



Children and Young People  
with Disability Australia

PO Box 172, Clifton Hill VIC 3068  
P: 03 9417 1025  
P: 1800 222 660 (regional or interstate)  
E: [info@cyda.org.au](mailto:info@cyda.org.au)  
ABN: 42 140 529 273

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Lisa Gropp, Martin Stokie, Deborah Brennan  
Early Childhood Education and Care Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East  
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Commissioners

**RE: Submission on the inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission as part of the public consultation on the Productivity Commission inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care. Sue Tape from the Children and Young People with Disability (CYDA) team was buoyed by her recent meeting with you to discuss your work.

In this submission we have included the following:

- Background on CYDA and our work in the area of early childhood
- Our report: "[Taking the first step in an inclusive life - experiences of Australian early childhood education and care](#)".<sup>1</sup> Which shares the results of CYDA's ECEC Survey 2022
- Sue Tape's (CYDA's Project Coordinator – Inclusive Education) remarks to the National Early Years Summit at Australian Parliament House on 17 February 2023

[Children and Young People with Disability Australia](#) (CYDA) is the national peak body which represents children and young people (aged 0-25) with disability. CYDA is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation with an extensive national membership of over 5,000 young people with disability, families, and caregivers of children with disability, with the majority of our members being families.

CYDA's purpose is to ensure governments, communities and families, are empowering children and young people with disability to fully exercise their rights and aspirations.

CYDA is committed to the following ongoing actions to achieve its purpose:

- Driving inclusion,
- Creating equitable life pathways and opportunities,
- Leading changes in community attitudes and aspirations,
- Supporting young people to take control,
- Calling out discrimination, abuse, and neglect.

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<sup>1</sup> Dickinson, H., Smith, C., Yates, S., Faulkner, A. (2022) Taking the first step in an inclusive life – experiences of Australian early childhood education and care. Report prepared for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Melbourne.

## **CYDA supports the following positions in conjunction with this submission**

- [Position Paper](#) on Segregation
- The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education's '[Driving change: A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia](#)' (How to make education better - [Easy English version](#))
- Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)'s [The Nest Child Wellbeing Framework](#)
- Early Childhood Australia's [Statement on the inclusion of every child in early childhood education and care](#) and [Draft Statement of Play](#)
- Early Childhood Australia and Early Childhood Intervention Australia's [Position statement on the inclusion of children with a disability in early childhood education and care](#)
- Thrive by Five & The Minderoo Foundation's [Time to Act: Investing in our children and our future](#)
- Play Group Australia's National Advisory Group's [Playgroup Statement 2022](#)

## **CYDA's role in advocating in the early childhood sector**

CYDA's role, including systemic advocacy and engagement with community in the early childhood area, is underpinned by our other work. CYDA is committed to ensuring that children and young people with disability are afforded equitable opportunities to succeed. We advocate that this cannot be achieved until they are fully included across all systems and community life.

We also acknowledge early experiences of inclusion and exclusion can have consequential impacts on one's life trajectory, and as such, children with disability must experience full inclusion from birth.

CYDA grounds our work in a human-rights approach. Children and young people with disability are not, and cannot be, full members of society unless their rights are upheld. This includes the rights of children and young people with disability to express their views and have those views listened to.

The experiences of children and young people must be captured in data and accounted for in public policy. Too often children and young people with disability's specific needs and strengths are absent from both children/youth-specific and disability-specific policies.

If you would like to discuss our response, or would like further information, please contact me

Yours sincerely

**Skye Kakoschke-Moore**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## CYDA's vision of early childhood for children with disability

The early years of a child's development can impact their entire lives. Accessible and inclusive early childhood experiences – play, learning, care, education, and development - are one of the surest and most sustainable pathways to an inclusive life and all the benefits that brings to the child, their family, peers, and their community.

**The vision of early childhood for children with disability (the early childhood vision) means:**

- 1. Activate our children's voices**
  - Activating and collecting input from young children on their experiences and goals
  - Families, caregivers, communities and systems hav high expectations and aspirations for children
- 2. Support the workforce**
  - All stakeholders drive inclusion from the earliest age, focusing on access, engagement and development
- 3. Calibrate the funding**
  - Investing in inclusive and accessible environments where children are welcomed and valued
- 4. Enhance support and adjustments**
  - Investing in support and adjustments for children and their families across local communities where they live, play and learn
- 5. Collaborate**
  - Collecting and sharing data to understand outcomes and drive investment and accountability

CYDA is encouraged by the draft '[National Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care](#)' released recently by the Australian Government for comment. CYDA supports this strong position and recognises that accessible and inclusive early childhood experiences are one of the surest and most sustainable pathways to an inclusive life and all the benefits that brings to the whole family, including balancing work and care responsibilities. To realise the vision and ensure children and families do not suffer the burden of bureaucratic pitfalls, the following is required:

- a) Establishment of a robust outcomes framework
- b) An independent body to report on the progress of governments
- c) Genuine commitment by governments over time.

The outcomes framework should include clear delegation of responsibilities between national, state and territory and local governments and include shared ownership by all departments that children with disability intersect with. The outcomes included should be established from a foundation of human rights as per relevant United Nations agreements, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## Challenges with delivering on the early childhood vision

The people, places and systems that relate to early childhood including— maternity hospitals, playgroups, early childhood education and care settings, child health, family support, the NDIS early childhood approach, housing, social services and child protection – are somewhat disconnected.

These systems span federal and state/territory governments, and separate ministries and departments within governments. This complexity is confusing for families and caregivers to navigate and children risk falling between the gaps of a fragmented system.

### Challenges to be addressed

- Lack of voice and agency for children and young people with disability
- Workforce burden; largely underpaid and under resourced
- Compounding and ongoing impact of systemic and structural inequity
- Inherent ableism and societal beliefs undermining human rights and legislation
- Policy settings and structures of Australia's federal, state, territory and local government
- Relatively new investment in the National Disability Data Asset and continuing data gaps and deficiencies

### Areas for reform

- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector including the Inclusion Support Program (ISP)
- Early childhood approach of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS); consider recommended changes that emerge from the outcome of the Independent Review of the NDIS (2022/2023)
- Other areas including but not limited to:
  - Effective design and use of community-based services and support models
  - Variations in experience and documentation for transitions to school
  - Maternal and childhood health services

### Levers for change

- [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#)
- [Disability Standards for Education](#)
- [Review of the NDIS](#)
- [National School Reform Agreement](#)
- [Disability Royal Commission](#)
- [National Disability Data Asset](#)
- [National Disability Research Partnership](#)
- [The Australian Institute Disaster Resilience](#)

## Experiences of early childhood education and care

In 2019, children with disability made up 6.8% of those enrolled in a preschool program in the year before full time schooling (children aged 4 and those aged 5 who were not repeating).<sup>2</sup>

### CYDA's ECEC Survey 2022

CYDA has been gathering feedback on educational experiences from its members via formal surveys since 2010. These surveys have consistently found that students with disability are excluded in their education. CYDA introduced an ECEC-specific survey (as part of a suite of education surveys undertaken in 2022) to understand whether the same kinds of issues are experienced in early childhood education and care settings.

The results of CYDA's ECEC Survey 2022 are shared in the report: "[Taking the first step in an inclusive life - experiences of Australian early childhood education and care](#)".<sup>3</sup>

This CYDA survey (which included majority responses from family members of children and young people with disability) provides vital information on children and families experiences including;

- Early childhood education settings accessed,
- supports received by young children, and;
- outlines areas of concern.

Despite the majority of respondents indicating that their child was welcomed in ECEC settings, such positive experiences are overshadowed by concerning reports of bullying, exclusion and limitations to engagement activities as the following results indicate:

- 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their child was made to feel welcome
- 78% agreed or strongly agreed that family or caregivers were made to feel welcome by ECEC settings
- Nearly 30% reported exclusion from excursions, events or activities and about the same number reported bullying from other children or staff
- One in five reported that their child had been refused enrolment
- Nearly a quarter said their child had been limited in the number of hours they were allowed to attend

### The Early Learning Monitor 2022

The Early Learning Monitor<sup>4</sup> is a national survey conducted by Essential Research on behalf of Thrive by Five. The monitor was first run in 2021, this is its second year.

The research shows there is wide agreement with statements relating to the importance of education options for preschool children with disability including:

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) People with disability in Australia, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 03 November 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Dickinson, H., Smith, C., Yates, S., Faulkner, A. (2022) Taking the first step in an inclusive life – experiences of Australian early childhood education and care. Report prepared for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Thrive by Five. (2022). The Australian Early Learning Monitor Available at: <https://thrivebyfive.org.au/earlylearningmonitor/>

- 80% agree it is important for all children's development to interact with peers of different backgrounds and needs
- 77% believe ECEC need to ensure that children with a disability are not subject to exclusion from activities or other discrimination
- 68% believe all ECEC should provide all reasonable adjustments and supports to educate children with a disability in the same classroom as other children
- 68% agree acceptance of enrolment to ECEC should not be affected by a child's disability

## Further information and resources

CYDA's work is rights-based and led by the direct experiences and diverse voices and visions of children and young people with disability across Australia. CYDA grounds its work in evidence and a human rights approach.

### CYDA's work on early childhood

1. [Report](#): Taking the first step in an inclusive life Experiences of Australian early childhood education and care
2. National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, [CYDA Submission](#)
3. National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Final Development Consultation Paper [Response](#)
4. NDS & NDIS Outcomes Framework Introductory Paper, [CYDA Submission](#)
5. [Pre-Budget submission](#): Drive inclusion and equity for children and young people with disability 2021-22
6. [Pre-Budget submission](#): Invest in children and young people with disability: their voices and their future 2023-24
7. Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005, [CYDA Submission 2020](#)
8. Senate Inquiry into on the national trend of school refusal, [CYDA submission](#)
9. Senate Select Committee on Autism inquiry, [CYDA Submission](#)
10. Tasmania's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, [CYDA Submission](#)
11. [Submission](#) to the National Disability Strategy beyond 2020
12. [Response](#) to the DRC's Rights and Attitudes issues paper
13. [What young people with disability said: Awareness, Access + Inclusion](#)
14. [Briefing Paper](#) for the Families Australia and Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) Forum
15. [Submission](#) to the Supporting young children and their families early, to reach their full potential consultation paper

### CYDA fact sheets

- [Understanding ECI language](#)
- [Supporting the development of children and young people with disability](#)
- [Services and supports in the early years](#)
- [About family-centred practice](#)
- [Building strong families](#)
- [Tips for early intervention from CYDA Webinar on Early Childhood](#)

- [What is inclusive education?](#)
- [Addressing ableism in education](#)

## National Early Years Summit 17 February 2023

### CYDA team member Sue Tape's remarks to National Early Years Summit (the Summit) at Australian Parliament House on 17 February 2023

#### A vision for the early years. What does success look like?

**Q: As a parent of a child with a disability and someone who also works with children with disabilities, what is important for your vision for the early years?**

**Sue Tape Answer:** On behalf of CYDA - Children and Young People with Disability Australia and our CEO Skye Kakoschke-Moore, also present today, I would like to acknowledge the Nggunawal and Ngambri peoples and pay our respects to the elders, past and present.

We also acknowledge the important contributions of our community. Any input we make today is drawn from the insights and lived expertise of children and young people and their families who participate in CYDA's work.

When deciding what shoes to wear today, I chose ones I wear every day for the school run. This Summit could be viewed as a special occasion where I might have picked something more formal but no, for me, it's a business-as-usual day. I have the responsibility to advocate for and share with you (1) my family's vision for our daughter, a child with disability and (2) the hopes and dreams of all the children and young people that CYDA engages with. My responsibility, like every day, is to say what needs to be heard and to get people to listen AND do the work that links the direct experiences of children and young people with disability with the Federal Government and other key stakeholders.

CYDA would also like to emphasise that children with disability don't live or align their priorities or visions of success to boxes on a demographic bingo card. Children with disability come from CALD backgrounds, Indigenous families and experience exclusion and discrimination based on where they were born, their geographical location, their economic status, their gender, their family's educational attainment level AND their disability.

CYDA's vision is that children with disability are valued and living empowered lives with equality of opportunity. Early childhood is the first step of an inclusive life of accessible and inclusive experiences – play, learning, care, education, and development - and are one of the surest and most sustainable pathways to an inclusive life and all the benefits that brings to the child, their family, their peers, and their community.

Last year as 4 young people helped to design a session on school readiness, I asked what they thought of developing a vision statement before young children start school. The eye rolling and the sighs of derision could not have been clearer. Young people with disability prioritise action on the challenges that need to be addressed. These challenges include:

- Lack of voice and agency
- Compounding and ongoing impact of systemic and structural inequity
- Inherent ableism and societal beliefs that undermine their human rights
- Overly complicated policy settings and structures of all levels of government
- Lack of interest and investment in data about their experience, engagement and outcomes, AND
- Siloed policy and program development meaning that children can't rely on politicians or policy makers to take a whole of life approach



Success for the early years must mean investment in lifelong learning and ALSO recognise the role of state and territory school education systems. Early childhood is the first step that must CONTINUE at their local school, in their local communities, with their same age peers.

The recent Productivity Commission report on the National School Reform Agreement noted *“that despite being one of the priority cohorts, outcomes data for students with disability is not collected and it is not possible to know whether reforms are effective”* – their words, not mine.

A vision for the early years must include a path paved with data collection, monitoring and sharing. Too often children with disability’s specific needs and strengths are absent from both children and youth-specific and disability-specific policies.

CYDA grounds our work in a human-rights approach. Children are not and cannot be full members of society unless their rights are upheld. This includes the rights of children and young people with disability to express their views and have these views listened to.

My child with disability, Eliza, is 11 years old and of all the forms, meetings or applications I have completed across local, state and federal government programs and services, I have never once been asked what my child wants from the experience. I’ve been asked what I want, been asked to prove her life-long and irreversible disability (time and time again), signed away her right to privacy to facilitate sharing of information, and opted in or out to provide feedback on MY experience. I’ve been asked to make split second medical decisions on her behalf, castigated for family decisions about where she spends her time and told what she needed to be able to do before she started school. Eliza isn’t aware of the complexities of the Disability Discrimination Act, the NDIS, the Australian Early Development Census, Disability Parking Permits, the Assistance Dogs Act of 2009, the ECEC National Quality Framework, nor the Disability Standards for Education. Eliza isn’t aware of the term ableism nor Australia’s Disability Strategy nor its Targeted Action Plans.

I was asked recently to provide a list and photo of things she likes – easy – and the things that she doesn’t like, to support conversations within her class. I don’t have photos of the medical trauma she has experienced or the conversations about her but not with her, or the people over the years who have asked “what is wrong with her”.

Eliza knows she went to kindy with some of the same children she now goes to school with. She knows her school friends when she sees them at the local shops. At times Eliza stays in her wheelchair to feel safe and she recognises when we are within 1km from home in any direction. Eliza gets excited when her grandparents visit, we have birthday parties and when the Christmas tree goes up. Eliza communicates to us her love of school, her dog and her brother, the local dog park, any body of water, music, her ipad and slap stick comedy.

Eliza’s limited knowledge and interest in the possible building blocks of a vision for the early years for Australian children isn’t because she has a disability but because she is a child. Maybe there is something in there for all of us. Thank you. **End**