Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Election Priorities 2026



Children with Disability

Updated 4 August 2026

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare is the peak body for child and family services in Tasmania and Victoria. For over 100 years, the Centre has advocated for the rights and wellbeing of children, young people and families, ensuring their right to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture.

Election Priority

Invest in a well-integrated disability support system which intersects more effectively with the NDIS system and enables every child with a disability to access the services they need to thrive.

What this looks like

- Commit sufficient, sustained funding so that support keeps pace with need, not just for today but also for the growth already locked in, by indexing inclusion funding to population growth, funding a real Thriving Kids transition guarantee, and invest in a costed workforce strategy.
- Reduce the administrative burden on families and services caused by disconnected systems, duplicated assessments, and unclear pathways between programs. This includes one clear pathway between Thriving Kids and the NDIS, consistent disability screening on OoHC entry, and simplifying referrals across services.
- Create a more integrated and accessible service system by designing services around the child and family, not the boundaries between departments and funding streams. We are asking for a child-centred State Disability & Autism Plan, mandatory disability-informed OoHC training, and ‘no wrong door’ access across mainstream services.
- Set clear, enforceable standards for assessment so children are not locked out of support by cost, geography, or inconsistent tools. This means fully subsidised

autism and disability assessment for all children under 18, and a Victorian standard for functional assessment that reflects how children actually function at home, school and in the community.

- Make child safety and voice central, not peripheral, by requiring a child safety impact assessment for any policy or funding decision that reduces disability support access for children, and by committing to funded, youth-led co-design for each pillar of the Plans, resourced in regional Victoria.

Background

Children with disability hold rights in their own right, not only as children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and not only as people with disability under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but at the intersection of both.

Victorian and Commonwealth disability policy has historically been developed with an adult-centric lens, with children's distinct developmental needs, family context and vulnerability to compounding disadvantage treated as an afterthought rather than a starting point.

Major reforms to the NDIS are due to roll out in October 2026 as Thriving Kids, a new national support for children aged 8 years and under with developmental delay or autism with low to moderate support needs.

When Thriving Kids cannot meet a family's need – for example, because it is full, group formats are inaccessible, geography makes participation impossible, or because a child's needs exceed what the program is designed to address – unmet need will ultimately be absorbed by the child and family services sector, a sector already experiencing capacity constraints. Responsibility will therefore rest on early childhood educators, family support workers, Maternal and Child Health nurses, social workers and teachers.

Children with disability are significantly overrepresented in the systems the Centre's members work in every day:

- **Out-of-home care and child protection:** Children with disability are overrepresented in these systems not because of their disability, but because unmet and delayed support needs compound family stress until it is picked up (and often reframed as risk) by statutory services rather than addressed earlier through disability and community-based support.
- **Prolonged engagement:** Once involved, children with disability often remain within statutory oversight for extended periods, reflecting how hard it is to transition

families out as needs stabilise or change, rather than any inherent need for ongoing statutory intervention.

- **Unequal access:** Aboriginal children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children in regional and rural Victoria and Tasmania face compounded barriers to timely, culturally safe disability support; meaning they are overrepresented among children whose unmet need eventually surfaces in statutory systems.
- **Carer and family strain:** Parents and carers of children with disability report markedly lower wellbeing than other carer groups, reflecting a service system that too often places the burden of navigation and coordination on families themselves until they reach crisis point.

Key data



73.1

Victorian children aged 0-14 per 1,000 receiving disability services, compared to 66.2 nationally.



71

median days from application to NDIS access decision for children aged 0-8.



~ 9%

of children receiving disability services are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



68.1%

of carers of people with disability report low wellbeing, compared to 33.6% generally.

- The median time from NDIS application to an access decision was 71 days for children aged 0–8 and 78 days for those aged 9–18, rising to 113 and 119 days respectively at the 90th percentile.
- In 2024–25, Victoria had around 73.1 children aged 0–14 per 1,000 receiving disability services, above the national rate of 66.2 per 1,000, reflecting the scale of both the disability and statutory systems operating in the state.
- In a study of 23 Victorian foster care agencies, 41% of children in foster care had a disability, but only 53% of those children had a NDIS plan, a 47-percentage-point gap between identified need and funded support.
- In rural and regional Victoria, public autism assessment waiting periods range from 12 to 24 months or more, and private assessments cost more than $2,000 in many parts of the state.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–14 are more than twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to have a disability (15.2% compared with 6.6%), yet face the greatest barriers to timely, culturally safe assessment and support.

Key Programs

Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) - www.vic.gov.au/kindergarten-inclusion-children-disabilities

Supports Victorian funded kindergarten services to include children with disability, developmental delay or complex medical needs. Assistance may include additional staffing, consultancy support, professional development and access to specialised equipment.

ACD (Association for Children with Disabilities) - acd.org.au

ACD has been Victoria's leading independent advocate for children with disability and their families for more than 40 years, supporting more than 15,000 families a year.

Berry Street Yooralla - www.yooralla.com.au

Yooralla is one of Victoria's oldest and most recognised disability service providers, supporting children, young people and adults with disability for more than 100 years. Yooralla delivers a wide range of services, including early childhood intervention, therapy, family support, community participation and NDIS supports, helping people with disability live the life they choose.

AMAZE - www.amaze.org.au

State-wide autism organisation providing information, advocacy, family resources, workshops, and navigation support for autistic children, young people and families.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) - cyda.org.au

National peak body representing children and young people with disability. Provides resources, advocacy, systemic policy work and information for families.

Key Research

CYDA – *Snapshot of Children and Young People with Disability in Australia (Key Statistics Report)* (March 2026) - https://cyda.org.au/cydas-key-statistics-report/
A comprehensive national snapshot of the experiences of children and young people with disability aged 0–25. The report brings together the latest available data across early childhood education, schooling, health, wellbeing, NDIS participation, safety, employment and social inclusion, while highlighting significant evidence gaps and areas for policy reform.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability – Final Report (2023) -
https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report
The landmark Royal Commission examined the systemic barriers, discrimination and harms experienced by people with disability and made 222 recommendations for reform. Of particular relevance to child and family services are the findings relating to inclusive education, safeguarding, child protection, supported decision-making and reducing restrictive practices.

Fostering Connections / Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare – *Fostering Children with Disability in Victoria* (2024) -
https://cfecfw.org.au/app/uploads/2025/03/The-Centre-Fostering-children-with-disability-in-Victoria_FINAL-REPORT.pdf
This Victorian study examined the prevalence of disability among children in foster care and the experiences of foster carers. Analysis of data from 23 foster care agencies found that 41% of children in foster care had a disability, while only 53% had an NDIS plan, highlighting significant service and support gaps. The report provides important evidence on placement stability, carer support needs and system navigation challenges.

What Will the NDIS Changes Mean for Child and Family Services? (2026) -
https://cfecfw.org.au/what-will-the-ndis-changes-mean-for-child-and-family-services/
A recent Centre policy analysis explaining major NDIS reforms and their implications for children with disability, families and service providers. Particularly useful where your advocacy asks relate to foundational supports, early intervention and service access.