

**Community Affairs Legislation Committee – Public Hearing
National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future
Generations) Bill 2026**

Opening statement

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today. I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands we are on today, the Ngunnawal people. I pay respect to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention (PRECI) was formed in 2022. Our vision is excellence and equity in services for young children with developmental concerns, delay or disability, and their families. In practice this means high-quality services for children, no matter where they live. Our purpose is to lead Australian early childhood intervention research, knowledge translation, quality practice and policy.

Early childhood intervention is grounded in the understanding that children learn from the people they spend the most time with, and in the places where they naturally live, learn and play. The interplay of a range of factors that influence child development requires specific consideration that recognises the complexity of child development, and the broader context in which it occurs.

PRECI would like to address four key areas in relation to the proposed Bill.

In terms of access to the scheme, while PRECI welcomes functional impact being considered to determine eligibility, it is important that the definition of ‘substantially reduced functional capacity’ be considered not just in relation to the individual child but their family, ecosystem and environment.

Making substantially reduced functional capacity the threshold for access presents a risk for young children. Babies and young children who receive an early diagnosis but may not yet be exhibiting significantly reduced functional capacity have the potential to benefit greatly from access to best practice early childhood intervention.

Intervening early, with the knowledge humans learn more rapidly in the early years than any other life stage, can help to strengthen development and participation and may reduce future support requirements. In the context of children with a known disability, waiting until a significant functional limitation is evident goes against the principles of early childhood intervention and risks missing critical developmental windows, taking significantly greater resourcing to support achievement of outcomes.

Children develop in the context of their environment. The social and environmental context surrounding the child must be considered during any assessment of functional capacity, with a focus on authentic assessment to ensure consideration of participation in everyday routines and activities is incorporated.

There is a risk that the requirement to demonstrate all available treatment has been undertaken may limit access to the NDIS during critical periods of early development. Allied

health therapies available through the current Medicare system usually have a significant gap fee attached, which can make them inaccessible. There is also an established gap in public health service availability, especially in regional and remote areas.

These system challenges have the potential to delay entry to the NDIS for children who would otherwise benefit from high-quality ECI.

Secondly, in the context of reasonable and necessary support, it must be recognised that families of children with disability are likely to be contending with a range of challenges, including significantly increased stress, in addition to their child's support needs.

Consideration of what is reasonable and necessary must be viewed not only in relation to the child's support needs, but the wider family context, rather than blanket definitions of what constitutes 'parental responsibility.' Preserving and supporting overall family wellbeing ensures that families have the capacity to effectively support their child's development and participation.

Thirdly, transitions in early childhood often occur more frequently than any other life stage. Despite the best planning, it can be challenging to anticipate the impact of transitions such as entering early childhood education, going to school or the arrival of new siblings. Limiting access to unscheduled plan reviews has the potential to compromise the effectiveness of early childhood intervention by reducing the responsiveness of support to changes in child and family needs.

Finally, in relation to pricing, we emphasise the need for all appropriate information to be considered to support decision-making, with specific reference to early childhood intervention and implementation of the National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention.

The complexity of early childhood intervention must be considered in the context of pricing decisions. Best practice early childhood intervention requires investment in building relationships, not only with the family but between practitioners as part of a collaborative team.

Best practice early childhood intervention is delivered through everyday routines and settings, in the places children live, learn and play. We are concerned that current price arrangements can make delivery of ECI in community settings less financially viable, despite this approach being recognised as best practice in the National Best Practice Framework.

Summary

In summary, PRECI acknowledges the need for reform that protects the future of the NDIS. However, we emphasise the importance of specific consideration of the unique needs and experiences of young children and their families in the reform process.

Presented by Lauren Falconer and Talia Pulis on behalf of the PRECI Board