



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

Summary Pages

Survey Report from the Australian Autism Alliance August/September 2025



AUSTRALIAN
Autism Alliance



Introduction & Survey Design

Introduction to this Survey and Reporting

On the 20th 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:

- ✉ E chair@australianautismalliance.org.au
- 🌐 W 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.
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