

30 November, 2023

***An oasis in the sandpit:
Bridging the gap between early years services and the NDIS***

KEY ISSUE RAISED

Is it the case that there is inadequate support for young children with development disabilities and delays outside the NDIS?

- Yes – the support for children and families is definitely inadequate
- The pathway to receiving support is unclear and there are long waiting lists
- There is much confusion as to who to refer to
- A lot of children are missing out on receiving early support
- Professionals have been sucked into the vortex of the NDIS and there are few left to provide support outside this system
- There has been an erosion of inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream ECEC services – the NDIS has led to greater exclusion
- There has been a shift to a medical model of treatment, with therapy seen as the primary form of service, regardless of the nature of the child's disability
- The service system has become more chaotic – there is a lack of collaboration between departments as well as between professionals
- Overall, the system is skewed towards treatment rather than prevention

What form should an effective Tier 2 / foundational support system and pathway take?

- Parents need to be put back in the centre of a redesigned system
- Parents need more support to navigate the system
- Parents also need capacity building and information, and support to be able to advocate for their children and family
- Services need to be better integrated – there needs to be no wrong door
- Family hubs / integrated child and family centres offer one way in which this can be done
- Integrated service systems will be better placed to provide wrap-around services
- Tier 2 ECI support programs need to be nested inside a progressive universalism model services
- We should build on what is there already, eg. existing family hubs or centres

- Tier 3 (NDIS) services should not be doing Tier 2 work
- We need to put back the *early* in early intervention – improve early diagnosis so that children can receive ECI services earlier – under the NDIS, ECI services are no longer getting babies referred
- There needs to be more support for mainstream services to help them meet the needs of children with developmental concerns or disabilities
- All families of children with developmental disabilities should be provided with opportunities to connect with other families of children with disabilities
- Group programs and playgroups provided within integrated child and family centres
- There is a need for ‘light touch’ allied health consultations and support during the pre-NDIS phase

What needs to happen to establish a viable Tier 2 support system?

- Let’s start (re-)building the EC ecosystem now
- Investment in Tier 2 ECI services is needed - federal, state, philanthropic – there’s not going to be a viable NDIS unless we fix the Tier 2 system
- Workforce shortages need to be addressed
- Services need to be freed from having to charge every aspect of service as billable hours
- ECI services need to be brought back into the community – funding should be provided to support this move
- Change the public discourse – promote greater awareness of the needs of children and families and of ECI best practices
- In addition to providing services for children, it is crucial that the social conditions under which their families are raising them be addressed
- Better collaboration between departments is needed
- More communication from the NDIS is also needed
- Redesigning the ECEC / ECI service system needs to involve genuine co-design with those who use the services
- More regulation of what ECI services are providing is needed to ensure that the services are consistent with best practice
- Best practice guidelines should be developed – at present there is too little guidance for parents and professionals as to what best ECI practice looks like
- There are several major reviews currently being undertaken – National Early Years Strategy, Productivity Commission ECEC review – and it is important that these take account of the NDIS review recommendations (and vice versa)
- In redesigning services, these reviews should all be considered together - we need one strategy to rule them all!