

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

22 April 2026

Autistic children aren't the budget problem—the system is

Autistic children are being positioned as the budget problem—when in reality they've exposed the system problem.

The Australian Autism Alliance is urging government to focus on system reform—not reducing support—to improve NDIS sustainability.

As pressure builds to contain costs, the Australian Autism Alliance warns that reducing access will not reduce demand—it will shift it into capped programs, into schools and health systems that are not yet ready, and ultimately onto families.

“The fastest and fairest savings come from fixing the system—not cutting support for people who rely on it.”

“It wasn't autism that created the problem—it was autism that revealed the problem in the system.”

“Sustainability and fairness are not competing goals—they require the same solution: systems that work.”

Where government should be looking

The Australian Autism Alliance says real savings are achievable now by focusing on system settings, including:

- stronger provider identification and enforcement
- smarter payment controls
- better frontline decision-making to reduce appeals and rework
- workforce capability and cross-system planning
- reducing duplication across health, education and disability systems

“If you tighten the wrong part of the system, you reduce outcomes without fixing the problem.”, stated Jenny Karavolos, Co-chair, Australian Autism Alliance.

Demand doesn't disappear—it shifts

Changing access doesn't change need—it shifts it—into capped programs, into schools and health systems that aren't yet ready, and ultimately onto families.

“Autistic children should not be the shock absorbers of a system governments have not yet fixed.” says Jenny Karavolos.

We know the system is not ready when pre-school-aged Autistic children are 10 times more likely to be permanently excluded from childcare.

The Alliance warns that shifting autistic children out of the NDIS before mainstream systems are ready risks:

- worse outcomes for children
- increased school exclusion
- higher long-term costs across government

“You don’t fix sustainability by moving children into systems that aren’t ready to support them.”
Highlighted Jenny Karavolos, Co-chair Australian Autism Alliance.

What must happen before any transition

The Alliance is calling for:

- a clear system readiness test before any transition
- no-gap protections
- child-specific transition plans detailing supports, timing, responsibility and fallback if services fail

The 10-point system readiness test

The Alliance has set out a 10-point test to ensure reforms are safe and effective, including:

- outcomes and no-harm safeguards
- proven system readiness and no service gaps
- clear accountability across governments
- controls placed on providers—not participants
- transparent measurement of outcomes

If a reform cannot meet these tests, it is not ready.

Transparency and accountability

The Alliance says government should publish:

- projected savings and replacement costs
- workforce and service readiness
- outcome measures for safe transition

If you can’t show it, you can’t claim it.

“We want to work with government to get this right—to build systems that actually work.”
— Jenny Karavolos, Co-Chair, Australian Autism Alliance

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:

[Australian Autism Alliance](http://australianautismalliance.org.au), Co-Chair jenkaravolos@outlook.com | chair@australianautismalliance.org.au

THE 10-POINT SYSTEM TEST

If a reform cannot meet these tests, it is not ready to be implemented.

1. OUTCOMES TEST

Does this improve real outcomes for people?

- safety
- wellbeing
- participation
- independence

Not just activity, compliance or cost reduction

2. NO HARM TEST

Will anyone be worse off as a result of this reform?

- loss of support
- reduced access
- increased risk

If yes then reform is not ready

3. SYSTEM READINESS TEST

Are the receiving systems actually ready?

- workforce capability
- service availability
- infrastructure

Not assumed — demonstrated

4. NO-GAP TEST

Is there guaranteed continuity of support?

- no service gaps
- no waiting periods
- no “falling between systems”

5. ACCOUNTABILITY TEST

Is responsibility clear across governments?

- who is responsible
- who is accountable
- what happens if it fails

6. CONTROL PLACEMENT TEST

Are controls placed where risk sits — not where need sits?

- provider-level controls
- system-level controls

- NOT participant-level restrictions

7. WORKFORCE CAPABILITY TEST

Do frontline workers have the skills to deliver this?

- autism capability
- decision-making ability
- not just compliance training

8. DECISION QUALITY TEST

Will decisions be consistent, fair and correct first time?

- clear criteria
- transparency
- review/correction pathways

9. VALUE & COST TEST

Does this reduce waste without reducing necessary support?

- targets leakage
- avoids cost shifting
- considers downstream costs

10. MEASUREMENT TEST

Will success be measured publicly and transparently?

- clear metrics
- regular reporting
- outcome-based

If you can't measure it, you can't claim it

Media Release

