

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

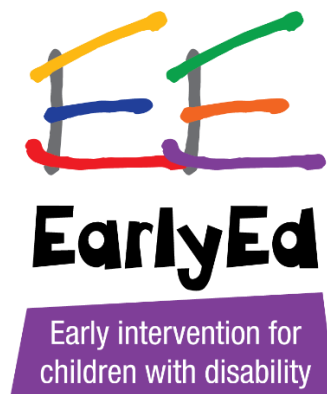
Organisation: EarlyEd
Date Received: 27 April 2025

NSW Inquiry into Foundational and Disability Supports Available for Children and Young People in NSW

27th April, 2025

Putting the *Early* back into Early Childhood Intervention

Submission by: Early Education (EarlyEd) Inc
Website: <https://www.earlyed.com.au/>



INTRODUCTION

This inquiry has provided a unique opportunity for NSW communities and the not-for-profit organisations that support children with a disability and developmental delay, and their families, to reveal the extent to which the moving of funding from the NSW Department of Aging Disability and Homecare (ADHC) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for early childhood intervention (ECI) has led to

- a loss of local collaboration and connection, and coordinated community solutions for children needing support
- impacts on the quality of services delivered to children and their families and
- reduction in equitable, accessible timely support and resources.

This submission will provide real examples of

- local gaps in supports for children that quickly opened up when the NDIS rolled out,
- where solutions have not been found to fill these gaps due to lack of investment in community service collaboration
- how community support for children with a disability and developmental delay is dependent on competitive philanthropic and small grant outcomes and interest.
- how very young children could no longer receive timely community supports,

This submission references assume the inquiry

- A. the unequivocal evidence of the impact or early childhood intervention for children and
- B. to be making use of the body of work developed by the

- NDIS - Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/working-together-deliver-ndis> and the responses to this publication
- Currently recognised descriptions of early childhood intervention by the NDIS <https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-approach/what-early-childhood-intervention>
- Currently recognised *ECIA National Guidelines: Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention* <https://www.dss.gov.au/early-childhood/resource/ecia-national-guidelines-best-practice-early-childhood-intervention>
- Current work undertaken by the Department of Social Services - *Early Childhood Targeted Action Plan action 2.4: Developing a framework for early childhood intervention* <https://www.dss.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-targeted-action-plan/early-childhood-targeted-action-plan-action-24-developing-framework-early-childhood-intervention>
- Current Outcomes of the Review of best practice in early childhood intervention Project: Imms, C., Moore T., Bull, K., Gavidia-Payne, S., Lami, F., Wilson, M., Allen, L. & Knight S. (2024). Review of best practice in early childhood intervention: Desktop review full report. https://www.preci.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ECI-TAP-Deliverable-1-Desktop-Review-Full-Report-V1.0_Nov2024.pdf
- The National Quality and safeguards Commission NDIS Practice Standards that apply to NDIS providers who are registered to provide early childhood supports to NDIS participants. Supplementary module: Early childhood supports <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/rules-and-standards/ndis-practice-standards/supplementary-module-early-childhood-supports>
- Quality support for children in the NDIS: A resource for parents and carers <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/rules-and-standards/quality-practice/quality-supports-children#paragraph-id-8784>

KEY MESSAGES

1. Revive the early childhood intervention Not-for-Profit sector that remains across the state:

Early childhood intervention services have been filling in the local gaps created by the adult centric system that is NDIS and the Early Childhood Approach. These gap services are now being referred to as Foundational Supports remain due to the commitment of organisations to the use of evidence- based practices, experiences of practitioners delivering early childhood intervention, community agencies supporting local families to understand and come to term with their child's developmental needs and most importantly feedback from families about their experiences navigating the system.

Many Early Childhood Intervention Not-for-Profit services formerly funded by the Aging Disability and Home care are well positioned to deliver Foundational Supports as they are trusted, connected locally and are currently delivering state government funded programs such as Targeted Earlier Intervention and Start Strong Pathways funded programs and are registered NDIS providers.

2. Ensure the Foundation Supports model represents the needs of all children and their families.

Supports for children need to match their developmental periods and stages of engagement in the community. Children have significantly different periods of development that is why we identify children differently even in the way we label them babies/ infants/ toddlers/ preschoolers/ school aged/preteens and teens. The experiences of the child's parents are significantly different at each developmental stage also. The EC Approach is for children 0-9 years though children need to be eligible to continue with NDIS.

Infants and babies need different support and whether Foundational or NDIS to preschoolers and school aged as they are being included in uniquely different social and community activities. Children older than 9 years need different supports.

Each group needs a skilled workforce for each area both in Foundational and NDIS Supports.

Specific Terms of Reference a. d. and e. will be addressed:

The submission will "report on child development, early childhood intervention services and other foundational and disability supports available for children and young people with developmental concerns, delays, differences or disabilities in New South Wales" for the following Terms of Reference:

(a) the role of such services and supports on a child's overall development, health and wellbeing

Issues:

Early Childhood Intervention Services are delivering community-based capacity building support (which are now referred to as both Mainstream and Targeted Foundational Supports and Navigators) across NSW.

Early Childhood Intervention practitioners continue to be asked by families, early childhood education services, schools, community playgroups and child and family services to support children not accessing or eligible for NDIS and to provide free support services or to assist with referrals due to

- long waiting times for families to access NDIS (Current feedback from ECI Partners are stating wats of 6-9 months if a child does not have a diagnosis and 2-3 months if they do have a diagnosis)

- lack of options if not eligible for NDIS,
- limited services fundable by NDIS that capacity build families

The remnants of the Department of Aging Disability and Homecare early child intervention services are currently delivering community-based capacity building support (what are now referred to as both Mainstream and Targeted Foundational Supports and Navigators) across NSW

- for children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families and the community services that support them
- funded by government and piecemeal outcomes of highly competitive short term community grants or contracts.

Early Childhood Intervention Services are struggling to fill in the gaps in supports for children with developmental delays or disability (which are effectively Foundational Supports)

The long-term financial drain on not-for-profit registered NDIS early childhood providers with no increase in funding for services has made it harder to deliver community supports for children with developmental delays or disabilities. Funding was not just withdrawn from early childhood intervention and therapeutic services when the Department of Aging Disability and Home care rolled back funding. Funding for open playgroups, parental emotional care through Family Support Workers ceased, holiday social activities, sibling support, parent group capacity building programs such as Hanen's ® It takes to Talk were not being delivered.

Case Study: Cubby House Toy Library Appendix 2

Loss of NDIS funding led to loss of free community disability specific capacity building supports.

Recommendations:

1. Fund early childhood intervention services continuing to deliver services to local families to offer a no wrong door approach. These trusted services are in place and connected to local services and can rapidly pivot to support the community more actively.
2. Fund through extensions and expansions of Start Strong Pathways funding Foundational supports that pay what it takes for capacity building program such as Toy Libraries.

(d) gaps and barriers to accessing early childhood intervention and their impact on a child's overall development, health and wellbeing, as well as on their family or carers and other government services and systems

Focus group: Babies and infants and their families

Issue: Continuing concerns lack of early, holistic coordination support and services for babies/infants and their families

A. Late aged in referrals for babies and infants to community NDIS early childhood intervention services (Note these same issues were first documented in an Inquiry in 2018). (Ref 3, 4) despite

- unequivocal evidence of added stress and depression for both mothers and on top of recognised stress of being a new parent
- international findings that supported transitions to home from NICU, have positive outcomes in the areas of parental well-being without negative impact on baby's health and that early childhood intervention during the early years including a focus

on infant-parent bonding and has positive effect parental stress and wellbeing and on the cognition of preterm infants.

- Approximately 13,000 babies born in NSW a year need special care. Special neonatal care is required by 17% of infants.
- A review synthesised that early supported transfer home interventions may improve and could have cost-saving implications for healthcare services (may save up to eight thousand pound per infant compared to usual NICU care). 9

B. Early childhood intervention support transitioning home after premature birth, NICU stays, after early diagnosis of disability or identification of developmental delay risk is currently not available, limited to medical support, delayed or based on eligibility requirements. The synthesis of evidence suggests that components of education, home visits, takeaway information, telephone support, education sessions and programme management are needed for early supported transfer to home intervention. 9

- Lack of collaboration between the health and early childhood intervention services – referrals not coming through from Neonatal Intensive Care Units, paediatricians and maternal and early childhood nurses.

C. Lack of data about how babies / infants and their families are being supported once they leave hospital from NSW Health or through NDIS.

- Lack of data from the NDIS Quarterly reports about the ages of referrals to the Early Childhood Approach and age at which a child receives an NDIS plan as the ages are grouped as 0-8years.

Recommendations:

Universal Screening for preterm children

Support for universal screening of young babies and infants born prematurely. Babies and infants until they are no longer risk for developmental concern, delay or disability are not monitored effectively.” REF 10 P62

Establish Bridging to home teams - More than just universal screening

Targeted Foundational Supports

Eligibility: All babies born prematurely, experiencing challenging births and neonatal experiences, involved with Neonatal Intensive Care or given an early diagnosis of disability or developmental delay.

Model: Families are met by early childhood intervention practitioner and offered resources and early childhood intervention follow up when at home, prior to leaving hospital.

Funding covers collaboration with relevant Health Department / Hospital teams and a Team Around the Child approach for the child and families Early Childhood Intervention Allied Health Team including Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathologist, Physiotherapist, Early Childhood Educators and Social Work/ Psychologist.

Links into the community will be made through with community mainstream playgroups, peer support groups and ECI specific programs e.g. MyTime, toy libraries, ECI playgroups.

Evidence:

- “Baby Bridge” approaches resulted in more infants born ≤ 30 weeks receiving early therapy services an average of 85 days earlier than historical controls. Ref Pineda et al 7
- Findings of the review suggest that early supported transfer home interventions may reduce hospital stay of babies (born before 37 weeks gestation) by up to 10 days (compared to routine NICU care), without increasing hospital readmission rates, worsening parental well-being, or impacting on infant weight gain or breastfeeding.¹⁶ The review synthesised that early supported transfer home

interventions may improve infant-parent bonding and could have cost-saving implications for healthcare services.¹⁷

- The synthesis of evidence suggests that components of education, home visits, takeaway information, telephone support, education sessions and programme management are needed for early supported transfer to home interventions. Ref Morgan et al 10

e) opportunities to increase engagement across sectors and improved collaboration across both government and non-government services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, early learning services, educational settings and health services

Issue: Collaborative practice: ongoing challenges of interdepartmental / non-government compounded by a competitive market driven early childhood intervention

Increasingly service system challenges are limiting the capacity of early childhood intervention to help children developmental concerns, delay or disability for children and their families with who live in Australia to reach their desired outcomes.

The newly released *Review of best practice in early childhood intervention: Review Report* articulates recommendations (**4.3 Service system and implementation issues p 62** Ref 11) that will help to improve implementation of early childhood intervention and its outcomes for children.

- Early identification systems
- Tiered supports with equity and individualisation
- Reaching and supporting marginalised families
- Easy, welcoming, strengths-based access and service pathway
- Connected systems to meet individual needs
- Informed choice and control – families
- Investment in peer support for parents is needed
- Workforce capacity building
- Inclusion and rights focused
- Consistent implementation and accessibility
- Accountability mechanisms

To make this happen collaboration and connection between government departments and community services need to be integrated. Structures need to be funded to facilitate coordination and cooperation.

Recommendations: Reintroduce a program similar to the Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program Model:

- Fund the
- creation of, and engagement in local community networks overseen by an elected committee chair and other supporting membership roles
- create regional groups that bring together regional representatives – meet bi-monthly and
- bring regional groups with representatives from the networks to meet with department representative – meet quarterly

The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program:

In 1991 the Department of Aging Disability and Home Care the commissioned the roll out of the Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program “to recommend ways to improve the planning, co-ordination and delivery of early intervention services for children with a diagnosed disability in NSW. Following its review in 1997 by David McRae, the project was

granted program status and was implemented across the State with funding from DET, NSW Health and DADAHC.” Ref: McRae 1, Ref 2 Roth, Ref 3Legislative Council By 2002, there was a network of 73 local committees in 16 local planning areas across the State and coordinated early childhood intervention services for children with a disability or developmental delay, and involved representatives from health, therapy, schools, early childhood education and support services working together with families”. Each committee would develop strategies to support coordination of services in each local area and was funded to manage the committee and deliver local programs.

Area committees would meet with representatives of the Management Committee and the Early Childhood Intervention Coordinator. Area Committees consisted of representatives of participating government agencies and NGO's and local network committees. Families also had representation on the area committees It was designed to support consistency and equity across the local area, build effective interdepartmental and NGO partnerships, respond to local needs, facilitate family-centred practices, improve coordination of services to give families ease of access and support cost effective planning and provision of services. Ref: Johnson 4

This initiative had a significant impact on connecting local providers and government agencies because it improved communication between families, service providers and policy makers to enable coordination of early childhood intervention services. It shared resources and knowledge and was able to capacity build services and keep each other informed.

References

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1. McRae, David & New South Wales. Ageing and Disability Department (1998). *The Early Intervention Coordination Project in New South Wales: an evaluation*. NSW Ageing and Disability Department, Sydney

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/27937561> (not publicly available)

2. Roth, Lenny & NSW PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY RESEARCH SERVICE (2007). *Government Policy and Services to Support and Include People with Disabilities, Briefing Paper* No 1/07

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<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Documents/government-policy-and-services-to-support-and-in/Policy%20and%20Services%20for%20People%20with%20Disabilities.pdf>

“Early childhood intervention coordination program DADHC is the lead agency of the Early Childhood Intervention Coordination (ECICP) Program, which aims to “provide coordinated early childhood intervention services for children with a disability or developmental delay, through involving people from health, therapy, education and support services working together with families”.167

The program’s main initiative has been “the establishment of a network of committees throughout the state that aim to facilitate communication between families, service providers and policy makers to enable coordination of early childhood intervention services”.168

Page 49

3. New South Wales Parliamentary Library cataloguing-in-publication data: New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. *Standing Committee on Social Issues Foundations for learning: A new vision for New South Wales / Standing Committee on Social Issues*. [Sydney, N.S.W.] :The Committee, 2002. – 83 p. ; 30 cm. (Issues Paper 4, March 2002) (Parliamentary paper ; no. 9) Chair: Jan Burnswoods 12 March 2002". ISBN 0731397533

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2327/Early%20Intervention%20Issues%20Paper.PDF>

"9.20 The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Project (ECICP) was commissioned in 1991 to recommend ways to improve the planning, co-ordination and delivery of early intervention services for children with a diagnosed disability in NSW. Following its review in 1997 by David McRae, the project was granted program status and was implemented across the State with funding from DET, NSW Health and DADAHC. At present, the program operates in 73 local committees in 16 local planning areas across the State. 197

9.21 The 1997 McRae review was generally very favourable. 198 Judging by the evidence to our inquiry, the program continues to generate considerable benefits for children with disabilities and developmental delay and their families.

Witnesses suggested it should be extended or duplicated to cater for children with learning difficulties:

While it...has a target group that is different from the one to which we are referring, the process and the actual program itself are some things worth looking at. 199

The Early Childhood Intervention Co-ordination Program has a philosophical way of bringing those people together...We have the basis there and I believe we could do something with it—with some teeth and funds."

"9.24 The ECICP appears to have had a very positive impact on the co-ordination of early childhood intervention services in NSW. This or a similar program could provide very real benefits to children with learning problems. However, the duplication or extension of the program to children with learning difficulties would require a significant injection of funds to allow existing early intervention services to extend their reach. P92"

4. Johnston, F Christine, 2003 *Early Intervention Practices Around the World, Formal and informal networks Chapter 13 The sky's the limit* ISBN (Print) 1557666458

<https://researchers.westernsydney.edu.au/en/publications/formal-and-informal-networks>

Babies and Infants

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Chair: Mr Kevin Conolly MP ISBN 9781921012785

1. Parents—Services for—New South Wales.

2. Infant health services—New South Wales.

3. Newborn infants—Care—New South Wales.

4. Newborn infants—Health and hygiene—New South Wales.

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/submissions/59215/submission%2033.pdf>

Summary p47

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has caused gaps and delays in early intervention for babies and children with disability. Services for babies with disability need to be reviewed. A whole of government approach is needed to ensure continuity of care.

Finding 6

The transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme has created gaps and delays in early intervention services for babies and children with disability....

Recommendation 24

That the NSW Government reviews services for babies and children with developmental delay and disability, to address gaps and improve referrals for support.

4.34 Rapid assessment and referral of babies and young children with disability is important as early intervention can have a significant impact on their long-term outcomes. It can improve their health overall, and reduce the cost of long-term support:

... The earlier you intervene, the higher likelihood you have of improved physical, mental, emotional health for both the child and family. If we can get the mechanisms right for early intervention it will save huge and enormous costs to community and families as children move through the spectrum of early childhood development and beyond.191

4.35 Early intervention services for children were previously provided through the NSW Department of Disability, Ageing and Home Care. Under the NDIS, services for children up to six are provided through the Early Childhood Early Intervention Pathway. Under the Pathway, parents who are concerned about their child's development are connected to an early childhood partner by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The partner supports the parents and gives them information to help them decide what support their child needs. They also help the family to access services in their community, access the NDIS and develop a plan for the child.192

4.36 Children needing support fall into two groups – those with a disability diagnosed at birth, and those with an emerging disability that becomes apparent after birth through developmental delay. We heard that for the first group, getting support under the NDIS is a priority. Children in the second group need assessment and identification of their developmental delay so they can be referred to an early childhood partner.193

4.37 Inquiry participants told us that the transition to the NDIS has led to gaps and long waiting times to access services for children with a developmental delay or disability. The NSW Child and Family Health Nurses Association submitted that 'there are children placed on waiting lists that are not actively being seen, assessed or referred on for treatment'.194

4.38 We heard that referrals to the NDIS are vital for children diagnosed at birth. Ms Kerry Dominish, an Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA) board member, told us that referrals have dropped and there are long waiting lists for children to access the NDIS during the transition process. She stressed the need for hospital NDIS liaison staff to promptly refer children through the NDIS pathway:

In all hospitals, we have NDIS liaison staff and we feel that it should be really important for those staff to immediately look at referring that child into a NDIS pathway and connecting them up with a service that the family chooses. That service is then able to commence and build a relationship for their ongoing requirements over time. ... At the moment we have an absolute decrease in referrals — we do not know where the babies have gone. There are very long waiting lists for the babies to get their NDIS packages, and in the meantime they are actually not getting any services. This gap has turned up because of the roll out of NDIS. They are an identified cohort that we can support to get that early referral going. We know that if we can get that referral happening it will decrease the impact of disability and decrease the likelihood of vulnerable family situations eventuating. ...195

4.39 Identification of children with developmental delay is also being affected. Previously these children were identified through early childhood intervention services provided by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. We heard that because state services 'are not there anymore, that identification process is falling down'.196

To fill these gaps, ECIA suggested more funding to train child and family health nurses, and collaboration between early childhood partners and maternal nurses to ensure rapid assessment and referral of children.197 Workforce training is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

4.41 ECIA also called for an integrated, whole of government approach that would coordinate disability policy and programs, negotiate with the Commonwealth and link agencies such as FACS and NSW Health. A whole of government approach could also address waiting lists and gaps in services, particularly for families that need extra support in Indigenous and CALD communities.198

4.42 We recognise that some of the issues we heard about may improve once the NDIS's early intervention pathway is fully operational. However, we agree that there is a need for a whole of government approach to early childhood intervention for children with disability.

6. Support For New Parents and Babies in New South Wales - Submission No 33

Organisation: Early Childhood Intervention Australia NSW/ACT

Name: Mrs Margie O'Tarpey

Position: CEO

Date Received: 17 November 2017

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/submissions/59215/submission%2033.pdf>

Issues:

1. *Adequacy of current services and structures for new parents, especially those who need extra support, to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their babies*
 - *Universal early identification of delays in development and/or disabilities and access to timely, comprehensive services for new parents and babies.*
 - *Following identification, we emphasise the need for a rapid coordinated response from an ECEI Provider, health services, and community services particularly family support services. Coordinated joint service delivery is particularly important when supporting families in complex situations such as domestic violence and homelessness as well as families that have children with delays in development and disabilities.*
 - *Where concerns are present ECI services work together with Community Health, Mental Health and Child Protection services but are not able to provide funded services that are outside the child's NDIS plan.*
2. *Changes to current services and structures that could improve physical health, mental health and child protection outcomes*
 - *Support the child and family through a coordinated multi-agency approach which works across traditional silos between health services, family support/child protection services, community services and early childhood intervention services.*
3. *Specific areas of disadvantage or challenge in relation to health outcomes for babies*

Recommend that premature babies be tracked and monitored for delays in development in order to put into effect a joint multi-agency response which includes ECEI Providers as they are often picked up late .
4. *Models of support provided in other jurisdictions to support new parents and promote the health of babies*
 - *drop-in centre provides wrap around services for children and parents including allied health, paediatrics and social work.*
 - *outreach supports that meet the new parents and their baby in the community or in the home; in order to encourage inclusion and opportunity for natural learning from community members.*
 - *supported structured playgroups/ ECI services also deliver parenting groups and classes for new parents and parents of children with developmental delays and disabilities. H*
 - *Proving difficult to fund such groups with NDIS plan funded supports.*
5. *Opportunities for new and emerging technology to enhance support for new parents and babies.*
 - *Telehealth connecting with families accompanied by to face-to-face appointments.*

Recommendation 1 - We recommend establishing a Taskforce headed up by NSW Government on the most effective way to identify families with complex needs that require a joint multi-agency response, especially children at risk of significant harm.

Recommendation 2 - We recommend additional funding for Child & Maternal Health Services as well as Child Development Services and Community Health Services that provide physical health and mental health services for all children including those children that do not meet NDIS access requirements as well as those that have a NDIS plan.

Recommendation 3 - We recommend that premature babies be tracked and monitored for delays in development in order to put into effect a joint multi-agency response which includes Early Childhood Intervention Providers.

7. Pineda R, Heiny E, Nellis P, Smith J, McGrath JM, Collins M, et al. (2020) The Baby Bridge program: A sustainable program that can improve therapy service delivery for preterm infants following NICU discharge. PLoS ONE 15(5): e0233411. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233411>
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9. Ferreira RC, Alves CRL, Guimarães MAP, Menezes KKP, Magalhães LC. *Effects of early interventions focused on the family in the development of children born preterm and/or at social risk: a meta-analysis*. J Pediatr (Rio J). 2020 Jan-Feb;96(1):20-38. doi: 10.1016/j.jped.2019.05.002. Epub 2019 Jun 27. PMID: 31254528; PMCID: PMC9432118.
10. Morgan N, Ibiwoye OH, Argent C, Hill J, Hamer O. Effectiveness of neonatal early supported transfer to home interventions: implications for practise. Pract Midwife. 2023 May 1;26(5):8-13. doi: 10.55975/FZHP6510. PMID: 39493579; PMCID: PMC7616767.

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11. Imms, C., Moore T., Bull, K., Gavidia-Payne, S., Lami, F., Wilson, M., Allen, L. & Knight S. (2024). *Review of best practice in early childhood intervention: Desktop review full report*. The University of Melbourne, funded by and provided to the Commonwealth of Australia's Department of Social Services. https://www.preci.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ECI-TAP-Deliverable-1-Desktop-Review-Full-Report-V1.0_Nov2024.pdf

12. Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. *Working together to deliver the NDIS - Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme: Final Report*. October 2023. ISBN 978-1-925365-35-1 (print), ISBN 978-1-925365-34-4 (online)

APENDIX A

Early Education (EaryEd) Inc.

Organisation description:

EarlyEd is

- an early childhood intervention service for children 0-16 years and
- not-for-profit, community-based organisation and charity
- operating across Northern and Western Sydney and Nepean Area for over 45 years
- focussed on supporting inclusion and community connection for all children of all abilities especially those at risk of delay or disability, harm and social exclusion through family centered evidence-based services.

EarlyEd has been a registered provider of National Disability Insurance Scheme services since it rolled out in 2017 in Early Childhood Supports.

Workforce:

EarlyEd has a team of Educators, Occupational Therapists, Speech Pathologists, Physiotherapists, Specialist Behaviour Practitioners, Social Workers and Therapy Assistants delivering Key Worker and early childhood services in each child's environments where they live, work and play.

EarlyEd's Vision: Children of all abilities, thrive with their families in inclusive communities.

Goals: EarlyEd strives to:

- Provide the best possible, evidence based early childhood intervention services for children with disabilities and their families to ensure their maximum participation in the life of their community.
- Advocate for and empower parents and local educational and community services to create and deliver inclusive programs, services and environments for children of all abilities and all cultures.
-

History: EarlyEd commenced in 1979 when it was established as the first generalist early childhood intervention service in NSW available to all young children whatever their concerns about their development or a disability and their families. Over the years it has been committed to incorporating the recognised evidenced based approaches for services to young children and their families across all disciplines and in early childhood intervention. For over 45 years it has been recognised for its commitment to finding ways that meet community's needs and to support all children to have equity of access to opportunities to learn, play and be safe and nurtured.

Approach and methodology: As EarlyEd's main work is delivering early childhood intervention services the principles of best practices in early childhood intervention underpin our philosophy and approach in all we do. This matches with NDIS's approach to the delivery of services to children. Most of our funding now comes through NDIS.

The Best Practices In Early Childhood Intervention Guidelines have 4 pillars - Team Work, Family Centred Practice, Inclusion and Evidence Based Practices / Accountability (Outcomes focussed): [What is early childhood intervention? | NDIS](#)

This means we use a Team Around a Child Approach and a Key Worker support person for all families. <https://www.earlyed.com.au/about-us/earlyed-team/>

Centres:

- North Sydney /Forestville /Merrylands /Kingswood

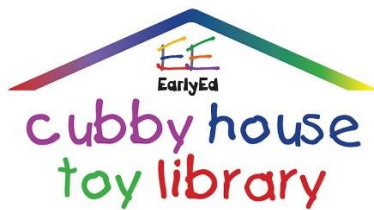
Services:

- Under NDIS – Registered for Early Childhood Supports and Specialist Behaviour Supports, home-based services for families, inclusion support in early childhood education settings and schools.
- Targeted Earlier Intervention supported playgroups - NSW Dept of Communities and Justice, Western Sydney since 2005.

- Start Strong Pathways through the NSW Department of Education delivered in Western and Northern Sydney.
- EarlyEd is a Registered NDIS Provider since 2017.
- Specialist Allied Health and Behaviour Support Provider Scheme
- Innovative Solutions – early childhood education
- Cubby House Toy Library for 45years operating across Northern Sydney

APPENDIX 2

Case Study Cubby House Toy Library: <https://www.earlyed.com.au/our-services/toy-library/>
Loss of NDIS funding led to loss of free community disability specific capacity building supports.



Cubby House Toy Library:

Description:

- community initiated
- operating for 45 years
- started up by community members in the Year of the Child.
- originally an independently run library for any child identifying as special needs children. Volunteers recognised that toy libraries could provide families of children with delays in development and disabilities with resources and supports.

Impacts of ADHC funding withdrawal:

In 2015 Cubby House Toy Library Management Committee had decided it needed to shut it down. This was due to the NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care) introduction of new requirements for it continue as an organisation and cuts in funding support. Cubby House Toy Library had to become an inclusive library with a focus on the supporting the whole community to continue to receive funding till the roll out of NDIS. It also had to meet increased compliance requirements, and would after a period of time no longer receive funding. In 2015 EarlyEd early childhood intervention service made a decision to take on the Cubby House Toy Library to avoid the loss of this service to the community.

Loss of funding

In 2017 EarlyEd's Cubby House it lost all funding as AHDC withdrew its funding with the roll out of NDIS.

No funding leads to closure of disability specific services:

The roll out of NDIS meant that EarlyEd could no longer fund the subsidise the Cubby House individual occupational therapy appointments and Play and Stay sessions to support families to use the resources in the toy library.

Current funding:

The Cubby House Toy Library is now funded partially by the NSW Education Department under Start Strong pathways funding to promote early education experiences, and supported by membership fees, rent relief from Council and club grants and donations.

The NDIS, with its focus on funded services also had an impact on the toy library. The library has grown but the percentage of children identifying as having a disability is only 7.5% of the year's membership in 2024-2025.

Toy Libraries in NSW

Currently in NSW there are 72 toy libraries supporting only 180,600 children as members. There are significant gaps in coverage state-wide. Compared to other states (though not including Tasmania) NSW is the state in Australia, with

- the second lowest number of libraries i.e. (15) per 100,000 children,
- only 4% of children 0-4 years identified as borrowing from toy libraries (the second lowest state alongside Western Australia).

There are an even split of council-run and community-run Toy Libraries in NSW and others run by not-for-profit organisations. Non council services have an average of 50-100 family memberships per year. Many are dependent on volunteer teams to help families select toys and manage processes for borrowing and returning toys and some totally managed by volunteer support and committees. Many are well-established (up to 50 years old) while some are new thanks to volunteer, local government and philanthropic commitment.

Toy library's purpose and operations

Toy libraries are place-based or mobile services that enable families of children of all abilities, from birth to primary school and beyond, to borrow a wide variety of suitable

- educational toys and resources,
- play and recreational equipment as well as
- specialised toys and equipment.
-

They operate in a similar way to that of a book library.

Toy libraries are cost effective accessible, inclusive, early education and early childhood intervention services for the community that can

- provide equity of access to early play and learning,
- facilitate community connections,
- be a soft entry point to child and family services,
- address cost of living pressures, and
- support children and families to learn the value of caring for and sharing belongings with others.
-

Toy libraries are innovative in the way they increase access to services through opportunities that support browsing and borrowing including

- online ordering,
- Click and Collect sites for pick up and returns,
- stay and play sessions and
- parcel lockers.

This variety of services meets the needs of busy families, working parents, children and parents with disabilities or other needs, short term carers (e.g. grandparents, foster parents, women's shelters) and rural and remote families.

Only with targeted funding of educators and allied health staff, volunteer training programs and suitable venues, toy libraries can provide tailored individualised early childhood intervention when there are concerns about a child's development or a diagnosed disability or developmental delay. These services

- capacity build family members to engage their children in play-based learning and activities that promote social connection and
- provide the advice they need about their child when they need it.

Eligibility: All families are eligible to join a library. Council run libraries are usually free. Community services have a membership fee.

Funding Sources: Previous funding: Many toy libraries started originally as independent specialist services for children with disabilities or delays. They attracted long term funding from the NSW Department of Aging Disability and Home Care. In 2015 with the roll out of NDIS and the NSW Bilateral Agreement* toy libraries were required to operate as inclusive libraries and their funding withdrawn. The library resources remained but free early childhood intervention services and advice to families ceased.

*https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2021-01/nsw_bilateral_agreement_ndis.pdf

Current funding – unpredictable: Most not-for-profit toy libraries' basic lending services are self-funded through a mix of membership fees, corporate sponsorships, rent assistance from Councils and community grants and are propped up by toy donations, fundraising, in-kind supports, and volunteering. Some are supported by longer term philanthropic programs and government funding. In NSW some toy libraries are partially funded by Start Strong Pathways funding from the Department of Education.

Evidence base for the Stay and Play sessions and allied health practitioner supports as well as volunteer supported borrowing:

<https://www.cotlands.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/06.-M-Stach.pdf>

Monica Stach and Judy van Heerden: *The role of toy libraries in the provision of play-based learning opportunities to young children*

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"Toy libraries provide play-based learning opportunities by lending toys or through play-based early learning sessions that are either provided in the toy library space or provided by a mobile toy library. A variety of play materials and activities are included in the play-based learning sessions. Play materials linked to children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development are used in the sessions, as confirmed by the findings. The assumption is that while providing a toy lending service without access to playbased early learning sessions gives children some access to early learning opportunities, play-based early learning sessions increase children's opportunities to learn essential skills through guided play. The toy librarian's interaction with the children must include questions, demonstration and scaffolding techniques that enhance learning. Toy libraries can make play materials and play opportunities available through lending and by providing play-based early learning session. Quality toy library programmes are conceptualised, set up and managed using the FQS to either monitor or improve service provision as well as to capacitate toy librarians. They play a pivotal role in igniting, safeguarding, nurturing and unleashing children's learning potential by giving thousands of impoverished young children and their families access to quality play-based early learning opportunities."

Recommendations ;

Fund more toy libraries in NSW

- Multi-year funding that pays what it takes to
- operate from sites that are local, welcoming, accessible and fit for purpose
- enable opening hours/strategies that suit the lives families across the state.
- use strategies to support all families to make use of the resources including rural and remote families i.e. mobile services, online borrowing, Click and Collect services, parcel lockers.
- provide volunteer training
- Toy libraries can be based in community locations near where families and children meet and play, but they have the capacity to be mobile or offer Click and Collect type services. To be integrated with other services they need staff and funding capacity to engage with community networks and early childhood intervention, health, family and community services including multicultural groups and ACCOS.

More information about toy libraries is available from Toy Libraries Australia.

<https://www.toylibraries.org.au/>

Toy Libraries Australia's members have a specific focus on promoting the educational value of play for younger children, encouraging positive adult/child interactions through play, and creating strong community connections in a setting that encourages the sustainable use of resources.

https://www.toylibraries.org.au/_files/ugd/c36e45_f22eb36e05e04d4a9eeac3d89a18797a.pdf