

Representatives of the Regional Autistic Engagement Network (RAEN) are feeling defeated having just watched the National Press Club address from Minister Mark Butler. We state unequivocally that we are appalled.

After years of tireless advocacy and constructive engagement, the disability community has been excluded from key roundtables discussing disability supports this week and now faces decisions that contradict the advice and lived experience of our community.

The naming of particular providers who appear to be earmarked as national providers for reliable information is disturbing given the issues seen in many of these provider systems being non neuro-inclusive, providing misinformation and contributing to the erasure of setting up disability led organisations to deliver disability supports to the communities they are part of. Fundamentally, this block funding approach erodes choice and control, which was meant to be central to the principles of NDIS and in turn, disability support systems.

We are particularly concerned with the announcement of a “thriving kids,” program, set to replace the NDIS for children with “developmental delay and autism.” With specifics unclear, Minister for Health, Disability and Ageing, Mark Butler MP, indicated the program could be covered under Medicare and would include programs like ‘Inklings.’

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. 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.

This approach encourages children to ‘mask’ Autism, research shows this leads to burnout, poor mental health and, worst case, suicidality. Reducing diagnosis may save money for governments, but it strips children of the understanding and support they need.

With minimal evidence on long term impacts, disregard for meaningful consultation, and a focus on “normalising” Autistic children, the announcements today signal a serious risk of harm to neurodivergent children.

Mark Butler’s use of the phrase “mild to moderate levels*” and suggestion that autism is not a permanent or lifelong disability is a return to functional labels that is beyond comprehension.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s claim that 40% of people are on the NDIS is blatant misinformation*.

As of 1 March 2024, there were 649,623 participants — less than 2.5% of Australians. Around 261,000 were under 15, which is just 8% of all children, not 40% of the population.

Inflating the numbers misleads the public and fuels stigma against people with disability.

This is NOT respectful co-design, this is NOT evidence based and this is NOT safe for the autism community.

RAEN calls for independent evaluation, genuine co-design with Autistic people, and investment in supports that affirm—not erase—neurodivergence.

RAEN is now taking time to process, we will be reaching out to other disability advocates and encourage you to connect with us: info@raentasmania.com.au

*<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-19/productivity-summit-begins-ndis-spotlight/105668816>

*<https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/speech-from-minister-butler-national-press-club-20-august-2025?language=en>