

MEDIA RELEASE
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Leading early intervention provider calls for cautious optimism of NDIS sustainability

AEIOU Foundation for Children with Autism welcomes the recent NDIS Review and its recommendations, underscoring the importance of early intervention for children with high needs and the challenges faced by families navigating their child's needs and entry to the NDIS.

AEIOU CEO Alan Smith said the need for a sustainable scheme is universally accepted, explaining high-quality early intervention is crucial to enhance the long-term wellbeing of autistic individuals.

"A recommendation of commitment to a dedicated, specialist early intervention pathway for children with high support needs is a positive development, as is the introduction of an independent body to manage pricing," Mr Smith said.

"It is also heartening to note the commitment to strengthen market monitoring and the dedication of a quality function with a new National Disability Supports Quality and Safeguards Commission. Further, with around 9% of AEIOU's cohort from First Nations backgrounds, we believe recommendations to improve access to supports for First Nations participants is vital."

Among the recommendations, AEIOU supports greater accountability for service providers. "AEIOU has long called for providers to be registered with equal accountability to both clients and the NDIS."

AEIOU is a registered service provider and uses standardised assessments to monitor gains and program efficacy. Mr Smith explained recent results show the average 'development age equivalent' of children increased from 1.7 years to 2.6 years over the first 9 months between assessments – coming nearer to their chronological age.

"The average age on intake is 3.8 years, with a developmental age of 1.7 years. The growth we see is driven by a 9.7% increase in Developmental Quotient in 2023," Mr Smith said.

"We see incredible growth and achievement in early intervention, but there are lifelong challenges autistic individuals, particularly those with high needs, will experience. We must maintain momentum and that includes when it comes to mainstream schooling," Mr Smith said.

"For true inclusion to work, we have a long way to go, and we must ensure these children are participating meaningfully, safely, and gaining value in those classrooms."

AEIOU Foundation this year released new data demonstrating the long-term cost-saving benefits of early intervention for autistic children and implored the government to follow the science.

"It is this upfront investment for long terms gains and future cost savings that is at the very core of the scheme." A cost benefit report commissioned by AEIOU shows that every dollar invested into autism-specific early intervention results in a direct cost saving of \$4.58 to the NDIS.

While recognising the commendable aspects of the NDIS Review, AEIOU emphasises the need for a nuanced approach to the transition, and urges participants and providers to closely monitor the government's response, and the ensuring legislative changes.

“Rigorous evaluation and ongoing feedback from families, service providers, and advocacy groups will be essential to refining and improving these assessment processes. Overall, we are working together, and we appreciate the task at hand to deliver the NDIS Review.”

AEIOU is committed to supporting autistic children to live their best lives through early intervention and education. Sustainability of the NDIS and the early childhood pathway to the scheme is essential for these children, their families, and their future.

For more information about AEIOU Foundation visit aeiou.org.au.

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