consider family/carer capacity, stressors, and home circumstances, not just the child's therapy frequencies.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention**  
This theme reinforces the comments surrounding the importance/evidence-driven acceptance that early, intensive support improves long-term outcomes and reduces future costs.
- **Quality and Neuroaffirming Practice**  
Before counting sessions, participants/parents/carers/therapists/NDIS must ensure that the support is evidence-based, delivered by trained professionals, and respects neurodivergent identity.
- **Integrated and Coordinated Support**  
Theme demonstrates that therapies, schools, and families need to work together to avoid the risk/occurrence of duplication and overload.
- **Flexible, Adaptive Funding**  
Stemming from the "no one size fits all" argument, this theme represents those who mentioned that and individual's therapies, frequencies, supports, goals and NDIS Plans should adjust easily as children grow and their needs change.
- **Access, Equity, and Availability**  
Captures the strong beliefs that all individuals, families/carers should have fair access to timely, affordable, and local supports.
- **Rights, Dignity, and Inclusion**  
Expresses the claim that all children deserve support that protects dignity, choice, and participation in everyday life.
- **Outcomes and Value**  
Theme relates to the acknowledgement that all supports should focus on achieving real progress, inclusion, and independence, before determining session numbers.



## Factors Driving How Much Support a Child Should Receive?

The most frequently mentioned theme (72 mentions) among these comments was that support/s should match each child's functional needs and goals, not provided at a fixed level or per-diagnosis.

In addition to support for a child, it was mentioned in 41 comments that the Family's/carers' well-being should be considered when determining supports for a child, e.g., their capacity to attend therapies, siblings' needs, parental/carers supports etc.

Inclusion of the people around the child was also a frequently mentioned theme; families/carers and therapists/experts/teachers/providers of supports should be consulted in the assigning of supports for every child.

*Q: What do you think matters most when deciding on how much support a child should get? N=238*

### Factors Driving How Much Support a Child Should Receive Themes emerging from written responses

### Number of mentions

Individualised, Function-Based Support	72
Family, Child, and Clinician Voice	54
Whole-of-Family/Carer Wellbeing	41
Early Intervention and Prevention	33
Quality and Neuroaffirming Practice	28
Integrated and Coordinated Support	24
Flexible, Adaptive Funding	21
Access, Equity, and Availability	18
Rights, Dignity, and Inclusion	15
Outcomes and Value	12



# Survey Sample Characteristics

Preferred Methods of Engagement, Connections to the Autism Community, NDIS Participation, Self Identification of Lived Experience(s), Identification of Parent/Carer, Ages of Autistic Person Parented/Cared For, Quantum of Parent/Carer Responsibilities, Residential Locations, & Identification With Intersectionality.

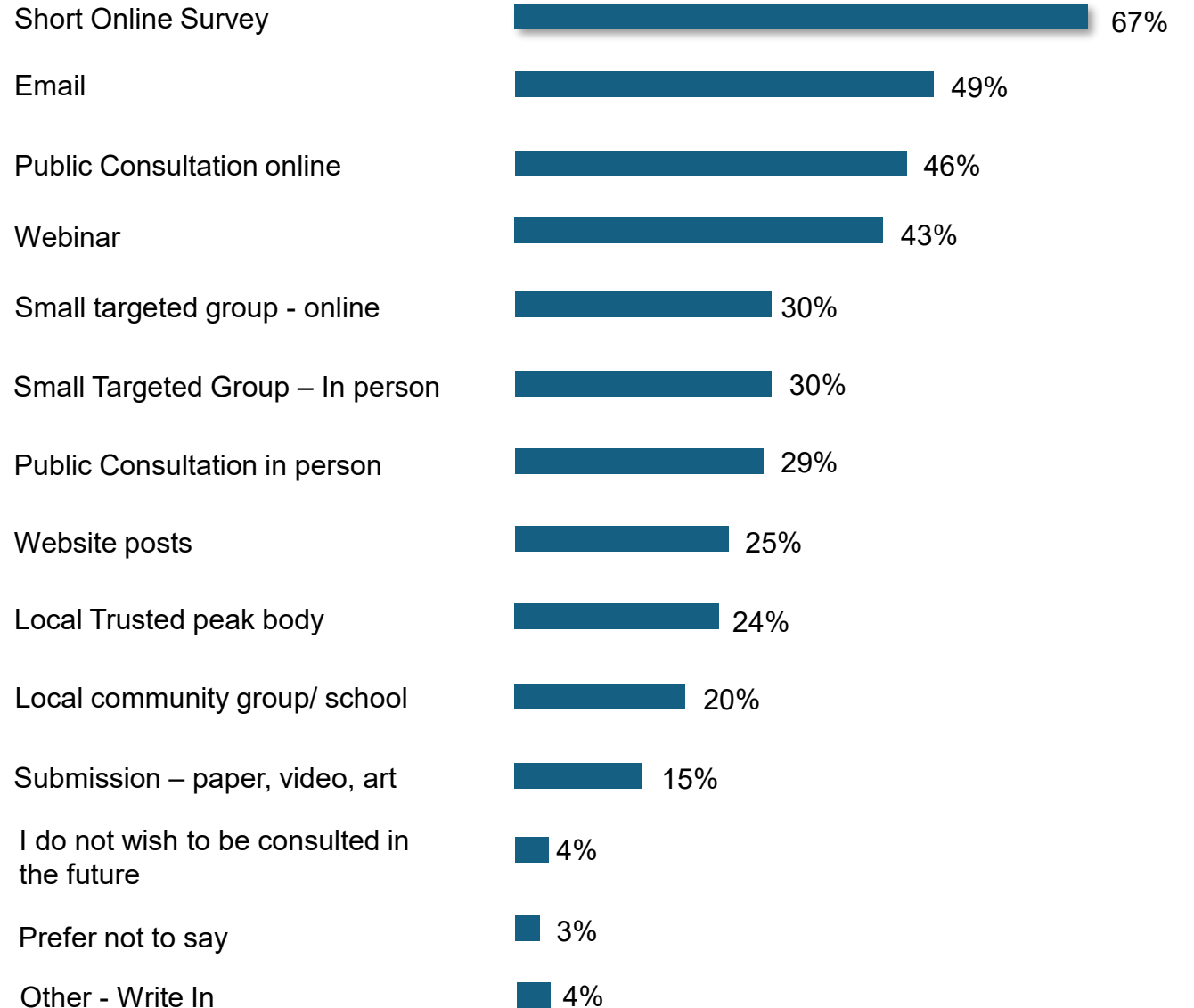
## Survey Sample: Preferred Channels/ Methods for Future Consultations

All respondents were asked to share their preferences for future consultations. A short online survey was the preference for two-thirds of these respondents, and online channels were the most frequently mentioned methods for consultation.

Unsurprisingly, a range of different channels/options have emerged, and this underpins knowledge that the Autism community's needs are diverse and future consultations must always be cognizant of these differences, or risk overlooking significant groups.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Readers should note that this question was answered by people responding via an online survey (likely to prefer this method/channel). It is recommended that this data should be gathered across a larger sample and wider range of Autistic individuals and members of the Australian Autism community for a truly representative indication of sector-wide preferences.

Q: What is the best way for you to be engaged to take part in consultations now or in the future?  
Please select all that apply. N=198

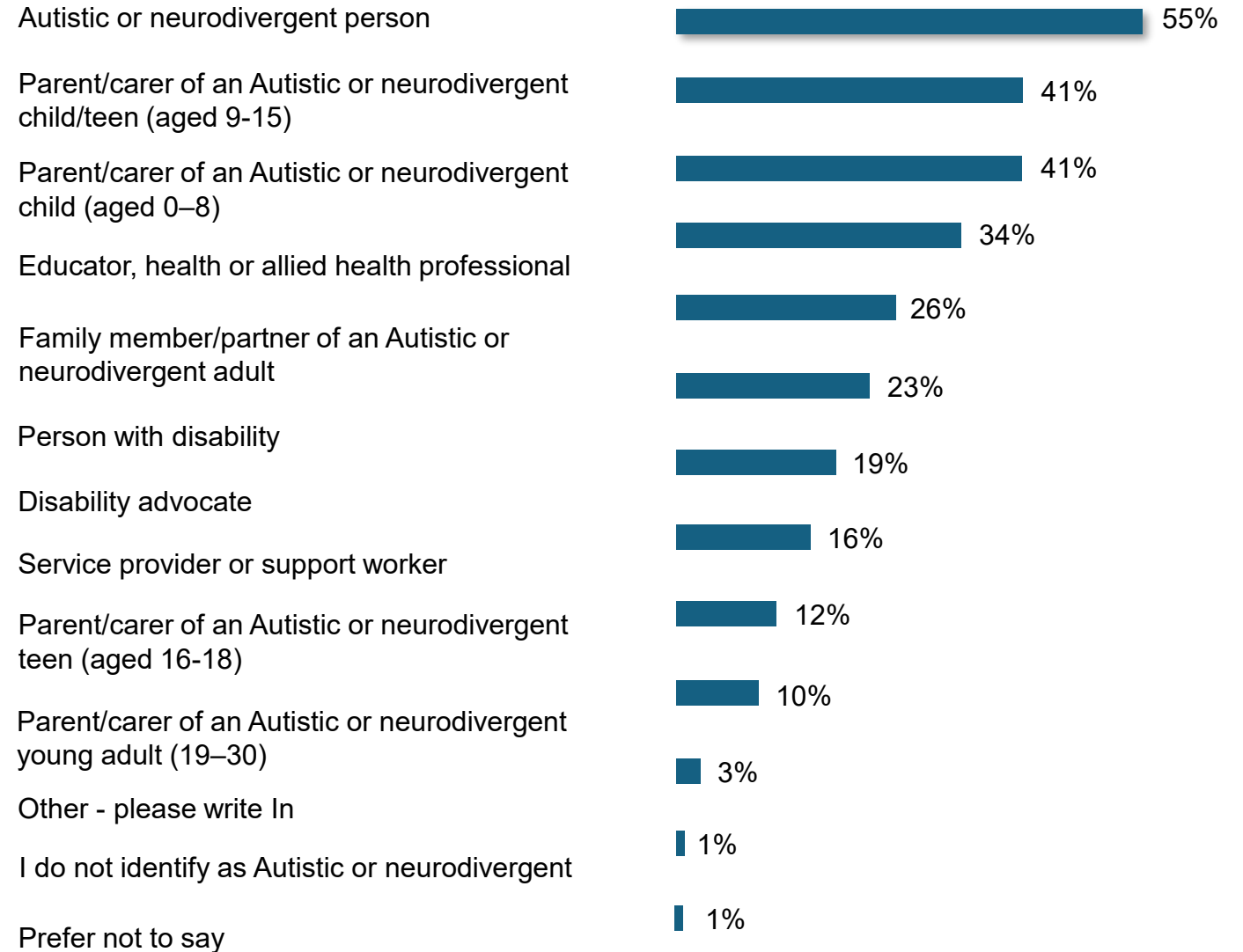


## Survey Sample: Connection(s) to the Autism Community

Half of those providing their opinions and feedback via this survey identified as being and Autistic or neurodivergent person, with many also connecting in other roles, e.g. parents, educators, advocates, partners, etc.

Just 2% of these respondents either did not identify as being an Autistic or neurodivergent individual or they preferred to not state their connection to the Autism community.

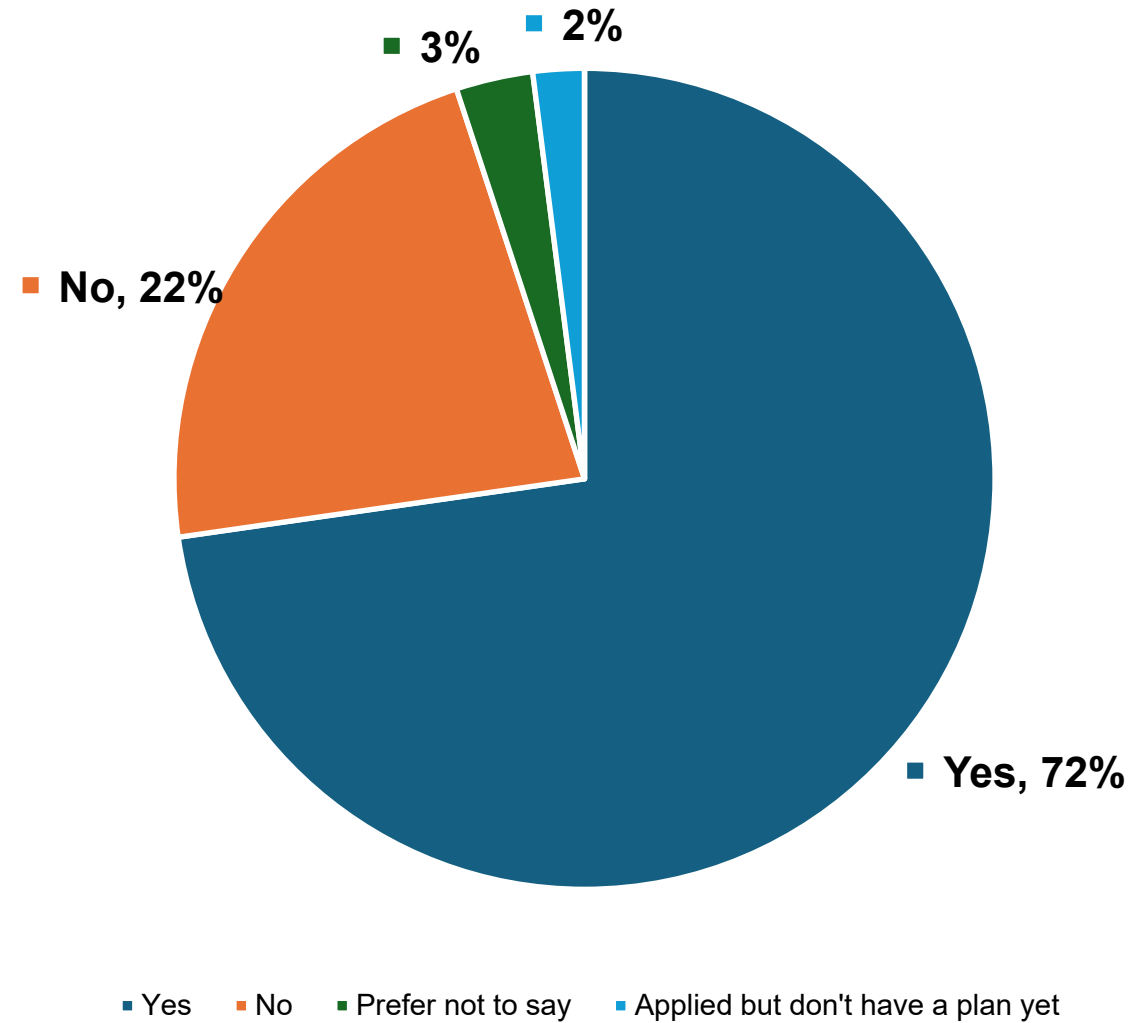
*Q: What best describes your connection to the Autistic community? Please select all that apply (multiple responses)*



## Survey Sample: NDIS Participation

72% of the respondents (and/or those they represent) were NDIS participants at the time of the survey, and 22% were not.

*Are you (or the person you represent) an NDIS participant? N=276*





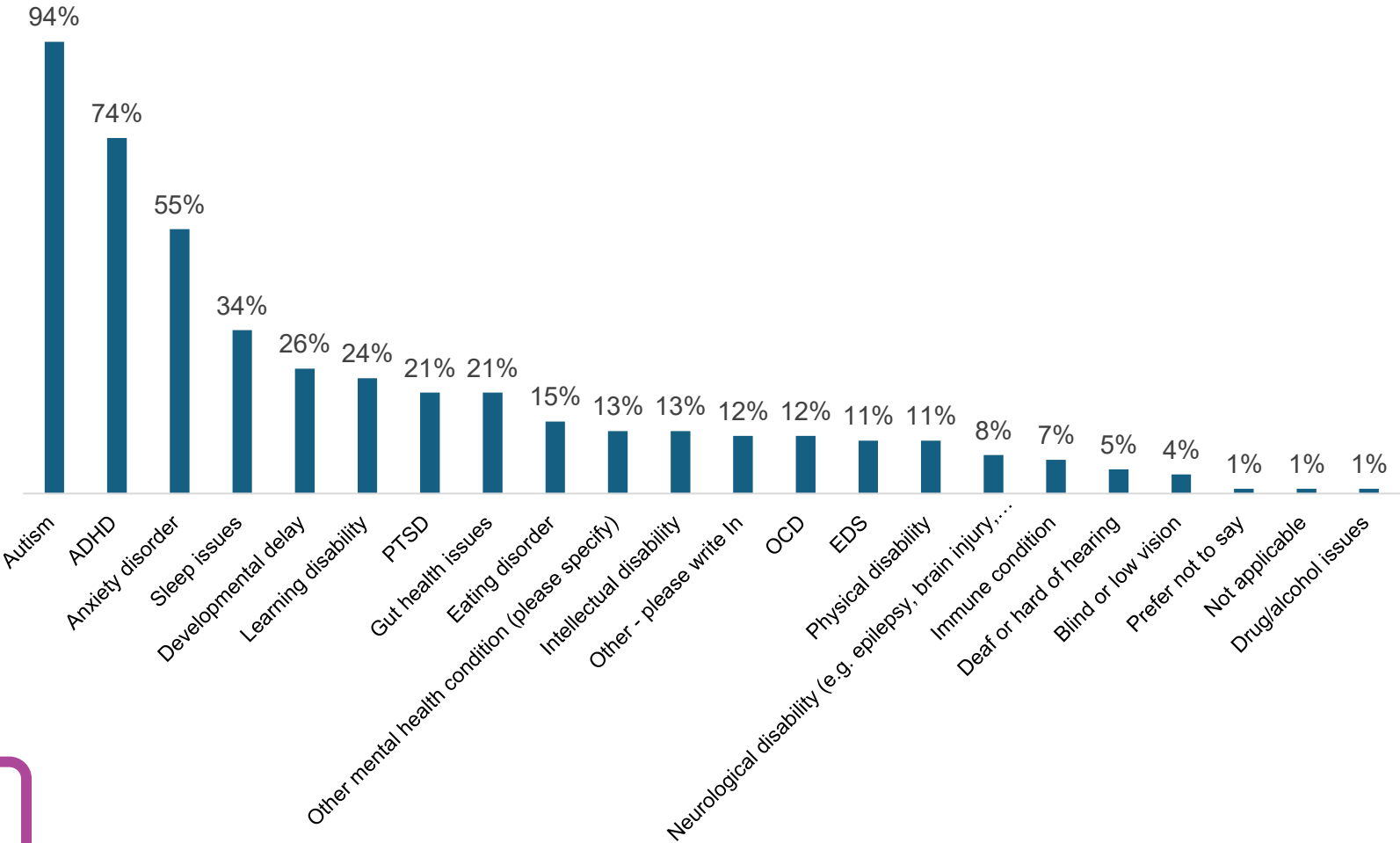


# Survey Sample: Lived Experience

Underpinning the knowledge that Autistic individuals frequently experience, and present with, many co-occurring conditions and that significantly affect their lives in ways that require multiple supports across their lifespans.

These also cross different sectors of public and private provider sectors, e.g., education, employment, mental and physical health, disability, justice, etc.

Additional Lived Experience of Survey Sample (Respondents)

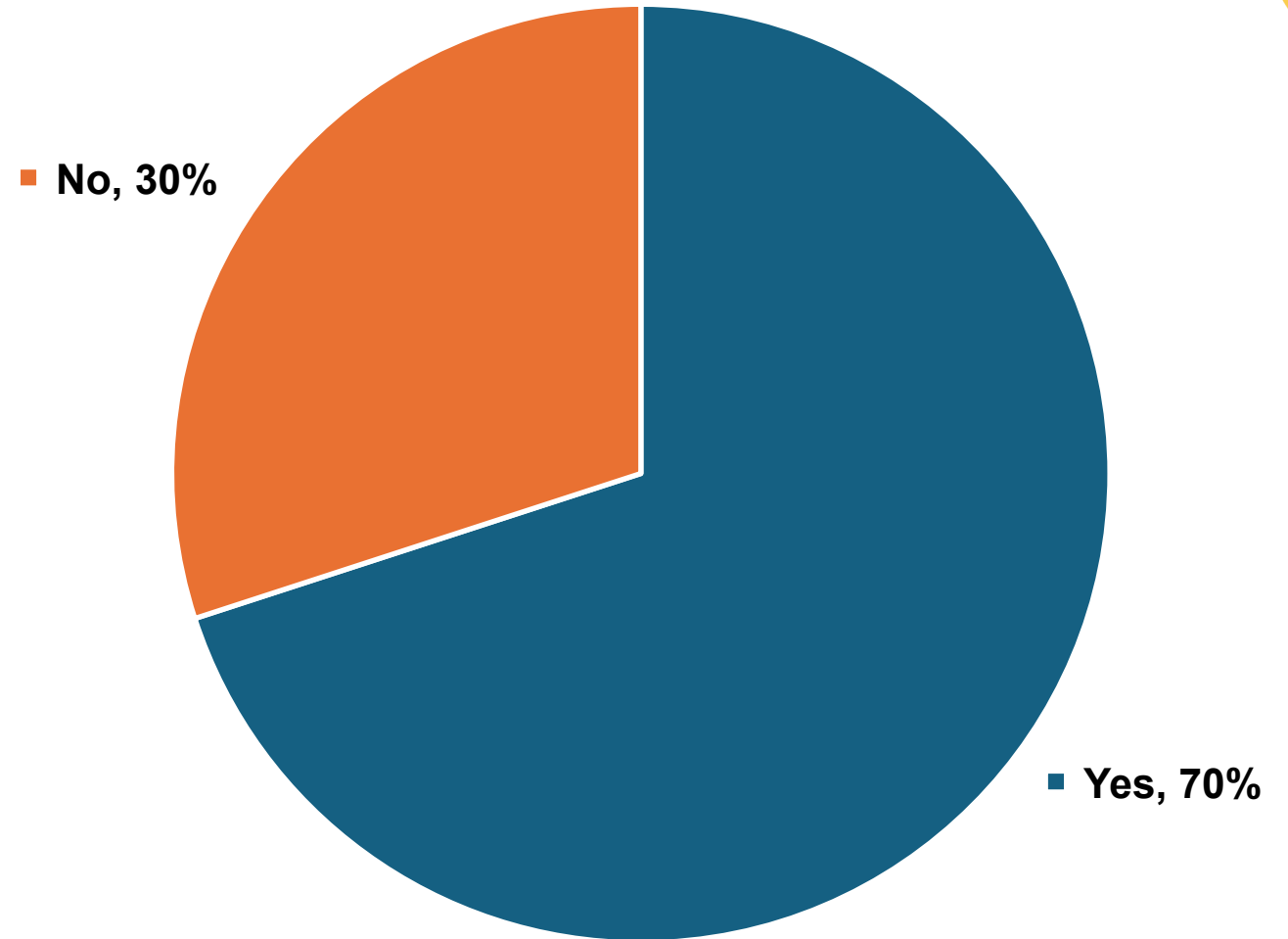


Which of these apply to you and/or the person you support? Please select all that apply (multiple responses)

## Survey Sample: Parents & Carers of Autistic Individuals

Given the topic of this survey was the Thriving Kids program, it was expected that the majority (70%) of those responding were parents of Autistic individuals.

*Are you a parent/carer of one or more Autistic person/s(of any age)? N=280*



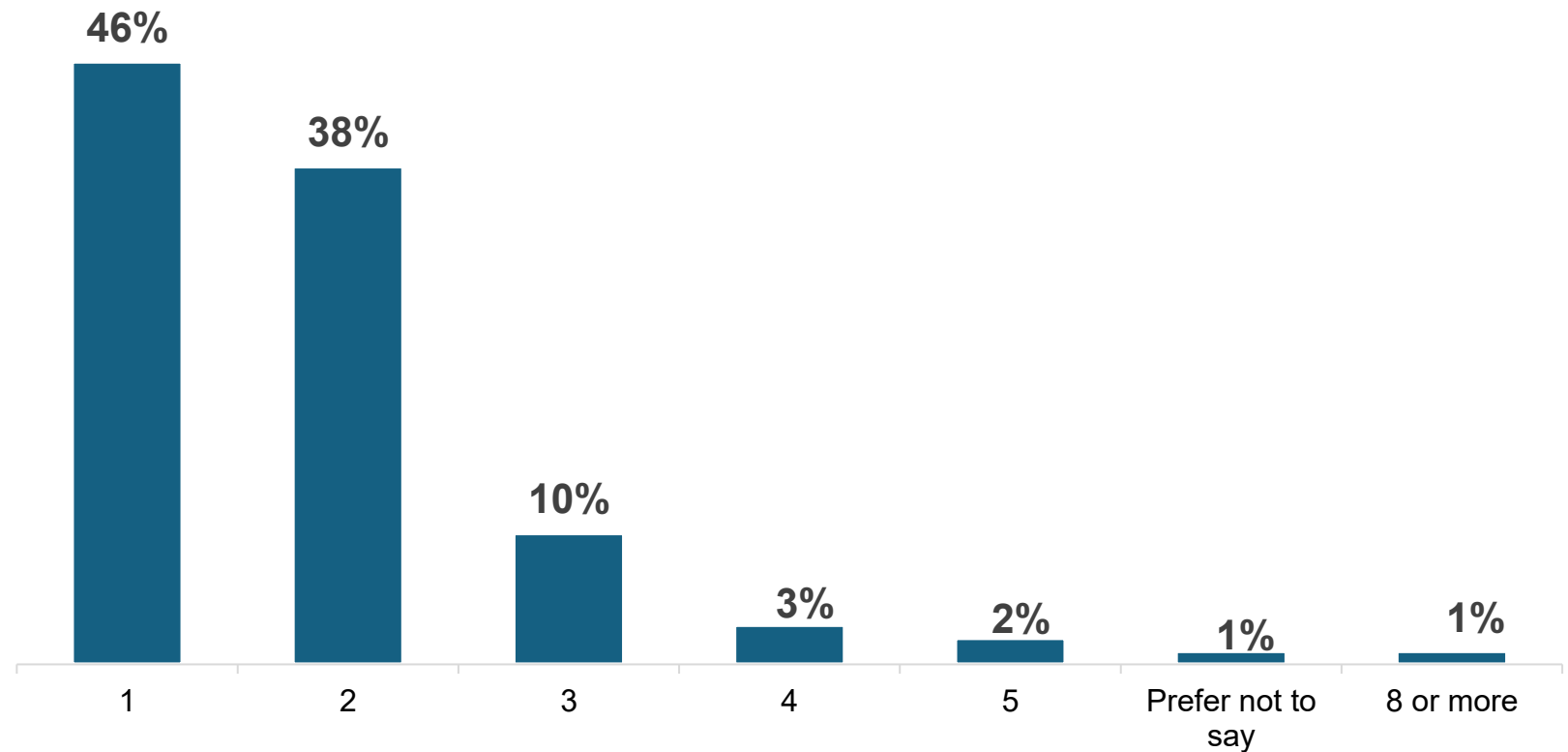


## Survey Sample: Quantum of Carer Responsibilities

Those who had previously identified as being parents/carers of an Autistic person, were also asked to share how many Autistic people they parented/cared for.

The majority told us that they were the parents/carers of one (46%) or two (38%) Autistic individuals.

**Reader Note:** Future consultation with parents/carers of Autistic individuals may require further investigations into ways to purposefully engage with parents of 3 or more Autistic individuals to achieve a representative and inclusive consultation.



Q: How many Autistic people (of any age) do you parent/care for? Base: Parent/carer of an Autistic individual N=193

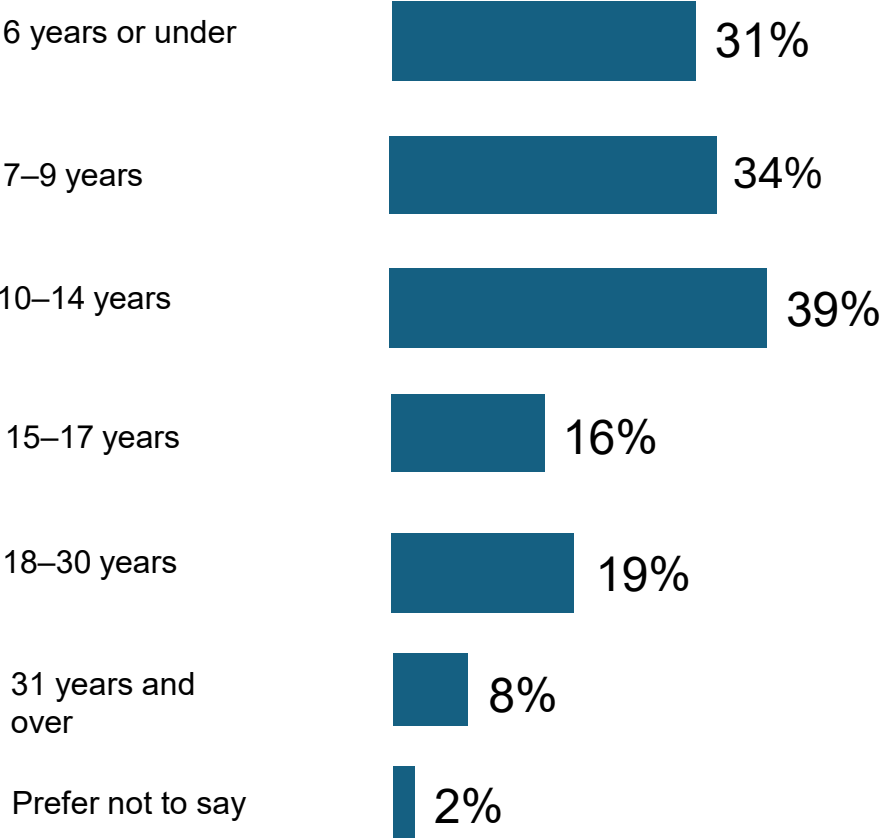


# Survey Sample: Age of Autistic Person Parented/Cared or

Parents/carers of Autistic individuals were asked to share the age(s) of those they parented/cared for, with the majority of those responding to this survey sharing that the children were aged between 0-14 years.

65% had, at the time of the survey, responsibilities with Autistic children aged between 0-9, the Thriving Kids' cohort.

*How old is the Autistic person/s you parent/care for? Please select all that apply*  
*Base: Parent/carer of an Autistic individual*  
*Multiple responses*



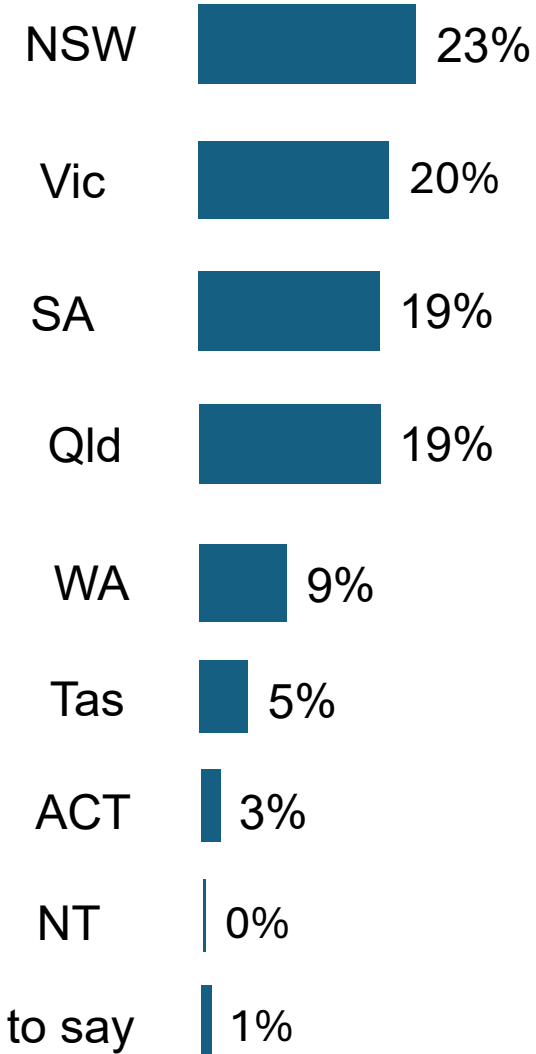
## Survey Sample: Residential Location (State)

This survey recruited responses via invitations from the Australian Autism Alliance, via emails and social media links.

Respondents to this survey were drawn from across Australia, with the exception of the NT (although included/invited)

*Reader Note: Consider additional targeted recruitment across all Australian states and territories to provide a representative sample (if required) for each jurisdiction/location.*

Q: Which State or Territory do you live in?  
N=278





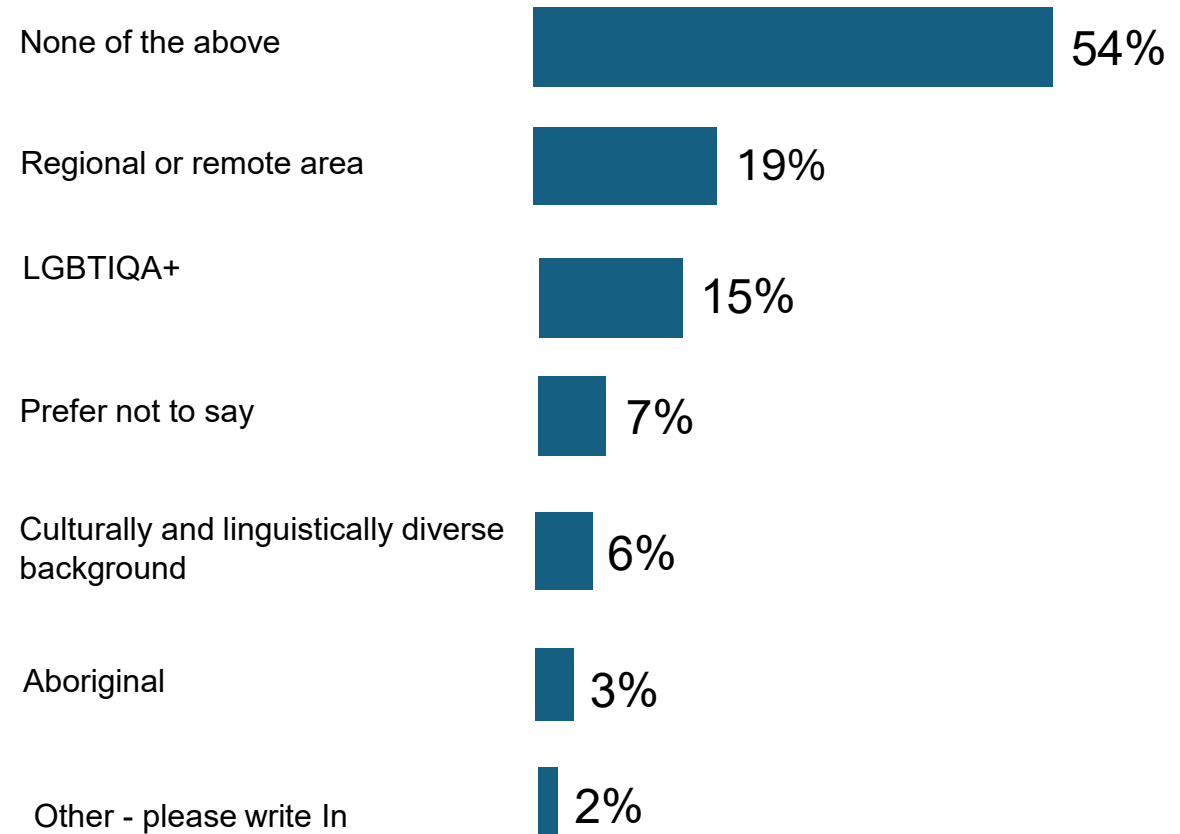
## Survey Sample: Identification With Intersectionality

This question sought to gather intersectionality demographics of those responding.

Forty six percent (46%) of the respondents to the question shared that they identified with one or more of the defined groups. 54% did not indicate this.

*Reader's Note: Targeted recruitment will be required if seeking statistically robust data describing Autistic individuals identifying with additional intersectionality.*

*Q: Do you identify with any of the following?  
Please select all that apply. Multiple responses*





# Link to Questionnaire

Australian Autism Alliance Thriving Kids Survey 2025