

Siblings Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this brief submission to the Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into **Provision of services under the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention Approach**. This submission will make particular reference to whole family support which relates to the following items in the Terms of Reference:

- a. the eligibility criteria for determining access to the ECEI pathway;
- b. the service needs of NDIS participants receiving support under the ECEI pathway;

The organisation previously provided a [submission](#) to the original EI Best Practice Discussion Paper produced by ECIA NSW Chapter in 2014. As a follow up to that the following comments refer to more current discussions about the ECEI approach within the NDIS.

The ECEI approach is described in NDIS literature as the following:

*The NDIS ECEI approach will help all children with developmental delay or disability and their **families** to achieve better long-term outcomes through support services in their local community, regardless of diagnosis. Initially, families will meet with an access partner to discuss their needs. The access partner will draw on their specialised early childhood knowledge to determine appropriate supports for the child and **family**, including information, emotional support and specialised early intervention supports.*

*Supports will be delivered through a family-centred approach, which builds on **family** and carer strengths in order to improve the child's developmental trajectory and overall quality of life.*

A child who requires more intensive early intervention support services will get a plan of supports and each family will be able to choose a provider(s) to best meet their child and their own needs.

The ECEI approach can be summarised as follows:

- **Family** meets with experienced early childhood intervention service provider (access partner) to discuss their needs
- The access partner determines the appropriate supports for the child and **family** – this may include a number of actions:
 - Information services, emotional support or referral to a mainstream service
 - Short to medium-term supports or longer term intensive supports.
- The access partner will assist a child and their **family** if they need more intensive supports. The access partner will complete a support plan and submit it to the NDIA for approval
- Once the plan is approved, the family can choose the early intervention provider(s) they wish to work with and the support begins. (**emphases added**)

If indeed this approach takes into consideration 'families', the question is how this approach will take into account the specific needs of siblings of children with disability. It is noted that there is one mention of support allowing the parent to take a brother to basketball and that is good to see. However, siblings experience a range of challenges including ongoing stress, at an age when they may not have the maturity to manage those stresses. They can develop their own mental health problems as a result. Much has been written about the challenges and supports for siblings by Siblings Australia, the RANZCP and others - see our [submissions](#); [advocacy](#) and our [research](#).

If indeed the ECEI approach does include siblings when it uses the word 'family', there needs to be some attention given to the availability, appropriateness and quality of sibling support services. Millions of dollars are provided to parent support approaches. There are many opportunities for parents to access *'Information services, emotional support or referral to a mainstream service'*. Unfortunately there is no policy nor funding given to sibling support. This is in spite of the knowledge about the risks to their wellbeing, and the fact that they are potentially going to be in the life of the child with disability longer than anyone. As the only organisation in Australia to focus on siblings, it is important that we can be part of this conversation about what the ECEI approach might look like for siblings.

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