Submission
No 22

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

Organisation: Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW

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MDAA

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

NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, work, and meet. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

We recognise their enduring connection to their land, waters, and skies and honour their rich cultural heritage and knowledge systems.

We commit to listening, learning, and standing in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, walking alongside them in the ongoing journey towards justice and reconciliation.

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Inquiry into foundational and disability supports available for children and young people in New South Wales

About MDAA

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW (MDAA) is the peak body in NSW for all people with disability (PWD) and their families and carers, with a particular focus on those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) and non-English Speaking (NES) background with disability.
Our vision is a society where everyone regardless of background or disability feels welcomed, included and supported.

Our aim is to promote, protect, and secure the rights and interests of people with disabilities.

MDAA works within a cultural sensitivity framework to ensure the safety, comfort, and well-being of our diverse consumers.

At MDAA, we provide support in the form of Individual Advocacy, with the aim to build the capacity of CaLD people with disability and ensure that the rights of individuals are promoted, protected, and secured.

MDAAs other services include Systemic Advocacy, NDIS Appeals and Reviews, and ongoing projects including The Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (ACVVS).

About this Submission

MDAA welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Select Committee on Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in New South Wales. As a peak body representing CaLD people with disability and their families and carers across NSW, MDAA is uniquely positioned to offer insights into the challenges and barriers of accessing necessary early intervention and support services for children and young people. Our submission is informed by consumer and staff consultation, and organisational data highlighting the clear need for funded foundational supports in NSW. Early intervention and social supports for children and young people is essential in achieving good health and wellbeing outcomes and ensuring that all children have equitable access to education and community regardless of disability.

What are Foundational Supports?

Foundational supports are services that would exist outside of the NDIS, making certain supports available to people ineligible for NDIS funding. These services would be a great option for someone who does not have complex needs and require high levels of support and can greatly uplift overall outcomes for children with disabilities and their families and carers. The NDIS Review recommended increased funding of foundational supports and highlighted its impact and necessity for particularly families and young people. Through investing in foundational support, strain on the NDIS itself can be minimised, children and young people are well supported through life transitions and independent living, and families and carers feel supported and well equipped with the tools and information needed to perform their carer duties effectively.

There are 2.5 million Australians relying on services and supports outside of the NDIS. Many, including MDAA consumers, highlight that non-NDIS services often do not meet the needs of the consumers and are falling short. The MDAA Annual Report 2023-24 also indicates that a large chunk of NDIS work that is in demand regarding out consumers are ‘disputed supports.’ The roll out of well-funded and appropriate foundational services would decrease the strain on the NDIS as a whole as it would be able to prioritise the needs of individuals with higher or more complex needs. It could save families time and money that they would have spent of specialist visits, gathering documentation, and navigating applying to the NDIS. This would also ensure that non-government organisations like the MDAA can assist the significant number of consumers who may not qualify for the NDIS and can help bridge critical service gaps, providing early intervention, advocacy, and community-based assistance that enhance quality of life and promote social inclusion.

Role of services and supports on a child’s overall development, health, and wellbeing

Based on MDAA consultations and case studies, majority of consumers stated that the outcomes of their child with disability would have increased or stabilised with better access to early intervention supports. Children and young people with disability and their families and carers need to have more options when it comes to services and support, and early intervention support should be of importance.

Foundational supports will allow children and young people with disabilities to thrive, as well as grant their families and carers support. Ongoing support, particularly in the social sphere can be a great respite for families and carers with children with disabilities.

Investment in these foundational services could mean that families have better overall health outcomes, in particular better mental health outcomes and the stress that many parents and carers face can become more manageable. Children and young people are then better able to participate fully in their community, school, and see increased social development. The case studies presented below highlight and reinforce these points.

Case Study 1

Based on the experiences of parents of children with disability who seek support from MDAA, NSW Education often falls short in meeting the needs of these children and in providing ethical and appropriate interventions and strategies Many parents feel as though their children are not well supported and are often judged and punished for their disability. Teachers and staff often lack knowledge regarding disability and the accommodations needed for children with disability. This includes neglecting to implement or follow through with interventions and action plans created alongside parents, as seen through the following case study:

> *Two girls (year 3 and 4, both with Laron Syndrome) were not being adequately provided adjusted curriculum based on their disabilities. One girl had a medical episode in which according to the safety plan, an ambulance was to be called, however this was not done, and the parent felt the school had been negligent to her safety. The parents of the girls felt the response of the principle was disrespectful and diminishing of the incidents.*
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> *The family were unable to reach a resolution with the school as they reported several incidents in the past where their raised concerns were not addressed. The parents had come to MDAA for advocacy support where an advocate worked with the parents in submitting a complaint to the educational director of Auburn network of schools. The response of the educational director was highly unsatisfactory as it did not address the behaviour of the school principal or the culmination of issues leading to this incident. The parents opted to not re-enrol their daughters into the school and took on home schooling as the other option.*

In line with the NSW Governments recent ‘Performance and Wellbeing Framework’ priority, adequate support in schools is essential to the wellbeing and health of children with disability.

Incorporating foundational supports or service assisting families and carers in service connection into NSW schools can help streamline access to supports for families and children with disability allowing connections to specialised allied health supports, and giving families and carers tools and information needed to support their children. To ensure that children with disability receive the support they need, schools must first be equipped with the tools and information required to carry out their duty of care. Most of a child's life is spent in schooling, making schools a main point of contact for families and carers. For this reason, MDAA recommends that foundational supports, including access to appropriate tools, resources, and information, be integrated into NSW schools to better support students with disability.

Case Study 2

Investment in foundational supports can mean relief and support for parents and carers. By having access to adequate and appropriate tools and information, parents and carers can better manage their time, their children's schedules, and lessen the stress and pressure they endure every day. Services assisting families, carers, children and young people with disability in navigating health systems and community services ensure that appropriate and adequate services are delivered, and parents and carers feel less overwhelmed. This is evidenced through the growing number of MDAA consumers assistance in connecting with services. The below case encapsulates this growing need:

> *TL is a mother to a 23-year-old son (K) with autism. L is the sole carer for K with little to no respite and has been searching and compiling services that may help K with living more independently. L says that she would like K to gain employment and be able to confidently live independently if he chooses to. L expressed that supports to help her connect with services are few and far between and the constant searching and care for her son is taking a toll on her mental and physical health. She is overly tired and burnt out.*
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> *L says she would greatly benefit from extra support from connector services and respite so that she is able to better manage her stress and her own health and provide K with the care he deserves.*

The wellbeing of families and carers is important and must be recognised as a priority. Foundational supports not only have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of children with disability, but also help families and carers feel more supported, equipped, and resilient in their caregiving roles. Reflecting the concerns and evidence presented, MDAA puts forward the following recommendations to the Select Committee:

Recommendations:

- Increased and continuous funding of advocacy services.
- Investment in culturally appropriate services and supports.
- Investment in age-appropriate services and supports.
- Ensure that information is widely accessible, in all formats. This includes translated information, employing staff of CaLD backgrounds, ensuring interpreters are used at every step.
- Children must be able to be supported at school, this cannot be done if teachers and other staff are not well trained or are ill informed about working with children with disability and their families.
- Connecting foundational supports or service hub with NSW Schools to streamline access to services and tools and information for families.
- Investment in service connector supports.
- Investment in respite services.

Closing Remarks

MDAA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and urges the Select Committee to consider the perspectives and lived experiences of CALD communities living with disability. As outlined throughout this submission, the current gaps in foundational supports are placing undue pressure on families, carers, and community organisations. Without timely access to culturally appropriate, accessible, and inclusive services, children and young people with disability risk being left behind, whether academically, socially, and in terms of health and wellbeing outcomes.

Foundational supports are not a luxury; they are a necessity. They provide a critical safety net for the many individuals who fall outside the NDIS framework, while also enhancing outcomes for those within it. With proper investment, these supports can promote inclusion, build capacity, and ease the long-term strain on government systems. Schools, families, and communities must be equipped with the right tools, training, and resources to ensure that all children, regardless of background or ability, are given the opportunity to thrive.

Reflecting on the evidence, lived experiences, and community needs outlined in this submission, MDAA respectfully asks Select Committee to consider these recommendations by addressing these systemic gaps and to support the implementation of meaningful, sustained, and inclusive foundational supports across New South Wales.