

My submission is based on personal experience with Australian institutions and relates to the following three topics:

- Lack of support and awareness of “invisible” disabilities related to mental health
- Diagnosis and early interventions for mental health issues
- Youth mental health in the schooling system
- Issues relating to carers family

Our problem started when our younger child started school. We later realised that transition from high-quality childcare centre to public school system was inadequate to unique needs of our child. It was too rapid, too rigid and no additional support was provided once problems started in kindergarten class. There was an offer of assessment, while only disciplining the child by the teachers led to rapidly escalating anxiety, self-harming and dropping self-esteem.

Our child was refused access to a counsellor at her primary school, as the child was not straggling academically and the behavioural issues were dismissed as not being “serious enough”. We do not blame the school or individual teachers. They are not trained about dealing with neurodiversity or developmental disorders, and thus cannot distinguish these from a child being “undisciplined”. The school system lacks resources to provide support to any but the most severe cases, with only one part-time counsellor overstretched in a school with almost 1000 kids. We were forced to seek help outside school system.

We have paid to get our child assessed privately. A clinical developmental psychologist confirmed our suspicion of ADHD. However, ADHD diagnosis alone is still not enough to get any extra support via school system. The lack of dedicated resources available for students’ mental health at public schools leads to widespread neglect of children with “invisible disabilities”, like ADHD, which are not considered as serious despite sound evidence of long-lasting detrimental effects on health and wellbeing.

With diagnosis, at school, our child was offered place in social skills training programme. There were no other follow up or any special accommodations provided. We are now trying to get additional assessment for potential comorbidities (there are indications of anxiety and sensory issues), but have to do this privately (extremely expensive) or via public services (extremely long waiting lists). It takes lots of our time and resources, while our child’s condition affects the functioning of our whole family. Which leads to the point that without early diagnosis, early intervention is not possible. Lack of intervention leads to escalating problems, not only for the child, but it also affects mental health and ability to work of people around, as a ripple effect. That’s why it is essential to have a sound mental health screening and support system that is easily accessible and affordable to all.