

**INQUIRY INTO FOUNDATIONAL AND DISABILITY
SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies
Association

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Submission to Select Committee Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales

About ANZACATA

ANZACATA is the professional association and self-regulating body for Creative Arts Therapists registered in Australia, New Zealand and Asia. It has over 2000 registered clinical members, including more than 1200 working in Australia. They voluntarily join ANZACATA and abide by its rigorous requirements for membership to demonstrate their commitment to professional and ethical conduct as therapists.

ANZACATA provides regulation and registration of highly qualified Creative Arts Therapists. It conducts annual audits of their compliance with clinical supervision requirements and with currency in the professional field and it offers insurance for the client work they do. ANZACATA is a member of [NASRHP](#) and has in place all the requirements expected of a regulatory body, including scope of practice documentation, mandatory declaration requirements, complaint procedures and policies relating to currency of practice. With an ANZACATA registered practising member, state governments are ensured of high-quality professional allied health clinicians.

ANZACATA's response to the Parliamentary Inquiry Briefing Paper

ANZACATA is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Representatives Select Committee on Foundational and Disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales inquiry. We believe the NDIS review recommendation for a jointly designed, funded and commissioned set of foundational supports outside an individualised NDIS budget has the potential to transform access to disability supports in Australia. A well designed, well-funded and coordinated foundational supports program can remove barriers to accessing support and change the way services are delivered, with care provided where children can benefit most, including in schools and community settings.

We provide a brief response about the role of Creative Arts Therapy as a foundational support for children and young people with disabilities within a new foundational supports system. Our response falls under 'terms of reference i) any other related matter.'

What is Creative Arts Therapy?

Creative Arts Therapists are allied health professionals who utilise various art forms, media, and processes, including visual arts, drama, dance, and movement to help clients explore emotions, enhance self-awareness, and alleviate anxiety. Creative processes can be a way for clients to explore and express emotions that may be hard to put into words.



Creative Arts Therapy is an evidence-based approach that draws upon theoretical frameworks from psychology and psychotherapy, while also integrating principles unique to the creative arts, recognising the interplay between artistic expression and psychological well-being

Demand for psychosocial supports

The Parliamentary Inquiry briefing paper found over 68,000 children in NSW have a psychosocial disability. It also noted that autistic children and those with developmental delay are the most significant contributors to the unanticipated demand on the NDIS, and that outside the NDIS, supports are inadequate to meet the needs of children and families. The lack of access to services for those children not on the NDIS creates a vicious cycle of increasing demand for the NDIS and conversely fewer services for those outside the system.

While the NDIS is a vital source of funding and support for children with psychosocial disabilities and developmental delays, it cannot address the unmet demand for services. Equally its individualised funding model too often sees care delivered in clinical settings, taking children away from their peers and from the places where children could most benefit from that care. With one in five NSW children starting school with issues in at least one developmental domain, the mainstreaming of coordinated foundational supports for children should be a priority.

The role of Creative Arts Therapy in supporting children and young people with disabilities

Creative Arts Therapists work extensively with children who are neurodiverse, experience developmental delay and have psychosocial and other disabilities. Increasingly, Australian state governments are seeing the value of Creative Arts Therapy in schools, and we often work now alongside teaching staff offering specialist programs and one-on-one therapy for children in schools (for example the Victorian Schools Mental Health Menu program). ANZACATA clinicians typically work with complex cases where frequently the child (or family) has exhausted all other options, and a Creative Arts Therapist is recommended (often by a Psychologist, Psychiatrist or Occupational Therapist) due to:

- Multiple diagnoses requiring integrated therapeutic approaches
- Traditional single-modality interventions having proven insufficient
- The child does not or prefers not to use spoken words to communicate
- Goals that may appear straightforward on the surface - such as 'making a friend' 'attending school' - often requiring sophisticated therapeutic work addressing underlying challenges in, for example, confidence, communication, and self-regulation.
- The alternative would be multiple separate specialist services at a higher total cost.

Supporting children within the education system

The Parliamentary report discussed the difficulties children with disabilities face in accessing the range of supports they need to participate in mainstream education system and the ongoing impact into adolescence and beyond.

Support programs often focus on physiological functioning to address physical barriers children with disabilities face, whether that be mobility, speech or coordination. Beyond these physiological services, foundational supports addressing psychosocial needs play an important role in helping children to enter, remain and thrive within mainstream educational systems. Creative Arts Therapy is shown to be particularly effective for children who are neurodiverse, including children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A full review of evidence for the effectiveness of Creative Arts Therapy is attached). These benefits include

- Enabling communication - Creative Arts Therapy offers a valuable non-verbal communication method, particularly beneficial to children with ASD, learning difficulties, or complex disabilities. Children are able to express themselves through art, allowing them to convey meaning without words.
- Reducing anxiety – anxiety is a common barrier to attending school for children with psychosocial disabilities. Creative Arts Therapy are shown to provide a safe and non-verbal medium for children to explore and process emotions, allowing them to externalise feelings and identify triggers for anxiety.
- Emotional regulation – Creative Arts therapeutic processes help children develop coping strategies and emotional expression through artistic means, contributing to improved self-management skills. Evidence shows demonstrable improvements in managing emotional dysregulation and anger, including reductions in emotional outbursts and improved communication.
- Improvement in cognitive and sensorimotor function - Creative Arts Therapy engages the sensorimotor system, aiding in the development of fine motor skills, balance, and flexibility. For clients with physical disabilities or motor impairments, Creative Arts Therapy can target fine motor co-ordination and hand-eye co-ordination through activities such as sculpting, drawing intricate patterns, or working with textiles.
- Promoting cognitive activity - Creative Arts Therapy supports cognitive functioning particularly for children with neurological conditions, helping them engage in memory recall, maintain attention and improve focus.

Improving the accessibility of Creative Arts Therapy and other foundational supports for children with disabilities

Currently, children with NDIS packages can access Creative Arts Therapy. (Note in October 2024, the NDIA announced its intention to reduce the level of access to these services. This decision is currently under review, in response to significant community pushback). Outside the NDIS, high out of pocket costs make Creative Arts Therapy and many other allied health services unaffordable for people with disabilities.

The NDIS review recommended that Foundational Supports provide evidence-based, early supports at the Tier 2 level originally envisaged by the Productivity Commission in the NDIS design. These supports would sit between a mainstream system that ensures the inclusion of children with disabilities, and highly targeted, specialist disability supports. ANZACATA believes many of these foundational support services should be delivered in non-clinical spaces, such as schools, early learning centres and at home. Creative Arts Therapy works effectively in these settings, and therapists are highly responsive to the individual needs of children, whether working with individual children or in small groups.

ANZACATA recognises NSW's leadership in undertaking this inquiry. The establishment of well designed, well-funded and sustainable foundational supports will require high levels of coordination and cooperation between governments, health and social services, disability services and others. In designing its foundational supports, we urge the NSW Government to consider the full range of services that improve the lives of children with disabilities, including psychosocial supports like Creative Arts Therapy and allow for Creative Arts Therapists working in multi-disciplinary teams or as stand-alone therapists to offer their unique and evidenced based support.