



Subject: Urgent: Petition and Meeting Request Regarding Thriving Kids Program

Date: 8th September 2025

Attn: Mark Butler MP

Minister for Disability, Health and Ageing

Cc: Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Supporting Material:

- Petition Link: <https://chnng.it/42nPzrvn26>
- Petition Signature List (attached)
- Petition Community Comments (attached)

Sent via email:

Dear Minister Butler,

On behalf of the Australian Autism Community as well as a Coalition of nationally placed advocates and organisations (including the Australian Neurodivergent Parent's Association [ANPA] and Reimage Australia), we are writing to convey urgent concerns regarding the proposed Thriving Kids program and the diversion of children with so-called "mild" or "moderate" autism away from the NDIS.

Our Coalition is a broad and growing alliance of disability and autism organisations, peak bodies, lived experience advocates and grassroots networks that has formed in response to recent attacks on the NDIS and in particular, the threats posed by 'Thriving Kids.' As a collective, we are committed to ensuring that the NDIS remains true to its core purpose of operationalising the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and in particular, protecting the rights of neurodivergent people.

Reflecting the concerns of this coalition and our community, the Regional Autistic Engagement Network (RAEN) launched a national petition in response to the 'Thriving Kids' announcement calling for the government to halt these changes. Within days, thousands of Autistic people, families, professionals, and allies had added their names. The petition



highlights widespread concern that diverting children out of the NDIS and into programs like *Inklings* will cause long-term harm and undermine the rights of autistic children and families

Our petition, which has now attracted **over 15,000** signatures nationwide in under two weeks, reflecting a groundswell of concern from families, Autistic people, professionals, and the broader disability community. The clear message is that the Thriving Kids model, and particularly the proposed funding of the Inklings program, poses serious risks of harm to our children and our community.

Our Community supports the call for you to:

1. Halt the rollout of Thriving Kids until independent safety evaluations are complete, and guarantee no children will be removed from the scheme or have their funding significantly cut in the meantime.
2. Engage meaningfully with advocates and DPRO's and work with national advocates to install a DPRO led review panel to provide independent review of programs prior to implementation.
3. Ensure suggested programs comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
4. Resume genuine engagement with community and advocates and review of previous engagement and feedback which seems to have been disregarded in the case of Inklings.

Community members have consistently stressed that the categorisation of autism into “mild” and “moderate” is not supported by either clinical evidence or lived experience, and is widely regarded as offensive and reductive. Autistic people's support needs fluctuate depending on context, environment, and the presence or absence of appropriate accommodations. Parents and autistic adults alike fear that replacing individualised, needs-based supports with block-funded programs like *Inklings* will leave many children without access to the tailored supports they require to thrive. This is especially concerning for groups already underserved in the NDIS, including autistic girls and women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and those with co-occurring disabilities.

Autistic children and families also report little transparency about how *Thriving Kids* was developed, why *Inklings* was chosen for funding, what evidence underpins it, or how it will be evaluated. Many describe the program as inappropriate, inaccessible, and inconsistent with their children's actual support needs. The lack of clarity has fuelled mistrust, and created the



perception that decisions are being driven by cost-cutting and provider interests rather than evidence, rights, or lived experience.

A member of the Coalition, ANPA, has now been made privy to documents both from the side of parents who have participated in the *Inklings* program and from clinicians who have undertaken the training to deliver the program which raise considerable alarm bells. Our concern is in the stated focus on reducing diagnosis and to the risk to maternal health of those mothers undergoing the *Inklings* Program with their children.

Our specific concerns about *Inklings* are longstanding. The program is experimental, lacks credible long-term evidence, and is built on the flawed assumption that autism can and should be “reduced.” Parents are encouraged to redirect or suppress natural autistic behaviours so children appear “less autistic.” This effectively trains children to mask their authentic selves rather than building genuine skills. Research shows that masking is strongly associated with exhaustion, burnout, poor mental health, and suicidality. Advocates and families have been raising these concerns for almost two years, warning that the program risks embedding masking as a policy outcome rather than supporting autistic children to thrive as who they are. Recently leaked materials have confirmed these fears, explicitly identifying the “reduction of visible autistic traits” as an intended outcome of the program.

The reforms also raise significant legal, human rights, and economic issues. They undermine the principles of choice and control at the core of the NDIS by forcing autistic children and families into standardised block programs regardless of individual need. They risk breaching Australia’s obligations under the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* and the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, both of which require non-discrimination, self-determination, and free, prior and informed consent. Economically, they represent a false saving. Independent analysis has shown that every \$1 invested in the NDIS generates more than \$2 in broader social and economic returns. Cutting individualised supports will reduce workforce participation, particularly among mothers who are predominantly the primary carers of disabled children, widen the gender pay gap, and increase long-term costs across health, education, and welfare.

Next Steps

The Coalition is a broad alliance of disability and autism organisations, peak bodies, and grassroots networks committed to protecting the integrity of the scheme. We request an urgent meeting with you to:



1. Present the community's concerns and evidence regarding Thriving Kids and Inklings.
2. Discuss alternative approaches to reform that would ensure no child is made worse off.
3. Explore opportunities for meaningful co-design with Autistic people, families, and representative organisations.

We strongly believe that direct engagement is essential before any further implementation steps are taken. Please advise of a suitable time for this meeting. This letter will be made public to our Community on our website and social media.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Reeve

Regional Autistic Engagement Network Vice President & Secretary