

Albanese Government Faces Backlash Over NDIS Changes

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— *Categories: Human Rights*

Disability groups and state leaders have voiced concern over the Albanese government's plan to divert children with mild to moderate developmental delays or autism away from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The federal government has announced a new initiative, the Thriving Kids program, which will provide "foundational supports" outside the NDIS framework. Backed by \$2 billion in federal funding, the program will be delivered in partnership with states and territories and is due to begin rollout in mid-2026. Changes to NDIS eligibility for the targeted cohort will not occur until mid-2027.

Ten of Australia's leading disability organisations, including the Australian Autism Alliance, People with Disability Australia, and Children and Young People with Disability Australia, released a joint statement urging NDIS Minister Mark Butler to involve them in designing the program.

"While Minister Butler noted 'nothing about us without us' in his National Press Club address, the announcements made by the minister came as a surprise to the disability community and representative organisations," the statement said. "We are heartened by the

government's continued commitment to the NDIS... however, we are collectively disappointed that the government chose not to engage with the disability community about their announcement.”

The advocacy groups described the timeline as ambitious and said further detail was needed to ensure the program met families' needs.

State leaders also expressed surprise. NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey told a budget estimates hearing he had not been briefed on the program, while Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan and Disability Minister Lizzie Blandthorn confirmed they only learned of it during Butler's public address. Officials noted states may need to allocate additional resources, particularly in education, to support the program's rollout.

Minister Butler defended the plan, saying it would complement existing NDIS services by ensuring children with mild to moderate delays received earlier support outside the scheme. He said the changes would strengthen the NDIS by keeping the focus on those with the most significant disabilities while expanding services for families who might otherwise miss out.

Disability advocates have called for ongoing consultation to guarantee the program is delivered in partnership with the community. They stressed that transparency and co-design will be critical if the Thriving Kids program is to meet its objectives and ease pressure on the NDIS.