

Fams submission to the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan Stakeholder Survey

The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan (DIP) sets out the ways in which the NSW government will make mainstream services more accessible. The Department of Communities and Justice is working to refresh the current Disability Inclusion Plan with a focus on engaging and involving people with disability.

Fams believes that a key issue for families with children and parents with disabilities is access to appropriate supports, including access to assessments, as the gateway to having disability needs met. Without this, there is risk that the early intervention and prevention sector funded through Department of Communities and Justice (programs including Family Connect and Support; Targeted Earlier Intervention; and Family Preservation) will fill this support gap, risking children and families being involved in the child protection system unnecessarily or not sustaining change positive family change due to ongoing unmet need.

A key priority group for consultation is families involved in services working towards preventing children entering Out Of Home Care. These families are frequently experiencing complex systemic disadvantage, including additional systems burdens from the service sector itself.

This document will focus on responding to the Disability Inclusion plan on the intersection between child protection and disability inclusion, discussing focus areas for actions and initiatives for prioritisation.

Focus area actions and outcomes for priority consideration

Child protection is not mentioned in the action plan and Fams believes this is a significant gap in the disability inclusion plan. Both the early intervention and prevention child protection (Family Connect and Support; Targeted Earlier Intervention; and Family Preservation) and disability NGO sectors are reporting more cases where families in disability services are identified to have child protection concerns, or families involved in the child protection system lack adequate disability access and support. This unmet need is putting children at unnecessary risk and increasing the likelihood of child removal, which could be avoided if families' needs were properly addressed.

Fams is concerned that many people with disabilities are facing major challenges in getting the support they need. These barriers include difficulties in accessing assessments to qualify for disability support and a lack of appropriate services, particularly for parents with disabilities who in need parenting support. This lack of support can lead to unnecessary child protection

involvement, which could be prevented with the right services. These risks are even greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Department of Communities and Justice funded Family Preservation services primary aim is to keep children safe at home with their families, future contact with the child protection system, prevent removal and placement in out-of-home care.

Family Preservation service providers have noted a surge in referrals for parents with intellectual disabilities. Although these families generally thrive in Family Preservation programs, sustaining change post-support remains a challenge as the core support need has not been addressed or requires some level of ongoing support, particularly support with in-vivo parenting coaching and parent focused case management. This results in re-referral when risk resurfaces.

To effectively facilitate lasting change, it is crucial to ensure that all necessary supports are in place, including both Family Preservation and disability support concurrently, tailored to the specific needs of each family. This requires a balanced approach with the right level of flexibility, intensity, and sustained service engagement. Services must collaborate cohesively, aligning with the family's goals, leveraging each service's expertise to avoid adding unnecessary burden to the family.

Case study 1

A Family Preservation service is working with a mum and dad who both have an intellectual disability and are parenting 5 children. The service is providing 2-3 home visits a week for parenting capacity building. The service provided is clearly not meeting the needs and complexities experienced by the family but has manage to provide enough support to stabilise the family. The family preservation service is seriously concerned that when they withdraw service due to program time limits child protection risks will escalate and there will be serious risk of child removal. They believe with appropriate and ongoing disability and parenting support it would be unlikely that the children would be at Risk Of Significant Harm (ROSH), preventing statutory intervention.

Fams advocates for the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan to include an additional action: the development of strategies to promote collaboration between various areas and levels of government. A key objective is to prevent misattribution of system limitations, such as inadequate disability support for parents, which can lead to unnecessary child removals and the long-term harm this causes to both parents and children.

One key aim would be to avoid misattribution of systems constraints on families i.e. inadequate disability support provision for parents leading to unnecessary child removal and the ensuing legacy of harm for both parent and child.

Initiatives for prioritisation

Provision of brokerage funding or alternative access strategies to help families obtain timely assessments

NGO service providers across the early intervention and prevention sector in child protection are using significant amounts of their already limited brokerage funds to help families (both children and parents) access NDIS assessments. Without this support, many families would be unable to access the services they are entitled to, further escalating the stress and burden on those already facing complex systemic disadvantage.

There is serious concern that this is not sustainable under current budgets, but without access to NDIS assessment children will be left without critical developmental supports. ***This is an immediate concern because of the developmental window for these children; that without timely, appropriate intervention and support the opportunity for critical change is missed leading to increased lifelong challenges.***

Provision of adequate brokerage for child and parent assessments will ensure families can access the necessary assessments to gain entitled NDIS funding. This is essential in preventing family's needs being inadequately responded to by the wrong system and this failing being framed as a family's responsibility or lack of capacity.

Without access to brokerage, families will continue to be responded to by the child protection system and children will not receive the essential services they require.