

## Response to the National Not-for-profit Blueprint December 2023

### About Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI)

Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI) is the peak body for professionals and researchers working with young children with developmental delay or disability and their families. It is an Australian research-to-practice network (NFP) focussed on outcomes for young children with developmental disabilities. PRECI was established as a not-for-profit public company limited by guarantee in June 2022. [preci.org.au](http://preci.org.au)

**Our vision** is excellence and equity in services for young children with developmental disabilities or at risk of developmental delay, and their families.

**Our purpose** is to lead Australian early childhood intervention<sup>1</sup> (ECI) research, knowledge translation, quality practice, and policy for young children with developmental disabilities.

PRECI has been formed to:

- provide a national network connecting ECI practitioners<sup>2</sup> and researchers with a focus on supporting collaborative research, knowledge sharing and peer support.
- provide ECI professionals, community organisations, researchers, higher education institutions and policymakers with an authoritative source of information about best practice in ECI.
- identify, develop, promote, and raise awareness of advances in effective models of service delivery to ensure consistent implementation of best practice for young children and families.
- promote a national approach to coordinated and comprehensive pre-service, in-service, and post-graduate training opportunities for professionals working with children with developmental delay and disability, and their families and related mainstream services, on contemporary and evidence-informed practices.
- develop a national research framework and conduct research projects to advance and inform ECI within Australia.
- promote interdisciplinary collaborations to ensure advances in research and translation of research into practice.
- provide nationally coordinated and timely responses to federal policy, funding, and service delivery guidelines to support consistent contemporary practice in ECI.

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<sup>1</sup> Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is described as “the process of providing specialised support and services for infants and young children with disability and/or developmental delay, and their families in order to promote development, well-being and community participation”. (ECIA Vic/Tas, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> ECI practitioners are minimum bachelor qualified members of a collaborative team (e.g., speech pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, specialist teachers, social workers...)

PRECI board members<sup>3</sup> hold leadership positions across various professional and research organisations across Australia. Their views are based on Australian and international research and practice and have been continuously sought by Federal and State governments for the last 30 years.

## Introduction to the response

Society needs a robust Not-for-profit sector to deliver social services in responsive, innovative, place-based, and culturally appropriate ways that government cannot. When addressing the questions asked in response to NFP Sector Development Blueprint Issues Paper we need to recognise that many issues are common but also that some sectors are struggling because of specific funding models. When sectors become a market and there is competition from for-profit and not-for-profit, the nature of social services and care are impacted. This is because organisations now need to make financial decisions to be viable. This includes decisions on how to deliver the least costly services, limit available services, offer less non-billable activities and limit support to staff that takes them away from service delivery eg supervision, training and professional development opportunities. This last point reduces the quality and outcomes of the very services and supports being provided. Organisations have been required to create marketing and financial management teams.

So why is this?

Reference:

[Considine, M. \(2022\). \*The Care-less State. Reforming Australia's Social Services.\* Melbourne University Pub. ISBN: 9780522879018](#)

## Disability sector

Not-for-profit services in the disability and/or early childhood intervention sector are a case in point when considering the role of markets. Many are long established charities (40, 50, 100, 150 years) and have for many of the 10 years of the NDIS rollout reported that they were digging into their reserves to keep social services afloat. The National Disability Services [NDS report shows 'worst year' for disability providers](#), and documents what a precarious state the sector is in. This is in the back-drop of the <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report> which has found “People with disability experience much higher rates of violence than people without disability.”

The disability sector itself (which includes the ECI sector) is not homogenous and does not deliver the same types of services. This means that impacts need to be considered separately eg supported accommodation is impacted by different

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<sup>3</sup> See below for current PRECI Board members.

pressures to early childhood intervention (children aged - 9yrs) due to the way funding is offered, what regulations are required and what practices are applied by whom.

As funding is now determined by price guides and billable services the culture of an organisation changes. Regulation increases and is more costly in terms of money and time. Fundraising is more challenging as participants, members and the community see you as a business, not a community organisation. This is exacerbated by media attention to fraudulent behaviours by organisations in receipt of government funding which has led to distrust of many charities. This a major problem currently as the NDIS Review Report has highlighted, particularly in the safety and fraud areas. Grants are required to fund gaps and much needed supports and services. This process is highly competitive and limits stability. PRECI's submissions and response to the NDIS Review Report can be found [here](#).

Our response to the NFP Blueprint is focussed directly to the Blueprint's targeted questions.

### What do you think of these key qualities of the future sector?

#### **PRECI'S comments and recommendations:**

The key qualities will future proof the NFP sector and cover all areas required. The NFP sector cannot achieve these qualities without equal participation by government. The future of the sector is dependent on robust government policies and practices.

### What is missing or needs to be framed differently?

#### **PRECI'S comments and recommendations:**

- Effective and responsive to change: PRECI recommends the addition of the word 'sustainable'. The reason for this suggested change is that sustainability must be a goal of all areas of the community ie diversity, inclusion. Healthy does not target this point.  
'.....and contribute to the innovations and debates needed for healthy and sustainable society'.
- People-powered and centred: PRECI recommends the addition of wording to emphasise the role of government and philanthropy in supporting the NFP sector. The reason for this suggested change: If the greatest assets of the NFP sector is its volunteers, staff and people, then the government and philanthropy need to commit to policy and practices that value them. 'Pay

what it takes', reduce red tape, capacity build, share resources, create less onerous funding applications that give equity of access and give recognition of all contributions. Policy and activities will only be fit for people and communities if people, communities and government work together.

'The greatest assets of the NFP sector are its volunteers, its staff and the people who participate in its activities and use its services and this asset needs to be supported. An effective future sector is committed to working with people, communities and government in designing and improving its offerings.' This enables the last statement to be deleted.

- Diverse, inclusive and cross-culturally capable: No change
- Collaborative and connected: PRECI recommends calling out the key players required to collaborate to make this point more explicit. The reason for this suggested change: Without collaboration with and by government and philanthropy, the NFP sector can't respond to change in a timely manner. With collaboration, forward planning, strategy development, resourcing and capacity building is streamlined and effective. Government and philanthropy need to 'pay what it takes' and support this with leadership. How can the NFP sector futureproof its operating environment without intelligence from government. How can NFP collaboration occur without resourcing and capacity building by government and philanthropy?  
'Collaboration is also needed by government, philanthropy and the NFP sector to support operating needs .....'.
- Digitally enabled, informed by evidence and data capable: No change
- Resourced and resourceful: No change

## What are the most pressing areas for action from your perspective?

### PRECI'S comments and recommendations:

#### Priority 1

- Mechanisms for good government-sector communications, investment in evidence generated through the sector and protection of NFP rights to advocate.

Collaboration with government to share their knowledge, fund, partner and capacity build NFP organisations to research gaps, collect data, measure social impact and design and implement services is the way we can use resources effectively and build healthy sustainable communities.

## Priority 2

- Full funding of sector services, and approaches to tendering and procurement that strengthen organisational sustainability and the benefits of collaboration.

‘Pay what it takes’ and resource through knowledge, infrastructure, collaboration and digital capability will strengthen and capacity build the NFP sector and value their greatest assets. Fund people not ‘things’. NFPs can do more with more staff rather than resources. They need staff to use resources. They need employees to increase volunteering and maintain strong volunteer teams. ‘Paying what it takes’ allows organisations to employ the experienced and qualified staff required and creates organisational stability, continuous improvement, succession planning and retention of staff. All of these factors strengthen services. Tenders that won’t fund the current workforce waste money and knowledge and ask organisations to do more at a loss. NFP organisations need to be valued as businesses and treated as such.

Grants and tenders create collaborative partnerships. Work is put to tender as government and communities need the service. A successful partnership starts before the tender design by working with the NFP sector, big and small, and sector knowledge experts eg organisations like PRECI, universities, professional bodies, to codesign the work. This enables researchers to set goals and measure achieved outcomes. This partnership can then continue through implementation, analysis, reporting and future planning.

## What is missing and what is of lower priority?

### PRECI’S comments and recommendations:

- PRECI believes that if the focus is on the above 2 priorities, then the remaining will fall into place and their achievement supported.

PRECI board members would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss our recommendations with the Blueprint Committee.

Kind regards  
Denise Luscombe (Chair) on behalf of the PRECI Board

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**Current PRECI Board Members (in alphabetical order)**

Dr Anoo Bhojti: *Senior Lecturer, Monash University, Dept of Occupational Therapy*

Dr Kerry Bull: *ECI consultant*

Paula Buttigieg: *Executive Director Wize Therapy*

Kerry Dominish: *CEO EarlyEd*

John Forster: *CEO Noah's Ark Inc.*

Megan Fox: *National Early Childhood Specialist, Mission Australia*

Dr Susana Gavidia-Payne: *Adjunct Associate Professor, Educational and Developmental Psychology, RMIT University*

Assoc Prof Christine Johnston: *School of Education Western Sydney University*

Denise Luscombe: *ECI Consultant, Director Postural Care Australia*

Dr Tim Moore: *Senior Research Fellow, The Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital*