

Beyond Blue submission to the Inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative

3 October 2025

Introduction

- Community-based foundational supports play a critical role in shaping the developmental, educational, and wellbeing outcomes of children who experience developmental delay and autism.
- Beyond Blue welcomes the commitment to a nationally coordinated reform effort – which must be supported by adequate investment and a feasible implementation plan – to establish Thriving Kids.
- Investment in foundational national and place-based infrastructure is critical to both advance timely implementation and draw on existing, trusted capability to ensure every child and their families and caregivers, regardless of background or location, can access the supports they need to thrive.
- Leveraging proven, scalable and trusted platforms like [Be You](#), the Commonwealth-funded national mental health initiative for early learning services and schools, offers an immediate opportunity to unify and embed Thriving Kids within existing systems that are already building educator capability and inclusive learning environments across Australia and have relationships with families and support networks.
- Be You provides a nationally embedded, evidence-based infrastructure that is implementation-ready, aligned with jurisdictional priorities, and trusted by educators, making it a powerful enabler of Thriving Kids.

Be You is the national mental health and wellbeing initiative for early learning services and schools in Australia. Launched in 2018 and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, it is delivered by Beyond Blue in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia and headspace.

Today, Be You has **significant national reach**, with 73% of all Australian schools and 39% of all early learning services registered as of August 2025.

Be You is **freely available** for educators and those studying to become educators. Over 215,000 Australian educators engage with Be You.

Be You draws on the best available global **evidence** and provides an effective model for implementing a whole-learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing.

In a cluttered education world, Be You is **unique** in Australia:

- It targets and equips educators to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people
- It supports learning communities spanning the age range of 0–18 years
- It operates across the continuum – from promotion of positive, inclusive, and responsive learning environments and pedagogy, to professional development and practical tools and resources, to specialist assertive postvention support for schools following a suicide.
- It aligns with national, state, and territory requirements for educators, and complements rather than duplicates jurisdictional investments and initiatives

- It employs a consultant workforce to support educators to plan and implement tailored strategies to create mentally health environments.

The professional learning modules are structured around five domains, one of which is **mentally healthy communities and family partnerships**.

Be You is recognised in the *National Autism Strategy's First Action Plan* as a key initiative supporting educators to meet the mental health needs of autistic children and young people.

Be You has an alliance with **Emerging Minds** and **Raising Children Network** and, together, our initiatives cover the educational, clinical, and familial dimensions of child wellbeing, offering a powerful, complementary foundation to support Thriving Kids.

Successive independent evaluations demonstrate the effectiveness of **Be You**. **Be You** is successfully building educators' capacity to promote children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Early findings show **improved learning outcomes** and **increased NAPLAN scores** for learning communities engaged with **Be You**, compared to schools not engaged with **Be You**. Students attending secondary schools engaged in **Be You** are significantly more likely to have **improved social and emotional wellbeing** scores than those attending secondary schools that are not engaged.

The evaluation also found that the approaches promoted in **Be You** aligned with and supported early learning services to meet and exceed the National Quality Standards.¹

Educators engaged with **Be You** are also more likely than non-**Be You** educators to:

- Feel **confident recognising the signs and symptoms of mental health issues** (74% vs 62%)
- Feel **confident about supporting a child or young person** with a mental health condition (82% vs 69%)
- Know how to **initiate conversations with parents and carers** about mental health (78% vs 58%)
- Feel **confident intentionally teaching social and emotional learning skills** (88% vs 77%).²

- This submission draws on Beyond Blue's 25 years' experience supporting mental health in Australia, including designing and delivering **Be You**, advocating for a focus on social and emotional wellbeing in the 0–12-year-old age group, initiatives to support children and families, and funding and applying research into childhood adversity and mental health.
- This submission adopts a system view, illustrating how integrated supports across learning communities and the broader service system can enable the success of Thriving Kids.
- Figure 1 below illustrates the ecosystem needed to support Thriving Kids, integrating the initiative in education settings. Educators and families/caregivers (and their wellbeing) are foundational to ensure the success of any early childhood/school-based programs. **Be You** can provide wraparound support to both educator and education setting levels while Child and Family Hubs sit and integrate with the broader service system.

¹ Dix KL et al. (2022). *Be You Evaluation Final Report: from launch until mid-2021*. Report for Beyond Blue. Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne.

² Beyond Blue (2024). *Be You National Mental Health in Education Full Report*.

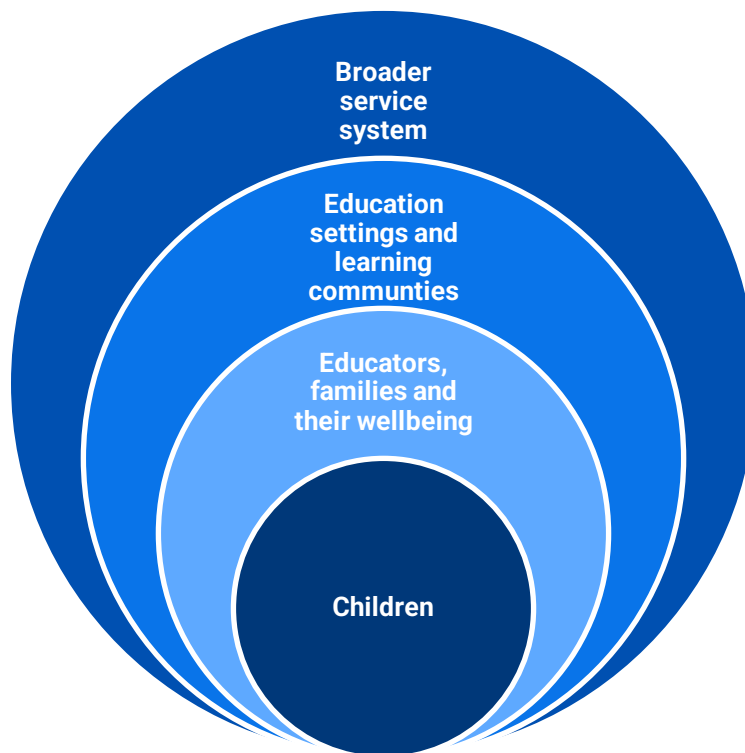


Figure 1: Ecosystem needed to support the successful integration of Thriving Kids in education settings

Recommendations

The programs, services and workforces needed to support the development and implementation of Thriving Kids may already exist or need adequate resourcing to scale, and/or new models implemented. In addition, the infrastructure required to integrate, coordinate and embed them effectively is critical, including in education settings. To support this, Beyond Blue recommends:

For education settings and learning communities:

1. A nationally coherent and coordinated approach is adopted to integrate Thriving Kids, enabling system-wide consistency and sustainability.
2. Resourcing education settings to support capacity-building and inclusion in learning communities, so they are enabled to meet an increased scope of responsibility under the reform.

For the broader service system:

3. Strengthening system coordination by building on existing integrated models, such as Child and Family Hubs.

For educators, families and their wellbeing:

4. Prioritising educator wellbeing in the design and implementation of Thriving Kids, recognising the additional pressures on an already stretched workforce.
5. Ensuring children with additional health and developmental needs and their families have access to holistic, coordinated, and family-centred supports to improve outcomes and address broader social determinants of wellbeing.
6. Embedding genuine co-design processes, including with learning communities and families/supporters with lived experience—particularly from communities historically underserved by mainstream systems.

Recommendations

Education settings and learning communities

A nationally coherent and coordinated approach is adopted to integrate Thriving Kids, enabling system-wide consistency and sustainability.

- The alignment of Thriving Kids with the broad suite of national reforms, including the Early Years Strategy, the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, the Building Early Education Fund and Closing the Gap, creates an opportunity to deliver connected policy change.
- Bringing these efforts together would deliver an integrated and coordinated approach to children and young people's mental health that is inclusive, equitable and responsive from the start.
- With changes to eligibility for support under the NDIS, education settings will increasingly be expected to play a greater role in supporting children with developmental and mental health needs.
- Education settings are well positioned to play a critical role in the success of Thriving Kids. Integrated, school-based models have already been identified as an approach to support the shift away from individualised NDIS-funded supports.³
- This shift requires careful planning from many angles. For example, autistic children and young people experience high rates of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion in educational settings,⁴ with 68.9% of autistic 5–20-year-olds attending school or an education institution reporting difficulty at their place of learning.⁵
- Children and young people who are autistic or with developmental delay also face significant challenges in accessing timely, affordable and appropriate support and services, compounded by long diagnostic wait times, fragmented systems, and limited availability of tailored educational and therapeutic interventions, especially for those with complex or intersectional needs. They also have a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues.⁶
- There is considerable variation and fragmentation across Australian jurisdictions in the integrated school-based models currently offered, and in their potential for scale.
- **A nationally coherent, evidence-based, and coordinated approach to the design and implementation of Thriving Kids will avoid further fragmentation and improve equity in levels of support.**
- **Be You, the national mental health in education initiative, provides a nationally embedded, scalable solution. Further investing in Be You to support the efficient and effective rollout of Thriving Kids, offers an evidence-based infrastructure that is already trusted by educators and aligned with jurisdictional priorities.**
- Enhancing Be You to support understanding about and the implementation of Thriving Kids would build on existing infrastructure and the established and high-functioning partnership between **Beyond Blue**, **headspace** and **Early Childhood Australia**. With additional capacity, Be You consultants and professional learning resources could enable educators and learning communities to embed the change Thriving Kids seeks to bring.
- Be You also provides a highly effective channel to strengthen educator capacity to create inclusive environments and increase awareness of referral pathways between existing supports, such as wellbeing and inclusion coordinators in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and schools, to broader community-based services.

³ Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. (2025). Thriving Kids – Fact sheet. Australian Government.

⁴ Department of Social Services. (2025). National Autism Strategy 2025–2031. Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/17301>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics,. (2024). Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, Autism in Australia, 2022.

⁶ National Mental Health Commission. (2021). National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. National Mental Health Commission. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au>

- Enhancing professional learning for inclusion and leveraging Be You's established networks will help ensure mental health and developmental supports are integrated across education settings in a coherent and sustainable way.
- **Be You's flexible delivery model and infrastructure further enable it to complement jurisdictional initiatives and support integrated approaches to mental health and wellbeing.**
 - For example, Be You has worked alongside Victoria's Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHIPS) initiative to fill gaps in educator wellbeing resources and avoid duplication, demonstrating its ability to enhance local delivery while maintaining national consistency.

Resourcing education settings to support capacity-building and inclusion in learning communities, so they are enabled to meet an increased scope of responsibility under the reform

- There are numerous data and insights capturing the contemporary experiences of educators, particularly the impact of high workloads and growing expectations of their role supporting children and young people, and working in partnership with families.^{7,8}
- Schools and ECEC are increasingly seen as a setting for implementation of a range of policy reforms and initiatives.
- Educators continue to consider it their responsibility to support the social and emotional development of children and young people.⁹
- Supporting the broader social and health needs of children and young people must be managed alongside educational responsibilities and other work aspects, such as curriculum planning, classroom delivery, providing feedback, and administrative and reporting requirements.
- Recognising that educators are already stretched and reporting high levels of stress and burnout, Thriving Kids must consider these structural issues, and adequate resourcing should accompany any further expansion to the role of schools and ECEC.
- **We recommend funding is allocated to support workforce resourcing, capacity-building and inclusion in learning communities to ensure educators can meet the increased need and scope of responsibility likely under the reform.**
- Be You is recognised in the *National Autism Strategy's First Action Plan* (Commitment 5, Action 4) as a key initiative supporting educators to meet the mental health needs of autistic children and young people.
- This reflects Be You's established role in providing evidence-based resources, professional learning, and consultant support to help educators create inclusive learning environments.
- Central to this work is Be You's disability inclusion approach, guided by the [Be You Disability Inclusion Guide](#), which highlights the importance of inclusive practice and provides strategies for embedding it in learning communities.
- More broadly, Be You offers a framework to help learning communities identify mental health and wellbeing priorities and supports educators to include children and young people who are autistic. Its resources and professional learning modules focus on increasing awareness, improving understanding, and strengthening pathways to diagnosis and support.
- With additional strategic investment, Be You can continue to build upon this infrastructure and expand its consultant workforce to support the implementation of Thriving Kids, particularly in partnership with other sector leaders. For example, **Be You has an alliance with Emerging Minds and Raising Children Network and, together, our initiatives cover the educational, clinical, and familial dimensions of child wellbeing, offering a powerful, complementary foundation to support Thriving Kids.**

⁷ Beyond Blue (2024). Be You National Mental Health in Education Full Report.

⁸ Granziera, H., J. Collie, R., Roberts, A. et al. (2025). Teachers' workload, turnover intentions, and mental health: perspectives of Australian teachers. *Soc Psychol Educ* 28, 149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-025-10113-w>

⁹ Beyond Blue (2024). Be You National Mental Health in Education Full Report.

Broader service system

Strengthening system coordination by building on existing integrated models, such as Child and Family Hubs

- To ensure continuity and clarity for educators and families, Thriving Kids must prioritise system coordination and integration.
- Emerging evidence also highlights the benefits of stacking complementary early interventions to maximise impact on children's outcomes and reduce inequities.^{10,11,12} There is growing evidence of the benefits from wrap-around supports which provide more holistic and coordinated support.^{13,14} A collaborative approach benefits families by reducing the need to retell their story, enabling seamless service delivery, minimising disruptions for children and families, and lowering barriers to participation.
- Integrated models, such as Child and Family Hubs, offer a practical mechanism to achieve this. These models bring together education, health, and social services in one accessible location, enabling families to navigate support systems more easily.
- Child and Family Hubs complement the Kids Hubs network, offering a broader, integrated model of support. While Kids Hubs provide a vital primary care response for children aged 0–12 with mild to moderate developmental, emotional, or behavioural challenges, Child and Family Hubs extend this by embedding a range of multidisciplinary services within universal settings like schools and early learning centres.
- They act as critical entry points into the service system, addressing not only developmental and health needs but also social determinants such as housing, financial stress, and parental capacity. This holistic, family-centred approach helps engage families who may otherwise be disconnected from services, identify emerging needs early, and facilitate seamless referrals, including to Kids Hubs, ensuring continuity and coordination across systems.
- The National Autism Strategy 2025–2031 identifies autistic children as being at greater risk of specific adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including disproportionate exposure to bullying, harassment, discrimination, educational exclusion, social isolation, violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.¹⁵
- Children who experience adversities during their childhood are 6–10 times more likely to develop mental health concerns later in life.¹⁶
- In developing supports for autistic children or with developmental delay, it is essential to consider their heightened risk of adversity and prioritise the prevention of ACEs, as these are critical to addressing mental health concerns.

¹⁰ Goldfeld, S., O'Connor, E., Guo, S., Pham, C., Gray, S., on behalf of the Changing Children's Chances investigator team. (2023). Reducing inequities in child mental health. Research snapshot #4. Centre for Community Child Health. Melbourne, Australia. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.22345162>

¹¹ Goldfeld, S., O'Connor, E., Guo, S., Pham, C., Gray, S., on behalf of the Changing Children's Chances investigator team. (2023). Reducing inequities in children's reading skills. Research snapshot #3. Centre for Community Child Health. Melbourne, Australia. doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.21644720

¹² Molloy, C., O'Connor, M., Guo, S., Lin, C., Harrop, C., Perini, N., & Goldfeld, S. (2019). Potential of 'stacking' early childhood interventions to reduce inequities in learning outcomes. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 73(12), 1078–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2019-212282>

¹³ Olson, J. R., Benjamin, P. H., Azman, A. A., Kellogg, M. A., Pullmann, M. D., Suter, J. C., & Bruns, E. J. (2021). Systematic review and meta-analysis: Effectiveness of wraparound care coordination for children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 60(11), 1353–1366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.02.022>

¹⁴ Therese M. Cumming, T. M. & Strnadová, I. (2022). Research Brief 30: A Wraparound Approach to Whole of Student Issues, University of New South Wales.

¹⁵ National Autism Strategy 2025–2031, Department of Social Services, p.16. Available at: <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-autism-strategy>

¹⁶ Sahle B., Reavley N., Morgan A., Yap M., Reupert A., Loftus H., Jorm A. (2020). Communication Brief: Summary of interventions to prevent adverse childhood experiences and reduce their negative impact on children's mental health: An evidence-based review. Centre of Research Excellence in Childhood Adversity and Mental Health, Melbourne, Australia.

- **Models like Child and Family Hubs provide the holistic response needed to identify and address adversity across multiple domains, offering early detection and prevention of emerging, accumulating, and interconnected health and social needs.**
- Thriving Kids can be both leveraged by existing Hubs and used to support the development of a more consistent and coordinated national approach to Hub models.

Educators, families and their wellbeing

Prioritising educator wellbeing in the design and implementation of Thriving Kids, recognising the additional pressures on an already stretched workforce

- Educator capacity and wellbeing must be considered in the design and roll out of Thriving Kids in learning communities, as it will likely place additional responsibility on an already strained education workforce.
- [Be You's latest national Mental Health in Education survey](#) showed that only 38% of educators felt that the staff in their learning communities are mentally healthy.¹⁷
- Be You research highlights time constraints as a critical issue affecting educators' capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, while also significantly impacting their own wellbeing.¹⁸
- Research consistently shows that educator mental health is closely tied to the wellbeing of the entire learning community; when educators are mentally healthy, they are empowered to create environments where children and young people can thrive.
- [The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2034](#) also recognises educator wellbeing as an ongoing priority to support a strong and sustainable education workforce.
- **To ensure educators are equipped to potentially take on this expanded role and able to look after their own wellbeing, we reiterate the need for the additional resourcing in recommendation 2. This resourcing must enable both capacity-building and the conditions necessary for educators to thrive alongside the children and young people in their care.**
- Research shows that educator wellbeing is best supported through a whole learning community approach, where individuals, leaders, early learning services, schools, and education systems work together to build and strengthen protective factors that promote wellbeing.¹⁹
- Be You provides an effective and established model for implementing this approach, with its emphasis on educator wellbeing a key point of difference across a cluttered mental health and education landscape.
- Beyond Blue has over 20 years' experience promoting mentally healthy workplaces. Our [Be You educator wellbeing offering](#) is available to support all learning communities, going beyond self-care to provide resources that help leaders and teams boost workplace culture, improve staff retention, and create thriving learning communities.

Ensuring children with additional health and developmental needs and their families have access to holistic, coordinated, and family-centred supports to improve outcomes and address broader social determinants of wellbeing

- Children with additional health and developmental needs benefit most when support is holistic, coordinated, and family centred. A combination of early intervention, allied health, parenting

¹⁷ Beyond Blue. (2024). Be You National Mental Health in Education Full Report.

¹⁸ Reupert, A., Patrick, P., Berger, E., Morris, Z., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., & Hine, R. (2021). Educator care: Moving beyond self-care. Report produced for Beyond Blue.

¹⁹ Hine, R., Patrick, P., Berger, E., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., Morris, Z. A., Fathors, C. & Reupert, A. (2022). From struggling to flourishing and thriving: Optimizing educator wellbeing within the Australian education context. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 115, 103727.

programs, education initiatives, and family services is essential, not only to address individual needs but also to respond to broader social determinants of health and wellbeing.

- As noted previously; in developing supports for autistic children or those with developmental delay, it is essential to consider their heightened risk of adversity and prioritise the prevention of ACEs, as these are critical to addressing developmental delay and mental health concerns.
- Preventing ACEs requires the creation of safe, nurturing environments, supporting families through accessible services and parenting programs, promoting positive relationships, and addressing social and economic stressors early through coordinated, community-based approaches.
- **To achieve better outcomes for these children, we must equip families and other supporters with evidence-based resources, training, and peer connection opportunities that build confidence and resilience. Families and other caregivers are central to a child's development and empowering them strengthens the entire support system around the child.**
- For example, parenting programs play a critical role in this ecosystem and can be promoted through existing touchpoints where families are already engaged such as antenatal classes, child health and parenting visits, early learning services, schools, and health services.
- Child and family hubs are another effective mechanism through which parenting supports can be delivered.
- Evidence from the UK's Sure Start program shows that early childhood hubs can improve long-term outcomes by increasing early identification of developmental needs, reducing later diagnoses, and enhancing parenting practices. Parenting interventions within the program led to clinical improvements in ADHD and Conduct Disorder, while children showed stronger social development and parents reported more positive home learning environments.^{20, 21, 22}
- Similarly, evaluations in Tasmania and Queensland show that Child and Family Hubs increase service uptake and improve outcomes by building trust with families, creating welcoming and non-judgemental environments, and enhancing parent-child relationships.²³ Hubs also help identify developmental delays early and empower parents, reflected in increased confidence, stronger connections to support networks, and greater engagement with services, especially among diverse and disadvantaged communities.²⁴
- To increase uptake, programs should be delivered flexibly, offering both face-to-face and online options that reflect the preferences of parents and carers. Promotion must use non-stigmatising, strength-based language that empowers families rather than pathologises challenges. Importantly, programs should also foster ongoing peer connection, helping families build informal support networks.
- Educators also play a vital role. Through Be You's whole-of-learning-community approach, they are equipped to build respectful, collaborative relationships with families and partner with them to support children's mental health and wellbeing, strengthening the bridge between home and learning environments.

Embedding genuine co-design processes, including with learning communities and families/supporters with lived experience—particularly from communities historically underserved by mainstream systems

- Partnering with the community and engaging them as experts in their experiences is crucial to creating policies, practices, and solutions that have a continued, meaningful impact.

²⁰ Carneiro, P., Cattan, S. & Ridpath, N. (2024). The short- and medium-term impacts of Sure Start on educational outcomes. The Institute for Fiscal Studies. https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/SS_NPD_Report.pdf

²¹ Hayre J, Pearce H, Khera R, et al. Health impacts of the Sure Start programme on disadvantaged children in the UK: a systematic review. *BMJ Open* 2025;15: e089983. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2024-089983

²² Melhuish, E C, Belsky, J & Leyland, A.H. The impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on three-year-olds and their families. Project Report. Her Majesty's Printer and Controller of HMSO, London, UK, 2008.

²³ Taylor C L, Jose K, van de Lagewega W I, and Christensen D, Tasmania's child and family centres: a place-based early childhood services model for families and children from pregnancy to age five, *Journal of Early Child Development and Care*, 2017, VOL. 187, NO. 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1297300>.

²⁴ The Benevolent Society. (2022). The Early Years Impact Report Early Years Places in Queensland.

- Thriving Kids must include capacity to ensure lived and living experience contributions are integral to developing, guiding, implementing, evaluating, and continuously improving Thriving Kids.
- First Nations children, their kin, and carers often experience multiple layers of disadvantage, including racism and a lack of culturally safe services. These children are at higher risk of being underdiagnosed or diagnosed late, which limits access to early supports and interventions.²⁵
- Better outcomes are achieved when First Nations Peoples have a genuine say in designing and implementing policies that affect them.
- **Co-design of Thriving Kids must include First Nations communities, recognising their cultural strengths, leadership, and unique perspectives on child development and wellbeing.** This aligns with the principles of the [Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\) Declaration](#) and the [National Impact Platform 2025–2028](#), which call for culturally safe, community-led reform.
- This extends to other children and young people who may face additional barriers and intersectional disadvantage that can lead to delayed diagnosis and limited access to services and support.²⁶ This may include culturally and linguistically diverse children and those living in rural and remote areas.
- Educators and learning communities must also be recognised as key stakeholders in the co-design process, given their frontline role in supporting children’s development and wellbeing. Their insights are critical to ensuring Thriving Kids is practical, sustainable, and responsive to the realities of education settings.

²⁵ Department of Social Services. (2025). National Autism Strategy 2025–2031. Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/17301>

²⁶ Ibid.