



29 August 2025

To: The Honourable Jeremy Rockcliffe MP & The Honourable Jo Palmer

Re: Minister Butler's Press Club Address "Thriving Kids" & Inklings Program

Good Morning,

In light of recent unexpected announcements by Minister Butlers on NDIS Reform and the proposed "Thriving Kids" as well as his troubling suggestion that "Inklings" will be part of this proposal, the Regional Autistic Engagement Network (RAEN) (Hannah Reeve - Vice President & Secretary and Heidi La Paglia Reid), alongside Fiona Hamilton representing the Palawa/pakana Disability Network lutruwita, **request an urgent in person meeting with Premier Rockcliffe & the Minister for Disability Services.**

The changes proposed under the "Thriving Kids" program, will rip away **individualised supports**, including therapies, aids, and flexible help that families rely on, and replaces them with **one-size-fits-all programs** designed by government and large providers. Families will be left with no real choice or control.

For 2 years, Autistic people, families, and **advocates have expressed consistent concerns that Inklings is not what it claims to be.** While presented as evidence-based, closer examination reveals troubling implications.

The protocols involved in Inklings appear to be part of a **broader agenda to 'reduce' Autism diagnoses** by teaching parents to redirect or suppress Autistic traits. This appears to complement Minister Butler's language used during the Press Club, describing autism as "moderate" or "mild"(1) and later suggesting not all autistic children will experience lifelong autism. (2)

The assumption appears to be that if children are put through such programs early, they won't need the NDIS later, because their disabilities won't be permanent - fundamentally flawed logic that is not backed by research. Calling this "evidence-based" is misleading. In reality, it is an **experimental intervention on babies without informed consent.** Families are being misled, Disability advocates are being excluded, and the Autistic communities' cries are being blatantly ignored. This approach encourages children to 'mask' Autism, research shows this leads to burnout, poor mental health and, worst case, suicidality.

Additionally, yesterday RAEN's advocacy partner the Australian Neurodivergent Parents' Association (ANPA) was made privy to a concerning series of leaks from both the perspective of parents who have gone through the Inklings program and Clinicians who had been trained to deliver the program.

An excerpt from the Clinician's notes on Session Five reads:

"Parents are required to "teach" emotions - they are instructed to model emotions using vocal tone and facial expressions aligned with neurotypical norms. I am concerned that this induces and reinforces masking behaviours, particularly in Autistic parents, exacerbating already high risks to maternal mental health. By explicitly linking parents' "performance" of these behaviours to their child's wellbeing and outcomes, the program risks heightening maternal anxiety and psychological burden."(3)

This concerning information confirms that **Inklings appears to be both a repackaging of the "refrigerator mother" concept and disguised ABA practice** encouraging masking in autistic children. It also raises serious concerns for the health of parents undertaking the program.

Furthermore, it has been reported that not only were States not made aware of the Press Club announcements prior to Minister Butler's address but that Treasurer Chalmers is now threatening States to back "Thriving Kids" at the risk of losing hospital funding. (4)

We urge you, our Premier and Disability Services Minister to protect the wellbeing of Autistic Tasmanians despite the strong arming efforts from federal ministers. With minimal evidence on long term impacts, disregard for meaningful consultation, and a focus on "normalising" Autistic children and risking Tasmanian's losing essential supports, the announcements from Minister Butler signal a serious risk of harm to neurodivergent children and families.

The promises made in the landmark **National Autism Strategy (NAS)** are being rendered redundant. Disabled People's Representative Organisations (DPROs) have not endorsed this program. This undermines Australia's obligations under both the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** and the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**, which require governments to respect self-determination, free prior and informed consent, and co-design with affected communities.

RAEN is currently hosting a petition to be delivered to Minister Butler requesting a meeting with himself and a national coalition of disability organisations. **So far this petition has over 14,000 signatures.**(5)

We look forward to your response to our request for an urgent meeting to address this matter.



Hannah Reeve (Vice President & Secretary)

Regional Autistic Engagement Network.

References:

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2. <https://www.9news.com.au/national/ndis-changes-children-with-mild-autism-what-does-this-mean-for-them-explainer/74639ec2-a4f5-4b6d-b92a-7d2e055a39d9>
3. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19gtgiEcRv/>
4. <https://cathnews.com/2025/08/25/states-warned-to-support-ndis-changes-or-risk-billions-in-hospital-funding/>
5. <https://chng.it/n6h7W5TKhz>