Siblings
australia inc

for siblings of children and adults with disability/illness

# Submission to the Australian Treasury

February 2026

## About Siblings Australia

Siblings Australia is the only national organisation dedicated to supporting the brothers and sisters of people with disability and chronic illness. For more than 25 years, we have worked across policy, practice, research, and service delivery to ensure siblings are seen, supported, and recognised as a critical part of Australia's care and support ecosystem.

Over the past four years, Siblings Australia has supported more than 50,000 siblings and worked with over 500 organisations nationally. Independent economic modelling demonstrates that our work delivers approximately $28 in community benefit for every $1 invested, primarily through avoided downstream costs in health, mental health, and disability systems. This return on investment highlights sibling support as a low-cost, high-leverage intervention aligned with Treasury's interest in efficient, preventative expenditure.

## Context of this submission

This submission responds to Treasury's consultation processes in relation to reforms affecting children, families, and foundational supports. It focuses on the role of sibling wellbeing as an under-recognised but highly cost-effective lever for improving outcomes for children with disability or developmental delay, their families, and the broader economy.

Siblings Australia currently receives Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) funding, which provides funding certainty for the next two years. While this funding will enable some additional growth and reach, demand for sibling support far exceeds current capacity. With additional and more stable investment, Siblings Australia could scale proven programs nationally and support many more families at critical points across the lifespan.

## Why sibling support matters

Siblings are often the longest-lasting relationship in the life of a person with disability. When siblings are supported, informed, and emotionally resourced, the benefits extend well beyond the individual sibling:

- Stronger family functioning and reduced family stress
- Improved outcomes and safeguarding for children and adults with disability
- Reduced reliance on crisis-driven and high-cost services
- Greater workforce participation and productivity for parents and siblings

From an economic perspective, sibling wellbeing is directly linked to labour market participation. Reduced family stress and improved sibling mental health increase parents' and siblings' capacity to remain engaged in paid work, education, and training. Conversely, unsupported siblings experience higher risks of anxiety, depression, educational disengagement, and long-term withdrawal from the workforce. These outcomes generate avoidable productivity losses and increased demand for publicly funded services across health, mental health, income support, and the NDIS.

Supporting siblings is therefore not only a matter of equity and wellbeing, but a prudent economic investment.

## Alignment with Thriving Kids and Foundational Supports

Siblings Australia strongly supports the intent and direction of the Thriving Kids initiative and has been actively engaged across the sector in shaping how this reform could operate in practice.

Thriving Kids recognises that children do not thrive in isolation. Family stress, informal supports, and protective relationships are central to outcomes. Sibling relationships are one of the most powerful – and currently underutilised – protective factors available.

We caution against an overly narrow, therapy-focused model. Evidence from Australia and comparable international systems demonstrates that peer, family, and community-based supports are essential complements to clinical and allied health interventions.

## Evidence-informed programs with international alignment

Siblings Australia is currently working with international research partners to adapt and pilot proven sibling support models in the Australian context:

- **Children aged 7–12**: In partnership with researchers in the Netherlands, we are piloting an evidence-based program that has demonstrated significant improvements in emotional wellbeing, resilience, and family functioning for child siblings.
- **Teen siblings and parents**: In collaboration with researchers in Norway, we are exploring a program that supports adolescent siblings alongside their parents, reflecting international best practice where siblings are recognised as stakeholders in care systems.

Both programs are designed for online delivery, ensuring accessibility for families across metropolitan, regional, and remote Australia. Additional funding would enable broader pilots, formal evaluation, and national implementation.

## Early childhood: a gap requiring specialist support

There is a clear and growing need for sibling-inclusive supports in the early childhood period, particularly around diagnosis and early intervention. Evidence indicates that family stress during this period has a profound impact on sibling mental health and long-term outcomes.

While Siblings Australia has deep expertise in sibling support across the lifespan, we recognise that early childhood is a specialist domain. To develop high-quality, age-appropriate resources for siblings in this cohort, additional funding would be required to:

- Engage early childhood and developmental experts
- Support meaningful co-design with families and siblings
- Develop, test, and refine evidence-informed resources

This approach would ensure quality, safety, and alignment with best practice, while embedding sibling considerations into early intervention pathways. It aligns with the growing focus on the importance of early years supports and intervention which are a clear priority for government.

## Economic and system benefits

Investment in sibling support delivers both immediate and long-term economic returns:

- Prevention of mental ill-health among siblings, reducing future demand for mental health services
- Increased workforce participation and reduced productivity loss for parents and siblings
- Strengthened informal care networks that reduce reliance on formal, high-cost disability supports
- Improved sustainability of the NDIS, health, and education systems through prevention and early intervention

Sibling support represents a low-cost, high-impact investment that strengthens the invisible infrastructure sustaining families and public systems alike. By acting early, government can avoid far more costly interventions later in life.

## Recommendations

A modest additional national investment in sibling support would enable proven, scalable programs to reach significantly more families, delivering strong social and economic returns without creating new, high-cost service structures.

Siblings Australia recommends that Treasury consider:

- Recognising sibling support as a core component of family and foundational support frameworks
- Enabling longer-term, scalable funding for proven sibling support programs
- Supporting national implementation of evidence-informed, digitally delivered sibling programs
- Investing in the development of early childhood sibling resources through expert-led co-design
- Acknowledging sibling wellbeing as a contributor to economic participation, system sustainability, and long-term cost containment

## Conclusion

Siblings are not optional extras in family systems. They are central to resilience, safeguarding, and long-term outcomes for people with disability and developmental delay.

With modest additional investment, Siblings Australia is well positioned to scale proven, evidence-informed programs nationally, delivering significant social and economic returns. Supporting siblings is not simply compassionate policy – it is smart economic policy.

Siblings Australia welcomes ongoing engagement with Treasury and government to ensure these reforms deliver lasting benefits for children, families, and the broader Australian community.