

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

Organisation: At One Play Therapy

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Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in New South Wales, Legislative Council

NSW Parliament House

6 Macquarie Street

Sydney NSW 2000

disabilitysupports@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Hon Natasha Maclaren – Jones and committee members,

We are writing in response to your invitation for submissions for the inquiry into Foundational and Disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales.

We are a collective of highly qualified Play Therapists from the Northern Rivers of NSW, (stretching from Kyogle, Lismore, Ballina, Kingscliff and Lennox Head.

We understand that the select committee was established to inquire into and report on child development, early childhood intervention services and other foundational and disability supports available to children and young people with developmental concerns, delays, differences or disabilities in New South Wales.

Federally, the NDIS has supported children with disabilities. Play Therapy has been one support child participants (and their families) have been able to access under the 'Other Professional' line number. In light of the current NDIA review to reform the NDIS, Music Therapy and Art Therapy (with



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dedicated line numbers), and the 'Other Professional' line number are at risk of removal or changes in service provisions as Play Therapy is a creative and experiential therapy, like Art Therapy and Music Therapy, a submission had been made to the Dr Stephen Duckett review, and directly to the NDIA for any internal review processes.

We are concerned that NDIS child participants may experience difficulty in accessing this child-centred neuro-affirmingly therapeutic support in the future.

The Australian Play Therapy community will continue to advocate for the inclusion of Play Therapy as an evidence-based support in NDIS moving forward, but we are also aware of the state and territory review of foundational supports. We request that Play Therapy is included in your review of foundational and disability supports for children in NSW.

Play Therapy as an essential foundational childhood support

Play Therapy is a researched-supported, evidence-based, developmental and mental health intervention that uses play – children's natural language – to address psychological, physical, social and emotional challenges through developmentally tailored therapeutic techniques.

Play Therapy professionals who deliver this therapeutic support are tertiary-qualified in Play Therapy (AQF 7 or above) and meet strict registration and ongoing compliance requirements. Play Therapy is one of many allied health professions (with AHPA and NASRAHP memberships) currently providing therapeutic supports through NDIS, with specialised focus on child participants.

Play Therapy is beneficial for all children up to the age of 18 years and in young adults with developmental difficulties.



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Play Therapy has demonstrated meaningful outcomes for children with diverse developmental needs and disabilities, addressing a spectrum of challenges including children with ASD, intellectual disabilities, dysregulated emotions, sensory processing differences, social communication barriers, behavioural regulation, anxiety, trauma responses, and developmental delays – creating pathways for more adaptive functioning and enhanced quality of life. (Bratton, Ray, Rhine & Jones, 2005; Leblanc & Richie, 2001; Lin & Bratton, 2015; Pester, Lenz & Dell'Aquila, 2019; Ray et al., 2015).

It has shown to have a preventative impact, reducing the need for more intensive later interventions, which aligns strongly with the review's focus on early intervention approaches.

The view of families of child NDIS participants

Our collective of specialised Play Therapists have provided essential support to hundreds of children and families across our communities. Parents frequently report that despite engaging with various practitioners (including occupational therapists, psychologists, and speech pathologists), their child's needs weren't fully addressed until introducing Play Therapy.

The developmentally sensitive approach we offer compliments existing therapies while providing parents with practical skills to implement at home and deeper insights into their child's unique perspective – creating a more comprehensive support system that bridges critical gaps in traditional care pathways.

Play therapy sessions provide a safe, non-judgemental environment for children to express themselves and work through any issues with the



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support of the highly trained therapist using specific skills to support the child.

Many of these families would not have been able to access this vital foundational support without government funding.

(Please see page 27 in '**Play Therapy and the NDIS: How Play Therapists support NDIS child participants and their families**' - (attached in email) - for a parents perspective – a family from Goonellabah in the Northern Rivers.)

Age-appropriate Supports and working Systemically

Play therapy not only addresses age appropriate supports, it is also in a unique position to support on a systemic level, whereby play therapists trained in the Filial Therapy Model, support and educate parents / caregivers to continue the profound benefits of play in the home – empowering families with sustainable skills beyond direct therapy sessions - increasing positive parent – child relationships and connection within the home environment, reducing parent stress.

Play therapists can also work closely with the child's school or childcare service insuring collaboration across sectors to create a valuable network system.

TORA (Teacher's Optimal Relationship Approach) was founded by Dr Kate Renshaw. TORA is an evidence -based approach adapting Child Play Therapy and Filial Therapy for teachers and other practitioners to support in schools and classrooms.



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Accessibility

Play therapy is adaptable to telehealth, providing service to non-metropolitan and rural areas

As mentioned above, early intervention of play therapy can significantly reduce costs later on for teens or even adults. Play therapy can also be delivered in groups, increasing accessibility and is compatible with existing NDIS structures.

Trauma-Informed Approach

Play Therapy directly addresses children's mental health needs and provides supports for children in out-of-home care and in child protection services. Working not only with the child / children, but also supporting carers to better understand their child's needs and to be able to provide more consistent parenting strategies to connect and build a trusting relationship overall.

Non-verbal processing of traumatic experiences are particularly effective for children with complex trauma histories.

We have experienced first-hand the importance of NDIS funded play therapy, and are fortunate to have industry documentation developed by [Dr Kate Renshaw](#) and the team at [Playroom Therapy](#) for the express purpose of the NDIA review into NDIS supports.

We have collated several industry documents to assist in the inquiry process:



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1. **Play Therapy Evidence Summary** (Renshaw & Scira, 2025), a 5-page document answering the key areas requested for this current review process. With additional supplementary materials including:
 - a. Appendix 1: Level 1 Evidence for Play Therapy (including disability and Early Childhood Supports).
 - b. Appendix 2: Level 2-5 Evidence for Play Therapy (disability focused)

Note: The Journal articles cited in the Level 1-5 evidence for Play Therapy review can be provided upon request.

2. **Play Therapy and the NDIS: How Play Therapists support NDIS child participants and their families** (Renshaw & Scira, 2024), a more descriptive document detailing how play therapists therapeutically support children to achieve functional capacity gains.
3. **Evidence-based psychological interventions in the treatment of mental disorders: A literature review (5th Ed.)** (APS, 2024). An update from the 2018 (4th Ed.) provides an “overview of the empirical research evidence for a range of psychological interventions in the treatment of selected mental health disorders in adults, children and adolescents”. Play Therapy is included in this document:
 - a. Definition of Play Therapy (p. 11)
 - b. Research evidence (Level 2) in support of treating depression with Play Therapy (p. 238)
 - c. Research evidence (Level 1) in support of treating PTSD with Play Therapy (p. 265)
 - d. Research evidence (Level 2 and 4) in support of treating neurodevelopmental disorders (e.g. ADHD) (p. 313)



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e. Research evidence (Level 2 x 2) in support of treating disruptive behaviour or dissocial disorders (e.g. ODD / conduct disorder) (p. 322; p. 323)

4. **Play Matters** Bradbury, A., Wright, D., Boardman, K., Thompson, P., Jarvis, P., Cowly, S., Veale, V., Wayne, D., Swalies, R., Scollan, A., Grimmer, T., & Renshaw, K. (2025) [Play Matters](#).

Chapter 12 is dedicated to Play Therapy in the early years

We appreciate your consideration of our submission to this critical inquiry. Our team stands ready to provide any further information about how Play Therapy can strengthen foundational supports for children in NSW. We look forward to the committee's recommendations for enhancing developmental and disability services to better serve the needs of children and families throughout the state.

Warm Regards

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