



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 3 February 2026

**‘THRIVING KIDS’ WILL OFFER A BETTER ALTERNATIVE TO NDIS FOR MANY
CHILDREN EXPERIENCING DEVELOPMENTAL DIVERSITY, AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) welcomes the release today of the [Thriving Kids Advisory Group Final Report](#) by Health Minister Mark Butler and Advisory Group Co-Chair Professor Frank Oberklaid. You can find a [summary here](#), the Minister's [media release here](#) and an article from [ABC News here](#). This follows the recent release of the Parliamentary Inquiry report into ‘Thriving Kids’, [No Child Left Behind](#). The Advisory Group consisted of experts from diverse professional backgrounds and roles, coming together to identify principles and delivery models that will best serve children and families through a series of deep dives and deliberations.

ECA was pleased to participate in the Advisory Group and congratulates both Minister Butler and Professor Oberklaid on their stewardship of this work. We strongly endorse the key principles for the proposed national model:

- Identify children with developmental delay as early as possible.
- Connect children and families with supports matched to their level of need, to best support their child’s early development.
- Offer supports that are child and family centred, informed by evidence and focused on outcomes.
- Ensure supports are delivered in everyday settings, where they live, learn and play.
- Ensure supports are empowering, connected to service systems families already trust and are easy to navigate.
- Acknowledge that children’s needs are not linear and can change over time.

The model for ‘Thriving Kids’ has two streams:

1. Universal Parenting Supports to help families build knowledge and skills in supporting their child’s development, foster strong relationships with their children and access peer support through connections with others who have had, or are going through, the same experiences.
2. Targeted Supports to develop the strengths and wellbeing of families, like allied health (occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, audiologists and psychologists), access to low-cost assistive technology (communication boards, social stories and sensory aids) and more individualised capacity building for families and children. These supports will need to be evidence based. They should be inclusive, flexible and tailored to the different needs of children, easy to access and delivered in environments where children live, play and learn (including early childhood education and care settings). In some cases, Targeted Supports may be provided through an expansion of existing services and in other cases, they may be new commissioned services.

CONTINUES OVER

Early childhood professionals have an important role to play in both streams, and the Advisory Group recognised several potential intersections between education settings and 'Thriving Kids', including:

- providing enriched and inclusive learning environments in which children at risk of developmental challenges can thrive and learn, preventing problems from arising
- recognising and supporting the role schools and ECEC services play in the early identification of developmental differences, concerns or delay
- supporting families to access information, supports and referrals to other services
- sharing public health information that might help with the prevention and early identification of developmental differences
- embedding 'Thriving Kids' supports into the routine of schools or ECEC services where these supports are reasonable, within the scope of an educator's skills and practice, and where they can be reasonably embedded in a group environment
- working collaboratively with early intervention professionals to help provide early intervention in natural settings, as recommended by the *National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention*.

Australian governments have agreed to invest \$4 billion to deliver 'Thriving Kids'. The Commonwealth is providing \$2 billion, with \$2 billion matched by states and territories. \$1.4 billion of the Commonwealth's contribution will go directly to support states and territories. The rollout will now commence on 1 October 2026, with full implementation by 1 January 2028.

ECA will continue to work with both federal and state/territory governments to leverage the expertise and capability within early childhood education and care services to support the effective implementation of 'Thriving Kids'.

Early Childhood Australia Chief Executive Officer Samantha Page is available for comment on 0448 883 687.