26 February 2026

The Children's Expert Advisory Group (CEAG) met on 26 February 2026. The meeting was held online.

Focus of the meeting

The focus of the 26 February 2026 meeting was:

- Thriving Kids update
- Support Needs Assessment update
- Children and young people, guiding principles for policy and reforms
- Early Childhood Approach – Our Guide.

Thriving Kids update

The Department of Health Disability and Ageing (DHDA) gave an update on Thriving Kids.

- The focus of Thriving Kids is to understand what children and their families need and matching them to the right supports, instead of being diagnosis driven.
- The Australian Government has agreed to a plan where over the next few months each state and territory will design its final mix of services and supports tailored for Thriving Kids. Members of the community and sector will be asked for their feedback as part of this work.
- Plans for how each state and territory will deliver Thriving Kids services will be finalised by the end of May 2026. Services will start from 1 October 2026 and are expected to be fully up and running by 1 January 2028.
- Each state and territory will use a mix of existing services and new services. These will be designed to meet local needs and will follow the national model for Thriving Kids.
- Children, families and caregivers will be able to get the right level of support based on their needs. Children will not need a diagnosis to access Thriving Kids services.

Support needs assessment update

The NDIA talked about developing a support needs assessment approach for young children in the future. This included how functional assessment information may be used as one part of a support needs assessment model for children younger than 9 as part of new framework planning.

Members feedback included:

- The importance of creating a tool with First Nations people or make a purposeful adaptation.

- Suggestions to build on assessments young children may already have, rather than using a support needs assessment alone. This would be better for families who may experience difficult emotions when an assessment is made about their child's development.
- The NDIA need to make sure there are steps in place to keep children and families safe in assessing support needs. There should be protections and regular check-ins to make sure supports can change when needs change.

Children and young people, guiding principles for operational policy and reform

In 2025, the CEAG members proposed making a guide for the NDIA about the most important ways to think about children and young people and their families. The NDIA can use this guide in the future while thinking about children and families when making operational system decisions and changes.

The Agency and members worked together in December 2025 to write the guide. The NDIA thanked members who helped and gave feedback last year.

The NDIA shared an updated guide. The guide is called 'Children and young people, guiding principles for policy and reforms'.

Members told us the guide should:

- Include strong links to the National Best Practice Framework for Early Intervention.
- Include clear information about other government systems and services and how they connect or overlap with the NDIS.
- Give NDIA staff clear information on where to go for expert help when making decisions about operational policy and systems.

Members endorsed the guide to be used broadly within the Agency in work relating to Agency systems and processes. The guide is not for decision making about individual participants.

Early childhood approach – Our Guideline

The NDIA gave a presentation on planned updates to 'Our Guideline – Early childhood approach'.

The move to new framework planning for children is still some time away. The NDIA will continue to work with families and children to improve current information for families, staff, Partners in the Community and providers.

The planned updates to Our Guideline – Early childhood approach will not change how the NDIA currently supports young children and families.

Member feedback included:

- Ways to make sure the Our Guideline – Early childhood approach is accessible, including providing it in Easy Read and creating information in other formats such as animations, videos and shorter versions.
- Include an example that clearly explains eligibility reassessment.
- Include an example showing the steps involved in getting a diagnosis.
- NDIA should work with families to best understand how families would like to see the information presented.
- Refer to the National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention in more places in the document to link existing resources that can help guide families and inform decisions.

Next meeting

The next Children's Expert Advisory Group meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 30 April 2026.

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