



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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DPROs Announce National Boycott of ‘Thriving Kids’ and Launch ‘Tick’ of Approval in Response to Press Club Address by NDIS Minister Butler

Canberra, 20 August 2025 – In response to Minister Mark Butler’s announcement today at the National Press Club of plans to nationally expand behaviour change programs such as Inklings as part of the new Thriving Kids program, the Regional Autistic Engagement Network (RAEN) and the Australian Neurodivergent Parents Association (ANPA) have announced a national boycott and the creation of a community-led regulatory framework.

“Minister Butler can make announcements, but he cannot run these programs without participants,” said Sarah Langston, President of ANPA.

“Parents are already saying no, and we back them. If Minister Butler wants bums on seats, he needs to work for our approval - not the other way around. If you want community backing, then start engaging meaningfully, Minister.”

The DPRO Tick of Approval

RAEN and ANPA are introducing a DPRO Tick of Approval for early childhood and parenting programs. Programs will only qualify if they meet all of the following conditions:

1. Transparency – all therapy manuals and protocols must be provided as a complete set to the independent DPRO assessment panel for review, with a copy lodged and retained so that parents can request and access them as an independent resource before choosing whether to use a program.

2. Human Rights Alignment – the program must comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Compliance is to be met in the view of the assessment panel, not the program designers.

3. Disabled Leadership and Oversight – the program must be led by Disabled people and subject to ongoing Disabled oversight.

This mark or “tick” of approval will be promoted across parenting forums, neighbourhood centres, allied health networks, and early intervention services to guide families toward safe, rights-based supports.

Why the Boycott?

- There is no long-term evidence that Inklings or equivalent preschool program PACT are safe or effective.
- There is no proper risk assessment for exposing infants to behaviour change experiments.
- These programs lack endorsement from Disabled People’s Representative Organisations (DPROs) — the UNCRPD-recognised voice of Disabled people.
- Parents are being denied informed consent, as the risks of teaching masking and compliance behaviours are not disclosed. There is a strong and growing peer reviewed evidence base that links masking behaviour to significant harm in Autistic people. This government has failed to respond meaningfully to this evidence to date.

A First Nations member of RAEN, who asked not to be identified, has further raised serious concerns regarding today’s announcement.

She stated that there appeared to be little consultation with First Nations people about these changes, which makes the claim “nothing about us with us” by the Minister disturbing.

“Our communities do not understand how these changes will be addressed within Closing the Gap agreements and implementation plans, nor where the funding is coming from? We remind the Minister that Neurodivergent First Nations children are protected by three UN Conventions in this matter, including our rights to Free and Prior Consent (FPIC).”

“It appears the Government has some talking to do with our mobs. We have seen no information around the success of the programs mentioned by the Minister for our kids. Where is the evidence-based approach in that?”

UNCRPD & UNDRIP Obligations

Australia has ratified the UNCRPD and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This creates obligations to:

- Article 4(3) UNCRPD – closely consult and actively involve Disabled people, through their representative organisations, in policy decisions affecting them.
- Article 7 UNCRPD – ensure Disabled children enjoy all human rights and freedoms equally.

- Article 15(1) UNCRPD – prohibit medical or scientific experimentation without free consent.
- Article 17 UNCRPD – guarantee respect for physical and mental integrity.
- Article 25 UNCRPD – ensure health interventions are based on free and informed consent.
- Article 19 UNDRIP – require Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from Indigenous peoples before adopting measures that affect them.

Quotes from Community Leaders

Sarah Langston, Australian Neurodivergent Parents Association (ANPA):

“These programs are being presented as harmless, but they are in fact experimental interventions on children without consent. That is a direct breach of international law.”

“Parents are not being told the risks of masking and compliance training. This is not informed consent — it is state-sanctioned experimentation on babies and breaches the UNCRPD.”

“If the government will not regulate these programs, the Disabled community will. The DPRO Tick is about protecting children and ensuring families have transparent, rights-based options.”

Hannah Reeve, Regional Autistic Engagement Network (RAEN):

“Behaviour change programs that experiment on babies without transparency or informed consent breach international law. The government has ignored its obligations under the UNCRPD — so the Disabled community is stepping in to protect children and families.”

Heidi La Paglia, Autistic Advocate, RAEN:

“The so-called Thriving Kids program is being presented as evidence-based, but in reality it is designed to suppress Autistic traits and reduce diagnoses — a dangerous and fundamentally flawed logic.”

“Teaching children to mask their Autism does not make their disability disappear; it leads to burnout, poor mental health, and, in the worst cases, suicidality.”

“Mark Butler’s suggestion that Autism is not permanent, and his use of functional labels like ‘mild to moderate,’ is beyond comprehension. This rhetoric is outdated, harmful, and misinformed.”

“This is not co-design, it is not evidence-based, and it is not safe for our community. We need independent evaluation, genuine consultation with Autistic people, and investment in supports that affirm — not erase — neurodivergence.”

Next Steps

Until programs provided under Thriving Kids meet these standards and undergo independent DPRO assessment, they will be flagged as unsafe and subject to a nationwide boycott. The DPRO approval mark and an application and assessment process will be released late next week.

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