

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Enabling Every Child to Thrive Equitably – No Potential Capped

Australian Autism Alliance response to [Minister Butler's National Press Club Address, 20 August 2025](#)

The Australian Autism Alliance welcomes Minister Mark Butler's renewed commitment to investing in children's development. However, we are deeply concerned by elements of his National Press Club announcement that may undermine the rights and futures of Autistic children and their families.

While we strongly support broader child development services, there is still much to understand. The current framing and proposed diversion of children with "mild to moderate developmental delay or autism" away from the NDIS raises serious questions. With no consultation to date, families are left facing uncertainty and fearing they may be handballed between fragmented systems at critical points in their children's lives.

We do welcome several important assurances from Minister Butler. This includes the **recognition that autism is common and important** – affirming that Autistic people and their families are part of the Australian mainstream, not marginal. The **commitment to value Autistic children** – recognising they are precious, capable and deserving of inclusion and opportunity. Continued **commitment to the NDIS, with stronger market stewardship** - tackling misconduct and lifting quality in the support sector. The **acknowledgement** that suitable, affordable, available and accessible **services do not yet exist**, alongside an **assurance that no child will be removed from the NDIS until appropriate alternatives are in place**. This provides reassurance that Autistic children and their families are not being abandoned.

These assurances are vital, and we will hold government accountable to them.

Despite these positives, the language and framing used in the Minister's address carry risks. **Deficit-based framing** - Autistic children must never be seen or described as a "burden." Stigma leads to exclusion. Policy must adopt a neurodiversity-affirming lens, in line with the National Autism Strategy and the voices of Australia's Autistic and autism community to avoid **pathologising autism**. While parent and carer support is vital, government systems must be adequately resourced; we cannot have an **over-reliance on families and informal supports**. Strong evidence exists that any "one-size-fits-all" model **excluding specialised supports** risks falling short and would appear to contradict the layered Model of Foundational Supports recommended by the [NDIS Review](#).

Whatever systems Autistic children and adults have access to need to take a holistic and systemic approach, as autism **is a life-long neurodevelopmental disability**. Support needs may be **ongoing, fluctuating, and context-dependent** as reflected in the [National Autism Strategy](#). Over 95% of Autistic people have a co-occurring disability and/ or medical or mental health condition and/or face multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage and discrimination due to intersectional identities. Without explicit protections, broad programs risk compounding inequity as outlined in the [Senate Inquiry on Autism report](#).

"We understand the "Thriving Kids program" is still at concept stage and urge meaningful consultation with the disability community," said **Jenny Karavolos**, Co-Chair of the [Australian Autism Alliance](#).

“We embrace the Minister’s commitment to delivering on the principle of “nothing about us without us, with co-design to be guided by Autistic voices, families, disability representative organisations, and service providers. As the Minister said, ‘there is much work to be done’ – and we stand ready to work in partnership.”

To ensure no Autistic child is left behind, we call on the government to:

- **Clarify the scope and funding of the proposed** “Thriving Kids Program”, including how it aligns with foundational supports as recommended in the NDIS Review.
- **Confirm State and Territory commitments, including generalised foundational supports** – to guarantee national consistency.
- **Explicitly add guardrails** – including no-gap transition protections so that no child loses existing supports before new, suitable services are in place.
- **Use government levers** – to deliver targeted and accountable action in government systems such as education, employment, and health, with enforceable human-rights obligations so this investment can be realised.
- **Provide data & transparency** - public dashboards on access times, service mix, outcomes, and equity (rural/remote, First Nations, low-SES), with independent evaluation against national guidelines (e.g., Autism CRC)
- **Fully fund and align with national instruments** – including the [National Autism Strategy First Action Plan](#) and the [National Roadmap to Improve Health & Mental Health of Autistic People \(2025–2035\)](#).
- **Accelerate implementation** of the National Autism Strategy’s First Action Plan and Disability Royal Commission recommendations – including those agreed in principle.
- **Set clear timelines** – to deliver a first action plan without delay.

Looking ahead, this moment does offer a unique opportunity for coordinated reform to occur effectively, as Minister Butler acknowledged, given his dual portfolio responsibilities for Health and NDIS.

“The National Autism Strategy, arising from the Senate Inquiry on Autism, recognised that the life outcomes for Autistic Australians are unacceptably poor,” said Ms Karavolos. “We must accelerate reform with accountability in place, but in a manner that we do not have Autistic children or adults fall through the gaps or have their potential capped.

The Australian Autism Alliance stands ready to work with Minister Butler and the government at all levels to ensure every Autistic child in Australia can thrive equitably and fulfil their potential.

About the Australian Autism Alliance: We are the national peak body furthering the rights and interests of Autistic people across the life span, their parents and carers, and the autism community in Australia. The members represent a cohesive national network of key organisations with a diverse focus on autism. For more information about Australian Autism Alliance go to:

australianautismalliance.org.au and connect with us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

Media enquiries: Jenny Karavolos

Australian Autism Alliance, Co-Chair jenkaravolos@outlook.com | chair@australianautismalliance.org.au